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National Early Years Strategy Discussion Paper Submission

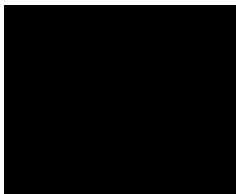
Please find attached the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre and its NACCHO Affiliate, Submission to the National Early Years Strategy.

The Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre is the NACCHO Affiliate, and the largest Aboriginal community controlled organisation delivering early years programs in lutruwita/Tasmania.

Included in its breadth of programs are an Aboriginal Child Care Centre, formally a MACCS funded service; early years education programs; Intensive Family Support Services, and the only organisation delivering out of home care programs for Aboriginal children; holistic primary health care service provider including antenatal and postnatal care, with midwives, child health nurses and allied health professionals, in addition to our general clinical and community team; and delivering three Connected Beginnings site with dual health and education components.

We look forward to collaborating with you closely as the Strategy comes to life, and we can embed the ways forward in lutruwita/Tasmania.

Yours sincerely



Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre

**NATIONAL EARLY YEARS STRATEGY DISCUSSION PAPER CONSULTATION GUIDING
QUESTIONS**

NOTE: can answer some/all of these and/or provide other information

QUESTION

1. Do you have any comments on the proposed structure of the Strategy?

The structure as proposed is difficult to comment on being at such a high level. Elements of the structure that can be considered include:

- Implementation plans will be critical in articulating how the Commonwealth will work towards desired outcomes.
- The structure is just a structure, we must ensure that the 'old does not become the new rebranded and rehashed', we must ensure the structure implementation and bringing the element to life are codesigned and embedded in First Nations thinking, driven by a change process that builds its community assets to create the outcomes the Strategy hopes to achieve.
- Neither the Strategy structure diagram, nor the Implementation Action Plan diagram indicate a process for on-going adaptation of evaluation structure in response to evaluation findings. This is of particular relevance to the IP.

QUESTION

2. What vision should our nation have for Australia's youngest children?

- That mothers are growing our future elders and should have the resources to overcome whatever vulnerability, or disadvantage they are experiencing at any point in time.
- The vision needs to be inclusive and encompasses the child's ecosystem, the holistic needs of the child and the families during the first 1000 days and early years.
- The vision that it takes a village or a community to raise a child.
- Every child has access to what they need, where and when they need it to thrive and grow now and into the future.
- All Australian children in the first five years of their life are safe, happy, and thriving and supported to reach their full potential.

Codesigning the vision will ensure it is real and meets our potential and current families' voices.

QUESTION

3. What mix of outcomes are the most important to include in the Strategy?

- Implementing the Strategy at a local place-based level will build the capacity for real and evidence-based outcomes, driven by community need and resources available to them.
- Place based, codesign and lead, drawing with less emphasis on pre described outcomes. (Collective Impact approaches)
- Families and communities are assisted and resourced to raise healthy happy children.
- Seamless services, linkages and pathways are in place to support families to provide the best care for their children.
- There is smooth transition for young children into the next life-phase and pathways into other whole of life supports.
- Children, their families, and the communities in which they live, experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage, are prioritized in the above strategies and resourcing.

QUESTION

4. What specific areas/policy priorities should be included in the Strategy and why?

- Collaboration – both within the Commonwealth and externally with States and Territories, communities, families, and children.
- First Nations lead approach to the Strategy.
- Understanding, and readily available State and Territory frameworks or strategies, which align to the Early Years Strategy; decreases duplication for all jurisdictions doing the same analysis.
- Identify the achievements across the country where change, and early years work is hitting the ground making a real difference, for example Connected Beginnings Program and specifically in Tasmania, the Child and Family Centre's, sharing this type of knowledge can escalate action and drive real outcomes.
- A key policy priority for the Commonwealth will be to raise awareness of the early years, especially the first 1000 days to ensure children and their families are informed and educated on the actions needed to support their children thrive and grow. A national campaign codesigned in partnership with key knowledge holders is needed to support the general public's understanding of why a National Early Years Strategy is so important for our Australian Children both now and for their future.
- Place a focus and emphasis on the first 1000 days as a significant period for health and developmental outcomes both now and into the future.
- A key driver for any work in the early years is the critical workforce issues facing both the Early Childhood Care and Education Sector and supporting early years services and supports such as allied and maternal and infant health professionals.
- Reviewing First Nations Childcare Centre's since the removal of Multifunctional Aboriginal Child Care Service (MACCS) to mainstream Child Care Centre, undoubtedly the finding will be to reinstate MACCS for our First Nations families, so access is affordable and accessible.

