

NATIONAL PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

Between

the Commonwealth of Australia

and

the State and Territory Governments

regarding

INDIGENOUS EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

1. Parties to the Agreement

This Agreement is between:

- the Commonwealth of Australia (the “Commonwealth”); and
- the States and Territories.

2. Term of the Agreement

This Agreement will commence on 1 January 2009 and expire on 30 June 2014.

3. Preamble

On 3 July 2008, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreed to sustained engagement and effort by all governments over the next decade and beyond to achieve the Closing the Gap targets for Indigenous people. As a first step, COAG agreed in principle to this Agreement with joint funding of around \$547.2 million over six years to address the needs of Indigenous children in their early years. This funding builds on the \$16.8 million committed over five years for the Indigenous Child Care Hubs, which takes the total amount of funding under this Agreement to \$564 million over six years.

Through this Agreement, the Commonwealth and the States and Territories will work together to improve the early childhood outcomes of Indigenous children by addressing the high levels of disadvantage they currently experience to give them the best start in life.

In entering this Agreement, the Commonwealth and the States and Territories recognise that a shared commitment to improvements in Indigenous child mortality require better access to antenatal care, teenage reproductive and sexual health services, child and maternal health services and integrated child and family services which focus on quality early learning, child care and parent and family support.

4. Context

This Agreement has been developed within the context of the broader COAG Reform Agenda, which includes actions across the domains of health, early childhood development, schooling, and housing.

Indigenous children are the most vulnerable group of children in Australia and disparities with non-Indigenous children in some outcomes have widened in recent years. To reduce the gap in developmental outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children, COAG has set targets to:

- halve the gap in mortality rates for Indigenous children under five within a decade;
- halve the gap for Indigenous students in reading, writing and numeracy within a decade; and
- ensure all Indigenous four year olds have access to quality early childhood education within five years, including in remote areas.

The Commonwealth, States and Territories already contribute significant funding for Indigenous early childhood development, including through the broader work being pursued by COAG. Many of the Government’s election commitments, along with existing measures, will improve services for Indigenous children, including funding for maternal and child health and parenting support services, early childhood education, child care and the early years of schooling.

States and Territories also invest heavily in the area of Indigenous early childhood, including through their provision of the universal platforms of preschool and maternal and child health services.

National Partnership Agreement for Indigenous Early Childhood Development

To achieve the COAG targets, Australian governments have committed to a reform program for Indigenous early childhood development that will be delivered in stages to achieve tangible improvements in outcomes for Indigenous children and generational change over the longer term.

This Agreement represents the first stage of the reform program and builds on current activity; with a focus on Indigenous children aged 0-3 years. The evidence shows that substantial benefits accrue from investments made in the first few years of life and this is even more so for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. A greater focus on interventions in the early years will also contribute significantly to the achievement of COAG targets relating to later life outcomes.

In mid 2009, COAG will consider a report on progress and take advice surrounding this Agreement's contribution towards COAG's broader reform agenda to overcoming Indigenous children's disadvantage. Progress achieved through this Agreement will be presented in annual reports from each State and Territory. These reports will be submitted to the Commonwealth in June of each year.

5. Definitions/Interpretations

The following definitions and interpretations are used throughout this agreement:

Agreement: this Agreement and any attached bilateral workplans, schedules or annexures

COAG: the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) or any body delegated by COAG to operate on its behalf within the context of this Agreement

Early Childhood: the period from 0 to 8 years of age, encompassing the transition to school

In-kind Contribution: a contribution to the achievement of this Agreement's objectives in the form of services rather than in funding and in the context of the Agreement includes integration of existing resources and/or services into implementation of the measures in this Agreement

Indigenous: people who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander

Milestone: a significant event or point in time within the delivery of the objectives of this Agreement

Performance Indicators: the indicators used to monitor the progress towards achievement of the activities as specified in the relevant workplan/s

Regional, remote and urban locations: for the Children and Family Centres remote, regional and urban is based on an aggregation of ABS Remoteness Areas:

- Remote – combines remote and very remote Australia,
- Regional – combines inner and outer regional Australia, and
- Urban – major centres.

