



# Reconciliation Australia Early Years Strategy – Public Submission

**28 April 2023**



Thank you for the opportunity to share feedback in response to the Early Years Strategy Discussion Paper.

Reconciliation Australia particularly supports the Paper's focus on:

- **First Nations**, including the imperative for First Nations children to “have the right to thrive and grow up healthy, supported by strong families and proud in culture”, and to have the opportunity to be enriched and empowered by community-led, holistic early childhood outcomes, facilitated through genuine partnerships between governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- **International obligations**, including active respect for, and commitment to, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
- **Strengths-based and evidence-based approaches**, including those which actively recognise the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge bases.
- **Relationships with other Commonwealth Government strategies**, including both the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood Strategy.

Nonetheless, both within and across these particular focus areas, Reconciliation Australia sees a need and an opportunity to embed a more explicit focus on reconciliation itself. Reconciliation Australia defines and measures reconciliation according to five integral and interrelated dimensions: historical acceptance; race relations; equality and equity; institutional integrity; and unity.

Further to coordinating relationships with other Government Strategies, embedding a focus on reconciliation in the early years can be supported by coordinating relationships with Education sector bodies, policies, standards and frameworks that are already demonstrating increasing commitment to reconciliation.

For example, following the release of the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Declaration in 2019, which reminded us of the importance of ensuring that all young Australians become “*successful lifelong learners, and active and informed members of the community... [who] understand, acknowledge and celebrate the diversity of and richness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures,*” this growing commitment has been reflected in:

- The 2022 release of Version 9.0 of the Australian Curriculum, and its stronger attention to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures Cross-curriculum priority towards ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students see themselves and their cultures in the curriculum and all students learn that First Nations communities in Australia are strong, resilient, rich and diverse.
- The 2023 release of the updated My Time Our Place and Early Year Learning Framework, with their renewed focus on reconciliation woven throughout the Frameworks' principles, practices and learning outcomes, and included right at the heart of their vision for all children to be “*active and informed members of their communities with knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives.*”

Reconciliation Australia's Narragunnawali: Reconciliation in Education program supports early learning services, as well as the schools that these feed into, to further take meaningful action in alignment with these commitments. Indeed, drawing on data from the latest Wave of the Department of Social Services' LSIC Survey, the [external Evaluation of Narragunnawali](#) has demonstrated a statistically significant link between students who attend schools that their parents know have developed a (Narragunnawali) Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP)<sup>1</sup> and both:

- A reduced likelihood of those students reporting they do not want to go to school;
- An increased likelihood of those students reporting that their school understands their needs and is good for them.<sup>2</sup>

More generally, it has been evidenced that those engaged with the Narragunnawali program feel it has *“increased their confidence in addressing reconciliation and driving meaningful change within their schools and early learning services. Engagement with Narragunnawali provides a formalised means of delivering students, staff and families with regular opportunities to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures...[and] also encouraged the forging of new relationships between schools and services, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.”*<sup>3</sup>

All this considered, Reconciliation Australia welcomes a conversation with the Department of Social Services about opportunities for leveraging coordinated efforts between the Department; the Education sector; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education/community organisations; and ourselves to further develop the Early Years Strategy in alignment with the feedback in our submission, and to bring an embedded strategic focus to life through the sustainment of programs such as Narragunnawali.

Thank you for taking the time to consider this submission.

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<sup>1</sup> Noting here that individual schools and early learning services develop their RAPs via Reconciliation Australia's Narragunnawali online platform. There is, simultaneously, a growing engagement of other Education & Training sector organisations in Reconciliation Australia's wider RAP program.

<sup>2</sup> See Biddle, N. 2022. [Narragunnawali Research Report 18: Capturing the impact of Narragunnawali - December 2022](#), ANU CSR.M.

<sup>3</sup> See Biddle, N. 2019. [Narragunnawali Research Report 11: Hearing from Schools and Early Learning Services - August 2019](#), ANU CSR.M.