



Government of
South Australia

Flying Start

South Australian Aboriginal Early Childhood Workforce Strategy (2025 - 2027)

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.

Thank You

In addition to the many individual Community members that contributed to the development of the South Australian Aboriginal Early Childhood Workforce Strategy, the Office for Early Childhood Development (OEC) would particularly like to thank the following contributors:

Members of each of the regions' Aboriginal Communities that make up the early childhood education sector; MTL Consulting Services in partnership with Kimberly Wanganeen Consultancy for leading the co-design work; the Aboriginal Leadership Committee within the OEC; members of the Aboriginal Co-design Governance Group (ACGG); Pat Caruso and his team at 'We Create. Print. Deliver.' for developing the beautiful artwork within this document; and finally the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers and educators who have paved the way for this Strategy.

Notes

Throughout this document, the term 'Aboriginal' respectfully refers to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders 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 *Zenadh Kes*, which is an amalgamation of Torres Strait language names for the four winds that pass through the region.

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Introduction

Every Aboriginal child has the right to strong enduring cultural supports in the early years to ensure the best possible start in life. These supports must be deeply rooted in culture, identity, and Community.

[The Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care 2023](#) highlighted the established evidence base that Aboriginal children are over-represented within the cohort of children considered developmentally vulnerable.

Aboriginal children have been entitled to attend preschool from 3 years of age in South Australia since 1988. This has been a special measure in place to improve Aboriginal children's wellbeing and educational outcomes. It is understood that Aboriginal families and children engage more confidently and meaningfully in early learning environments where they see themselves, their culture and their Communities reflected.

Growing the early childhood education sector's Aboriginal workforce representation is not only vital for improving outcomes for Aboriginal children, it also strengthens the cultural safety, capability and inclusivity of the entire sector and its services.

This Aboriginal Early Childhood Workforce Strategy (the Strategy) 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 over two years as part of our commitment to grow, strengthen and support South Australia's Aboriginal Early Childhood Workforce.

This is above and beyond initiatives already in place, including:

- the established scholarships pathway via [QualifySA in Early Childhood](#);
- the established OECD capacity-building grants in line with the [Early Childhood Care and Development Sector Strengthening Plan \(SSP\)](#) under the [National Agreement on Closing the Gap](#), to support capacity and capability building, including workforce development within the South Australian Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO) sector;
- 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; and
- the [Early Childhood Education Immediate Action Plan](#), launched in March 2025.

Community-led Aboriginal co-design

Understanding that Aboriginal co-design requires Aboriginal-led engagement, MTL Consulting Services, in partnership with Kimberly Wanganeen Consultancy, were engaged to undertake the co-design process with Aboriginal Communities, aligned with the First Nations Voice to Parliament regions across South Australia.

Throughout 2025, the results of that process were provided to the shared decision-making group established to govern the development of the Strategy – the Aboriginal Co-design Governance Group (ACGG). The ACGG's governance was established in line with the South Australian Public Sector's definition, principles and conditions for authentic engagement outlined within the [Co-design with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples](#), co-designed with the South Australian Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations Network (SAACCON).

The ACGG is a co-chained governance group between SAACCON and OECD. Its 75% Aboriginal membership includes early education experts, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), Aboriginal peak bodies, Community Elders, and other government agencies.

Why representation matters

One of the biggest contributors to supportive service engagement for Aboriginal children, families and Communities, is feeling culturally safe to engage with those services.

Aboriginal children, families and Communities feel culturally safe and are more likely to access services when they see themselves reflected in the workforce of those services, and their practices.

By embedding Aboriginal perspectives and leadership across early childhood education services, and in partnership with their families, Aboriginal children are supported to thrive from the very start of life.

That is why Aboriginal workforce representation within the early childhood education sector must grow.

This is the 'Why?' behind the development of the Strategy.



What the literature told us

A literature review of Aboriginal workforce strategies across the nation and throughout different industries identified six consistent themes that underpin effective Aboriginal workforce development.

- Aboriginal Cultural Safety must be embedded into policies and practices for the workforce to thrive.
- Targeted engagement and recruitment strategies are more effective at engaging and reaching Aboriginal peoples.
- Strong and supportive entry pathways are effective ways to engage and retain Aboriginal peoples long-term.
- Development and recognition of Aboriginal staff leads to better retention.
- Community and employer collaboration is essential for successful implementation.
- Accountability and evaluation structures are aligned to the outcomes of the [National Agreement on Closing the Gap](#).

What Aboriginal co-design told us

Throughout the co-design process we heard about the challenges associated with growing the Aboriginal workforce. To support real and lasting change for Aboriginal children, families and Communities, we must lay a strong foundational pipeline to support the growth of the Aboriginal workforce.

This Strategy is part of a broader call for enduring policy change and is a vital step in addressing long-standing inequities in workforce representation.

Aboriginal co-design strongly echoed and validated the themes identified in the literature review and provided a strong steer from Community as to where the investments should be made initially. This included:

- Growing Aboriginal cultural safety as a shared responsibility.
- Addressing structural and systemic barriers to accessible training and career pathways.
- Embedding Community-led and culturally grounded approaches by strengthening partnerships with ACCOs.
- Improving the public perception of the sector as a whole.
- Recognising that mainstream services will benefit from Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing.