However, there is flexibility in the categorisation of locations. For example, given the limited number of urban centres across the country it may make sense to consider large regional cities as part of the urban allocation. This will be agreed bilateral on a jurisdiction by jurisdiction basis between states and territories and the Commonwealth

Remote Indigenous Community: a community that is classified as either 'remote' or 'very remote' according to the MCEETYA remoteness structure, and also classified as an 'Indigenous Location' by the ABS

Remote Indigenous Strategy: a plan for implementing the commitment to provide universal access to all four year olds living in remote Indigenous communities

6. Objectives

Through this Agreement, the Commonwealth, States and Territories are committed to:

- improving developmental outcomes for Indigenous children and achieving key targets as agreed by COAG;
- achieving sustained improvements in pregnancy and birth outcomes for Indigenous women and infants;
- improving Indigenous families use of the early childhood development services they need to optimise the development of their children; and
- implementing this National Partnership in a way that also contributes to COAG's social inclusion, early childhood development, education, health, housing, and safety agendas, by identifying reforms and models of service delivery that will improve outcomes for Indigenous children.

The attached integrated policy framework is a basis for developing future reforms by all governments in Indigenous early childhood development (see Attachment A).

7. Priority Areas

This Agreement concentrates on priority areas where the evidence shows a high level of impact can be achieved to improve the outcomes for Indigenous children.

A. Element One: Integration of Early Childhood Services through Children and Family Centres

Many Indigenous families miss out on early childhood services even though they stand to benefit most. Early childhood experts advocate integrated delivery of services, including antenatal services, child and maternal health services, parenting and family support services, and early learning and child care, as the best delivery platform to ensure families actually receive the support they need¹.

It is important that action in this area includes provision of parent and family support services. Evidence shows that early childhood programs are most effective when they support parents' active participation in their children's development.

A minimum of 35 integrated Children and Family Centres will be established nationally in accordance with the allocation below. The Children and Family Centres will provide a dynamic mix of services, responsive to community needs, and include child care, early learning and parent and family support services. The operations of the Children and Family Centre will be underpinned by integration of their management, governance and service systems.

Community engagement with the Children and Family Centres is integral to their successful implementation.

Table 1 – Proposed allocation of Integrated Children and Family Centres across the country.

Proposed Centres	NSW	QLD	VIC	SA	WA	TAS	NT	ACT	Total
regional/remote	4	5	1	2	4	0	4	0	20
urban	5	4	1	1	1	1	1	1	15
Total	9	9	2	3	5	1	5	1	35

Where possible, through consideration of need, capacity of existing services and leveraging of other funding and programs States and Territories should look at ways of establishing more than their allocation of Children and Family Centres.

¹ Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (2004) *Indigenous Parenting Project*, P 13.

B. Element Two: Increased Access to Antenatal Care, Pre-pregnancy and Teenage Sexual and Reproductive Health

While Indigenous women access antenatal care at comparable rates to non-Indigenous women, available data shows that they tend to leave their first antenatal visit until much later. In addition, studies have shown that teenage mothers, particularly Indigenous mothers, are more likely to experience poor pregnancy outcomes, including low birth weight.

The Commonwealth will provide funding to the States and Territories to improve access to, and use of, antenatal care by young Indigenous mothers, and support young Indigenous women to make informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive health. Efforts will focus on areas with significant numbers of young Indigenous women and high numbers of births to teenagers.

States and Territories will reform existing services where necessary and implement new services to increase access to, and take-up of, first trimester antenatal visits, provide support to reduce risk factors such as smoking, and provide pathways to related services, with a particular focus on Indigenous women under the age of 20.

Encouraging the use of antenatal care (starting in the first trimester) would contribute to halving the gap in infant mortality rates, reducing the incidence of low birth weight (which is twice as common for babies born to Indigenous mothers), and improving early childhood and later life outcomes.

Complementary to this, States and Territories will implement strategies to reduce the high rate of early pregnancy in the Indigenous population and to educate young people on sexual and reproductive health issues. Action in this area would aim to deliver targeted sexual and reproductive health programs for Indigenous teenagers, including those who are disengaged from school. This would have the positive effect of increasing the age of first conception among young Indigenous women.