QUESTION

5. What could the Commonwealth do to improve outcomes for children—particularly those who are born or raised in more vulnerable and/or disadvantaged circumstances?

- Reduce the number of children living in and being raised in poverty by increasing income support to the level during the COVID pandemic.
- Work with communities, families and children experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage to develop local placed based interventions that suit the community's needs, context, and priorities for their children. An example is the Connected Beginnings program while currently focused on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and communities this scope could easily be broadened to a wider range of communities and is already supporting meaningful change for all children as a ripple effect of the program doing clever work in place.
- Scope could also broaden from the current education and health sectors and capture all services and supports with touch points for children and or their families in the early years.
- Fund Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and services directly to work with their communities.
- Fund and emphasis the importance of culture and cultural practices as a protective factor for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.
- Minimize duplicate processes, and/or strengthen synergies between all relevant initiatives concurrently in play, such as free childcare for ATSI children and those experiencing

vulnerabilities or disadvantage. There is risk that they contradict each other and/or place additional impost on services on the ground to be able to adequately participate/response.

QUESTION

6. What areas do you think the Commonwealth could focus on to improve coordination and collaboration in developing policies for children and families?

- Acknowledge and resource appropriately the role of coordination and collaboration when developing policies and within programs. Too often collaboration is by word only, to do this well requires a distinct set of skills, focus, resources, and time to achieve.
- Support the early years sector, through resourcing, to build capacity in collaboration.
- Investment, support, and prioritization at the Commonwealth level for local place-based service collaboration (e.g., inter-agency partnerships that support pathways, linkages, and programs at the local level).
- Bipartisan agreement to the National Early Years Strategy to ensure it is not another short-lived framework.
- Commitment by the three levels of government, Commonwealth, State and Local Government to grow our future elders.
- Partnerships will ensure all involved are focused and responsible for the outcomes for the future, this could include working agreements with the States and Territories to align and value add to each other's work.
- Support data and information sharing.

QUESTION

7. What principles should be included in the Strategy?

- Evidence shows that life experience the first five years impacts on physical and mental health and well-being across the lifespan.
- In the early years of life, parents, carers, families, and kin are key to the well-being of children and therefore supporting parents and caregivers to provide the best care for their children is essential.
- Services that are locally based, client-driven and work in collaboration are best placed to support parents, carers, families, and kin as caregivers to their children.
- Investing in strategies to support transition into "next life-phase," contributes to, and maximize impact of other early years initiatives and activities.
- A true and un wavered commitment to a child centered, strengths-based approach.
- Listening to and acting on the voice of the child.
- Use of language that does not place an 'identity tag' on an individual or community.
- Collaborative approaches, within a framework that supports genuine, meaningful, and evidenced based change – Collective Impact or similar (i.e., First Nations ways of working).
- The National Early Years Strategy cannot stagnate, it must have adaptability and flexibility to adjust and respond to new research and evidence.
- Caring for and nurturing the environment: the natural environment is impacting our children now and into the future and must form part of any Strategy moving forward.
- Embody and reflect the;
 - United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
 - United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Persons with a Disabilities

- United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People

If we fundamentally pay attention to all these rights, we will provide the best and most valuable experience for our future elders.

QUESTION

8. Are there gaps in existing frameworks or other research or evidence that need to be considered for the development of the Strategy?

- Monitoring and evaluation need to bring communities along with it – be based on what the community (and service provider program partners) seek to achieve and provide a feedback loop with community (i.e., allows community to celebrate achievements).
- Evaluation needs to be adaptable to the community and a real emphasis on story telling- as an evidence base, owned and evaluated by local people and less of the ‘consultant cookie cutter approach).
- Outcome measures need to be based on clear understanding about what programs are trying to achieve and include space to identify/record incidental/unintended impacts (both positive and negative).
- Frameworks need to include strategies for rigorous analysis of “what working/not working” and allow for adapting program focus along way.