

First Steps Strategy midpoint update

Acknowledgement of Country

The NSW Department of Education acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waterways where we work and live. We celebrate First Nations Peoples' continuing cultural and spiritual connections to Country and recognise the significance of First Nations voices and cultures. The Department of Education would like to pay respects to Elders, past and present and are committed to nurturing First Nations children who are the Elders of our future.

As Aboriginal people are the Traditional Custodians of NSW, this document refers to Aboriginal people. The Department's Aboriginal programs and services are available, without question, to Torres Strait Islander peoples.

June 2023 marked the midpoint of the First Steps NSW Aboriginal Children's Early Childhood Education Strategy (2021-2025).

The First Steps Strategy, developed in partnership with the Early Childhood Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Committee, solidifies the NSW Department of Education's commitment to ensuring the best possible early childhood educational (ECE) outcomes for Aboriginal children aged 0-5.

The Strategy has funding of \$23 million over 5 years to implement evidence-based programs and initiatives that contribute to achieving better outcomes for Aboriginal children in NSW.

It works to achieve Closing the Gap targets and priority area reforms and the outcomes of the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) Partnership Agreement (2020-30).

First Steps strategy vision

All Aboriginal children in NSW can access quality early childhood education and are supported to embrace their culture and identity for a strong start to lifelong learning.

First Steps strategy key goals and performance measures

The NSW Department of Education invests in a range of programs and initiatives to achieve 3 key Goals and 5 Performance Measures in the First Steps Strategy.

Key goals

- 1. Child** – All Aboriginal children and their families are supported to enrol in quality culturally inclusive ECE.
- 2. Family and Kinship** – All Aboriginal families and children feel respected in ECE services as their culture is celebrated and nourished.
- 3. Learning** – Aboriginal children are provided access to ECE that drives stronger outcomes through strengths-based approaches and all children have a sense of pride in Aboriginal peoples, cultures, and histories in NSW.

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Performance measures











1. 95% of Aboriginal children will be enrolled in the year before school starts by 2025.
2. 55% of Aboriginal children will be assessed as developmentally on track in all five domains of the Australian Early Development Census by 2031.
3. 50% of Aboriginal children in ECE will have access to an Aboriginal language program by 2025.
4. 3% of staff working in the department's ECE directorates will be Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.
5. 100% of staff working in the department's ECE directorates will have completed or commenced cultural awareness/safety training by 2025.

Alignment with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap



The First Steps Strategy and the department-funded programs and initiatives it guides align with Targets 3, 4 and 16 and all 5 Priority Reforms in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap:

-  **Target 3**
By 2025, increase the proportion of Aboriginal children enrolled in Year Before Fulltime Schooling (YBFS) early childhood education to 95%.
-  **Target 4**
By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal children assessed as developmentally on track in all 5 domains of the AEDC to 55%.
-  **Target 16**
By 2031, there is a sustained increase in the number and strength of Aboriginal languages being spoken.
-  **Priority Reform 1**
Genuine partnerships and shared decision-making.
-  **Priority Reform 2**
Building the Aboriginal community-controlled sector.
-  **Priority Reform 3**
Transforming government organisations.
-  **Priority Reform 4**
Sharing data and information at a regional level.
-  **Priority Reform 5**
Employment, business growth and economic prosperity.

Performance measure	What we have done until now	What we will do over the next 2.5 years
<p>Performance Measure 1</p> <p>95% of Aboriginal children will be enrolled in the year before school starts by 2025¹</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased the number of Aboriginal ECE organisations delivering the Aboriginal Families as Teachers (AFaT) program. There are currently 10 providers delivering across 29 locations. Procured SNAICC/THRYVE as the Sector Strengthening Partner (SSP) to support and grow the number of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations (ACCOs) delivering ECE in NSW. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Further increase the number of Aboriginal ECE organisations delivering AFaT increase their accessibility and ensure continuous quality improvement. Align our efforts with the National Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership. Work with the SSP to further increase enrolment in ACCOs delivering ECE.
<p>Performance Measure 2</p> <p>55% of Aboriginal children will be assessed as developmentally on track in all five domains of the Australian Early Development Census by 2031²</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supported the development of culturally appropriate Health and Development Checks in preschools. Established the SSP to support and grow the number of ACCOs delivering ECE, to support developmental outcomes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Design and implement the Culturally Responsive Health Development Tool. Establish unconscious bias training for all Kindergarten teachers delivering the AEDC.
<p>Performance Measure 3</p> <p>50% of Aboriginal children in ECE will have access to an Aboriginal language program by 2025³</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ninganah No More (NNM) continues to expand with 26 organisations delivering languages under the grant program and 3 organisations delivering languages through established hubs. Funded NNM and 3 language hubs, which have seen an increase in the number of Aboriginal children learning an Aboriginal language (25% of the cohort in NSW are now engaging in the program). Ensured continuous quality improvement via bi-monthly NNM network meetings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Further increase the number of NNM language hubs and ECE providers delivering NNM. Further align and expand languages along the continuum of learning. Continue to ensure quality improvement via bi-monthly NNM network meetings.
<p>Performance Measure 4</p> <p>3% of staff in the department's ECE directorate will be Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Targeted recruitment pathways for Aboriginal people. Facilitated individual recruitment rounds for identified staff. Facilitated an Aboriginal Early Childhood Network for corporate staff to increase retention by ensuring staff are connected and culturally supported. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to target and identify recruitment pathways for Aboriginal people and facilitate individual recruitment rounds for identified staff. Continue to facilitate the Aboriginal Early Childhood Network.
<p>Performance Measure 5</p> <p>100% of staff working in the department's ECE directorates will have completed or commenced cultural awareness/safety training by 2025</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delivered the Professional Learning Sprints for Early Childhood Outcomes (ECO) mandatory for staff. Conducted a training needs analysis to inform an individual cultural capability approach. Aligned the work of ECO with the developing Cultural Responsiveness Framework. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure 100% of ECO staff engage with the department's Cultural Education module 'Let's take the first step together'. Continue to implement an individual and teams approach to understanding their cultural capability.

¹ Aligned to Closing the Gap Target 3; ² Aligned to Closing the Gap Target 4; ³ Aligned to Closing the Gap Target 16

To find out more about the First Steps Strategy and other programs and initiatives, please visit our website at <https://www.education.nsw.gov.au/aboriginal-ecec> or email the Aboriginal Early Education and Care team at ECE.aboriginalengagement@det.nsw.edu.au