C. Element Three: Increased Access to, and use of, Maternal and Child Health Services by Indigenous Families

The Commonwealth is investing \$90.3 million over five years for maternal and child health services under the existing *New Directions* measure (commenced 1 January 2008). This complements existing child and maternal health services to meet the Australian Government's commitment to halve the gap in infant and child mortality rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children within a decade. The Commonwealth will consult with States and Territories to determine priorities for investment under *New Directions*.

Under Element three of this Agreement States and Territories will also invest \$75 million (including funds allocated since December 2007) to deliver antenatal, postnatal, child and maternal health services by Indigenous families. This could include, but is not limited to:

- improving data sharing between health services to improve continuity of care for Indigenous mothers and their babies;
- increasing antenatal service provision to Indigenous women through hospital settings (in keeping with the principle of universal access);
- increasing access to antenatal care for Indigenous women with an emphasis on early presentation, and regular visits throughout pregnancy (the minimum requirement is eight visits during pregnancy, with two in first trimester);
- promoting and increasing uptake of child health checks, including those with particular focus on mainstream health services; and
- increasing accessibility and utilisation of maternal and child health services and programs aimed at promoting healthy lifestyles especially during pregnancy ,for example, smoking, alcohol and nutrition.

The full and exact nature and range of services, undertaken to deliver these and other initiatives within each jurisdiction, will be agreed bilaterally in consultation with local communities.

8. Outcomes

This Agreement will contribute to the following **overarching** outcomes:

- Indigenous children are born and remain healthy;
- Indigenous children have the same health outcomes as non-Indigenous children;
- Indigenous children acquire the basic skills for life and learning; and
- Indigenous families have ready access to suitable and culturally inclusive early childhood and family support services.

This Agreement will contribute to the following **specific** outcomes in each jurisdiction:

- increased proportion of Indigenous children participating in quality early childhood education and development and child care services;
- increased proportion of Indigenous people using parent and family support services;
- increased proportion of Indigenous children's child health checks completed each year;
- increased proportion of Indigenous children who are fully vaccinated each year;
- increased proportion of pregnant Indigenous women aged under 20 years with an antenatal contact in the first trimester of pregnancy each year; and
- increased proportion of Indigenous teenagers accessing sexual and reproductive health programs each year.

9. Outputs

This Agreement will facilitate the delivery of the following **outputs**:

- a minimum of 35 Children and Family Centres established in urban, regional and remote areas with high Indigenous populations and disadvantage, commencing operations from June 2010;
- provision of early learning, child care and parent and family support services to Indigenous families at or through each of the Children and Family Centres;
- increased provision of antenatal care services targeted at young Indigenous women, as agreed in the workplans;
- increased provision of sexual and reproductive health services to Indigenous teenagers, as agreed in the workplans; and
- increased provision of maternal and child health services for Indigenous children and their mothers, as agreed in workplans.

10. Progress Measurement

While all Australian governments are committed fully to achieving genuine improvement for Indigenous children and families, a number of challenges to measuring progress are recognised. These include the relatively small size of the Indigenous population meaning that identifying trends may require aggregating several years of data. It is also recognised that the benefits of this program may not begin to be realised until after a period of years, towards the end of the agreement as programs are bedded down. These and other relevant factors will be considered when measuring progress.

Following the agreement of baseline data by the Commonwealth, States and Territories, all jurisdictions will use the following **performance indicators** for the duration of the Agreement to identify and measure progress towards the agreed outcomes:

- increased proportion of Indigenous children attending the Children and Family Centres who have had all age-appropriate health checks and vaccinations;
- increased proportion of Indigenous three and four year olds participating in quality early childhood education and development and child care services;
- increased proportion of Indigenous children attending the Children and Family Centres who go on to attend school regularly;
- increased proportion of Indigenous children and families accessing a range of services offered at or *through* Children and Family Centres, including but not limited to childcare, early learning, child and maternal health, and parent and family support services;
- increased proportion of pregnant Indigenous women with an antenatal contact in the first trimester of pregnancy in each year;
- increased proportion of Indigenous teenagers accessing sexual and reproductive health programs and services;
- reduced proportion of Indigenous babies born with low birth weight each year;
- reduced mortality rate of Indigenous infants each year;
- reduced proportion of Indigenous women who use substances (tobacco, alcohol, illicit drugs) during pregnancy each year; and
- reduced proportion of hospital admissions of Indigenous children 0-4 years.