These themes have framed the development of the Strategy and the need for culturally safe support structures that foster the growth of the Aboriginal workforce.

Our vision

To grow and support culturally safe and accessible pathways into early childhood careers that recognise, develop and retain Aboriginal peoples long-term.

What we are doing



A targeted attraction approach

Elevating Aboriginal voices through compelling human-interest stories, while addressing key barriers to obtaining Working with Children Checks (WWCC) and police checks.

Supporting Aboriginal peoples seeking work in the sector, we will foster more inclusive and culturally safe hiring practices by empowering the sector to adopt and implement the Practice Guide: Aboriginal Culturally Responsive Recruitment in Early Education.



Building and supporting entry pathways

Through initiatives such as taster courses, traineeships, and paid placements, while ensuring these pathways are connected to a network of culturally safe services for student placements.



Development, recognition and retention of staff

By connecting entry pathways to culturally safe services for student placements, supporting access to local training opportunities in regional areas, and supporting Aboriginal staff's ongoing professional development through Aboriginal-specific professional networks, including mentoring.



Community and employer collaboration

By supporting employers to grow in their capacity to support services and workplaces that are culturally safe for Aboriginal peoples. This will be reinforced by localised initiatives that strengthen the application of cultural knowledge and Aboriginal Cultural Safety Training delivered by Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) and Aboriginal Business Suppliers.



Accountability and evaluation

By evaluating the effectiveness and impact of the Strategy and its underpinning actions, aligned to the National Agreement on Closing the Gap Outcomes. The evaluation will help inform continuous improvement and ensure that the Strategy remains responsive to Community needs and national commitments.

What this means for Aboriginal Staff

Entry pathways

Action	Description
Taster courses	Free culturally safe pre-certificate early childhood education taster courses for Aboriginal peoples to explore, risk free, a career in early childhood education.
Culturally safe placement options	Establishing and supporting the development of a network of culturally safe placements for Aboriginal students as they begin their career in early childhood education.
Local training options for Aboriginal communities	Grant funding to support opportunities for localised training pathways for Aboriginal Communities to become qualified in early childhood education, in their Community.

Financial supports

Action	Description
Addressing screening related barriers	<p>Removing the financial barriers relating to obtaining both a Working With Children Check (WWCC), and police criminal history checks.</p> <p>This is supported at the earliest stage of the entry pathway as part of the culturally safe, Aboriginal specific taster courses and through scholarships for vocational education and university courses.</p>
Paid placements	<p>Financial support for Aboriginal students to undertake paid placements within culturally appropriate early childhood education services.</p> <p>The funding is designed to reduce financial barriers that may prevent students from undertaking or completing placements.</p>
Scholarships in early childhood education	<p>Delivered through the Qualify SA Aboriginal Pathways program, financial support is available for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the following courses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Certificate III in Early Childhood Education • Diploma in Early Childhood Education • Birth – 5 Bachelor's degree • Birth – 5 Master's degree • Birth – 5 Graduate Diploma (where the student holds an existing teaching qualification).

Career development recognition and retention

Action	Description
Career planning supports	Interactive pathway tools will support Aboriginal peoples at every stage of their career to navigate and effectively plan for career aspirations. From considering a career in early childhood education through to becoming the director of a centre and everything in between.
Career development scholarships	Recognising the importance of Aboriginal-led pathways into leadership, skill-building, and empowering individuals to shape their own career trajectories. Financial support is available for Aboriginal staff to access self-identified professional development opportunities to grow their career.
Recognising Aboriginal staff	<p>As part of the targeted attraction campaign, human-interest stories spotlighting local Community heroes and key figures will be developed, recognising the critical role that Aboriginal peoples in the workforce play.</p> <p>Sponsorship of awards recognising the integral role that Aboriginal teachers and educators play within the Community, the early childhood education sector, and the lives of young children.</p>



What this means for services and the sector

Engagement and recruitment

Action	Description
Targeted Aboriginal attraction campaign	To grow the profile of the Aboriginal early childhood education workforce and support the value proposition of the early childhood education sector as an employer of choice for Aboriginal peoples, we will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · spotlight local Community early childhood education sector heroes and key figures in human-interest stories; and · partner with the Department of Human Services to clarify and destigmatise WWCC.
Culturally responsive recruitment	Empowering and supporting the early childhood education sector with the Practice Guide: Aboriginal Culturally Responsive Recruitment in Early Education. The Practice Guide was developed in partnership with an Aboriginal business to support the early childhood education sector to recruit in a culturally safe way that is responsive to the needs of Aboriginal peoples.

Entry pathways

Action	Description
Supported traineeships	Financial support for culturally safe services to take on Aboriginal trainees as they work towards a Certificate III or Diploma qualification in early childhood education.

Career development recognition and retention

Action	Description
Investing in Aboriginal talent	Grants to support early childhood education sector services to develop and retain Aboriginal staff working in their centres.

Community and employer collaboration

Action	Description
Embedding Aboriginal cultural safety in the sector	Grants to support ACCOs and Aboriginal Business Suppliers to build capacity to deliver Aboriginal Cultural Safety Training for early childhood education services.
Empowering services to grow their cultural knowledge	Grant funding to support early childhood education services to engage in local centre-based activities, access Aboriginal education resources, support Community connection, and strengthen the application of cultural knowledge.





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