11. Consultation and Engagement

Consultations surrounding the delivery of this Agreement are fundamental to its success and the achievement of its objectives shown in item six. Extensive consultation across all key partners and stakeholders including but not limited to Indigenous communities, non-government organisations delivering the services and industry peak bodies et cetera will be initiated at the earliest opportunity by States and Territories.

The timing of such consultation and engagement will be guided by State and Territory workplans and will continue for the duration of this agreement. The outcomes will also be considered as part of the overarching evaluation of this Agreement.

The outcomes of these consultations should be documented and become a key component of the workplans and, wherever practicable, be shared to enable a strengthening of best practice by other State and Territory consultative exercises. Outcomes of consultation and engagement will be included in annual national reports to COAG.

12. Roles and Responsibilities

The Commonwealth and States and Territories will work in partnership to realise the goals and commitments made in this Agreement, to deliver the agreed outputs and achieve the agreed outcomes.

Shared

States, Territories and the Commonwealth share the following roles and responsibilities and will:

- work in partnership through COAG to ensure effective implementation of this Agreement and its associated workplans consistent with the parameters, goals and targets set by COAG;
- work in partnership to evaluate outcomes of the Agreement at a national and local level;
- work in partnership to review annually the bilaterally agreed workplans and re-align workplans with the COAG reform agenda where required;
- work in partnership to identify and share best practice across all parties of this Agreement and to provide information and assistance with the overarching evaluation of this Agreement; and
- provide sufficient data (as specified later in this Agreement and in the workplans) to enable a thorough evaluation of outcomes of the Agreement at a national and local level.

States and Territories

States and Territories will:

- provide financial contributions (and any in-kind support identified within the respective workplan) as set out in this Agreement; and
- be responsible for planning and implementation of bilaterally agreed workplans attached to this Agreement, in consultation with Indigenous communities and other stakeholders.

Commonwealth

The Commonwealth will:

- provide a financial contribution (and any in-kind support identified within the respective workplan) to States and Territories as set out in this Agreement;
- participate in consultations as appropriate regarding implementation of this Agreement, including mechanisms convened by States and Territories; and
- participate in the planning of bilaterally agreed workplans as appropriate and where requested by the respective State or Territory.

13. Governance Arrangements

Governance arrangements for this Agreement will be determined by COAG. Governance arrangements will cover, but not be limited to, delegation of decision and review making powers, dispute resolution processes and processes for varying the Agreement.

14. Financial arrangements

This Agreement is based on a facilitation payment and joint investment approach between the Commonwealth and State and Territories. Subject to appropriations and agreement of payment process (including frequency of payments, progress reviews and linking of payments to milestones) for National Partnerships by COAG, the first facilitation payment for element one will be made in January 2009, with subsequent payments made as agreed by parties. Funding for element two will commence 1 July 2009.

15. Review

COAG will agree a process for monitoring and reviewing the Agreement and workplans that is consistent with other National Partnerships. At the end of the Agreement, following a review of progress towards stated outcomes, COAG will make a decision on the form of any additional assistance to continue to make progress towards the outcomes.

National Partnership Agreement for Indigenous Early Childhood Development

16. Distribution

Commonwealth funding to States and Territories for elements one and two will be distributed according to the tables below, corresponding with the attached bilaterally agreed workplans.

A. Element One: Early Childhood Service Integration - Children and Family Centres

Table 2 – Funding Allocation for Element One - Integrated Children and Family Centres.

In \$m	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	Total
NSW	4.46	19.03	17.31	14.08	9.91	9.91	74.70
QLD	4.49	19.15	17.42	14.17	9.97	9.97	75.18
SA	1.51	6.43	5.84	4.75	3.35	3.35	25.22
WA	2.53	10.79	9.81	7.98	5.62	5.62	42.35
VIC	0.99	4.24	3.86	3.14	2.21	2.21	16.65
TAS	0.48	2.06	1.87	1.52	1.07	1.07	8.09
ACT	0.48	2.06	1.87	1.52	1.07	1.07	8.09
NT	2.53	10.79	9.81	7.98	5.62	5.62	42.35
Total	17.47	74.55	67.80	55.17	38.82	38.82	292.62

* The amounts in the above table reflect the agreed phasing of construction and operation of Children and Family Centres.

B. Element Two: Antenatal Care, Pre-pregnancy and Teenage Sexual and Reproductive Health

Phasing of funding over the life of the Agreement may vary as agreed by the relevant parties.

Table 3 – Annual Cashflow for Element Two – Antenatal Care, Pre-pregnancy and Teenage Sexual and Reproductive Health

In \$m	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	Total
NSW	3.75	5.00	5.75	6.00	6.25	26.75
QLD	4.20	5.60	6.44	6.72	7.00	29.96
SA	0.75	1.00	1.15	1.20	1.25	5.35
WA	2.40	3.20	3.68	3.84	4.00	17.12
VIC	0.75	1.00	1.15	1.20	1.25	5.35
TAS	0.45	0.60	0.69	0.72	0.75	3.21
ACT	0.15	0.20	0.23	0.24	0.25	1.07
NT	2.55	3.40	3.91	4.08	4.25	18.19
Total	15.0	20.0	23.0	24.0	25.0	107.0

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C. Element Three: Increase Access to, and Use of, Maternal and Child Health Services by Indigenous Families

State and Territory financial contributions towards element three, and an indicative breakdown of the *New Directions* investment of \$90 million by the Commonwealth, are as set out below, in accordance with the attached bilaterally agreed workplans (with phasing of funding over the life of the Agreement varying as agreed by the relevant parties).

Tables 5 and 6 – Allocations of State and Territory (5) and Commonwealth (6) Contributions under *New Directions*

5. Allocation of State and Territory contribution		6. Allocation of Commonwealth contribution	
	\$m		\$m
NSW	21.5	NSW	20.0
QLD	21.25	QLD	25.5
SA	3.75	SA	4.0
WA	11.25	WA	15.0
VIC	4.5	VIC	4.0
TAS	2.5	TAS	3.0
ACT	0.5	ACT	0.5
NT	9.75	NT	18.0
Total	75.0	Total	90.0

17. Performance Indicators and Accountability

Review of the overall operation of the Agreement will be based on progress against the following agreed performance indicators:

- performance measures identified in item 10 of this Agreement;
- progressive achievement of the outputs, as specified in bilaterally agreed workplans;
- satisfactory compliance by States and Territories with all financial and progress reporting requirements of this Agreement;
- participation by States and Territories in annual bilateral discussions with the Commonwealth to review progress against bilaterally agreed workplans, and outcomes and outputs as set out in this Agreement; and
- collection and reporting of data for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework, as it relates to this Agreement. Performance Indicators contained within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework of relevance to this Agreement:-

1.01 Low birthweight infants
 1.11 HIV/AIDS, hepatitis C and sexually transmissible infections
 1.12 Children’s hearing loss
 1.14 Life expectancy at birth
 1.18 Infant mortality rate
 1.19 Perinatal mortality
 1.20 Sudden infant death syndrome
 1.21 All causes age standardised death rates
 1.22 Leading causes of mortality

1.24 Avoidable and preventable deaths
 2.18 Tobacco smoking during pregnancy
 2.23 Breastfeeding practices
 3.01 Antenatal care
 3.02 Immunisation (child and adult)
 3.09 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians in the health workforce

Measurement of Child and Family Centre performance will be made using the performance indicators identified in this Agreement at item 10 and with reference to the performance indicators defined as part of the wider Early Childhood Education and Care Reform Agenda and its associated Specific Purpose Payments and National Partnership Agreements.

18. Evaluation of the Agreement

This Agreement's effectiveness in achieving its outcomes will be determined through a comprehensive national evaluation to be undertaken throughout the life of the Agreement. The evaluation strategy will be developed by the Commonwealth in partnership with the States and Territories by 30 June 2010 and will form the basis of the final report to COAG in June 2014. The evaluation strategy will be consistent with any future decisions made by COAG on this subject and will provide the framework for the final report to COAG in June 2014.

An initial baseline data study will provide a basis from which to monitor and evaluate progress over time. It will also include agreed data definitions and sources, base lines and reporting protocols.

Central to the evaluation will be the collection and analysis of data against the outputs and performance indicators identified in this Agreement, as well as the progress and performance against each of the attached State and Territory workplans. This data collection and analysis will also include a range of agreed outcomes and progress measures drawn from those set out in the attached Indigenous Early Childhood Development policy framework.

19. Reporting Requirements

Reporting requirements will be agreed by COAG to align with review and financial arrangement processes. However, State and Territory reporting will include:

- providing a financial report for each element of their workplans to the Commonwealth to ensure phasing of facilitation payments reflects the work to be achieved in each year; and
- developing progress reports for each element of the Agreement to assist in developing the regular report to COAG on the achievements to date on the agreed outcomes.

20. Risks

There are a number of potential risks associated with implementing the proposals described in this Agreement. Examples of these risks and some mitigation strategies include:

- shortages of trained workers across both the maternal and child health and early childhood education and care sectors:-
 - funding for Children and Family Centres to include support for training local Indigenous and culturally competent workers;
- limited construction capacity to build the integrated Children and Family Centres, which may impact on the timing of the rollout of the centres:-
 - use existing early childhood facilities to deliver integrated services;
- pronounced construction and workforce shortages in remote locations:-
 - in relation to workforce, additional investment in housing and other support services would assist in attracting and retaining trained; culturally competent staff to remote locations;
- difficulty in identifying those who would benefit most from services in urban locations due to the dispersion of the target population throughout the community:-
 - less visible groups would need to be targeted through outreach to ensure they can use early childhood services; and
- availability of data sets to measure progress against the performance indicators in this Agreement:-
 - establish new or expand existing data collection mechanisms.

21. Relevant Legislation and any Future Legislative Commitments

The Agreement will be implemented and delivered in accordance with applicable Commonwealth, State and Territory legislation.

22. Variation of the Agreement

This Agreement may be varied by mutual agreement in writing between the parties in accordance with a governance process agreed by COAG to ensure the following:

- The objectives and outcomes identified in this Agreement reflect:-
 - achieving COAG's Closing the Gap targets for Indigenous children,
 - COAG decisions on the aspirations and outcomes of the Early Childhood Development Reform Agenda,
 - the objectives and outcomes of the proposed Early Childhood Development National Partnership Agreement, and
 - future directions around a national early childhood development strategy.

- the implementation arrangements identified in this Agreement reflect COAG decisions and the outcomes agreed;
- the performance indicators identified through this Agreement reflect any changes made by COAG to the targets of the wider Early Childhood Education and Care Reform Agenda; and
- the data collected through reporting requirements identified in this Agreement does not duplicate any data collected through other arrangements including the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care.

Other changes in Commonwealth, State or Territory circumstances that impact on this Agreement will be reflected in a variation to any relevant bilateral agreements and State or Territory workplans.

National Partnership Agreement for Indigenous Early Childhood Development

23. Signatories to the Agreement

IN WITNESS WHEREOF this Agreement has been executed as at the day and year first written above.

SIGNED by:

The Honourable Kevin Rudd MP)
Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of Australia) _____

The Honourable Nathan Rees MP)
Premier of the State of New South Wales) _____

The Honourable John Brumby MP)
Premier of the State of Victoria) _____

The Honourable Anna Bligh MP)
Premier of the State of Queensland) _____

The Honourable Colin Barnett MLA)
Premier of the State of Western Australia) _____

The Honourable Michael Rann MP)
Premier of the State of South Australia) _____

The Honourable David Bartlett MP)
Premier of the State of Tasmania) _____

Chief Minister of the Australian Capital Territory)
) _____

The Honourable Paul Henderson MLA)
Chief Minister of the Northern Territory of Australia) _____

Schedules

- State and Territory Workplans

Attachment

- Attachment A – Indigenous Early Childhood Development Policy Framework