



Australian Government

National Commission for Aboriginal and  
Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People

# Corporate Plan

## 2025–26

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## Acknowledgement of Country

The National Commission for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People (the National Commission) acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and recognises their continued care of and connection to land, water, culture and community. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and to Elders both past and present.

## Acknowledgement of people with lived and living experience

The National Commission acknowledges and thanks all children and young people with lived and living experience who have shared their stories, insights, and wisdom over many years.

We honour the strength, resilience, and leadership of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, and we commit to listening deeply, walking alongside, and amplifying their voices in all aspects of our work.

The National Commission recognises the definition of children as those aged 0–12<sup>12</sup> and young people as those aged 12–24<sup>13</sup>, in line with the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

## Note on language

The terms Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, First Nations, and Indigenous are used respectfully and interchangeably throughout this document when referring to First Nations peoples of Australia. These terms are used to respectfully encompass the diversity of cultures, identities, and preferences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

## Statement of Preparation

I, Lillian Gordon, as the accountable authority of the National Commission for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People, present the 2025–26 National Commission for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People corporate plan, which covers the periods of 2025–26 to 2028–29, as required under paragraph 35(1)(b) of the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* and in accordance with section 16E of the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Rule 2014* (PGPA Rule).



Lillian Gordon  
Acting National Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People  
29 August 2025

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# National Commissioner's Foreword

As the Acting National Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People (National Commissioner), I am proud to present the 2025–26 corporate plan for the National Commission for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People (National Commission).



Since commencing operations on 13 January 2025, the National Commission has focused on establishing foundational corporate and governance structures that will enable the team to carry out their work. We have also commenced relationships and ongoing dialogue with key stakeholders to determine how we work together to perform our functions, enhance coordination, and collectively advance the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. During this time, I have met and talked with young people whose aspirations have inspired me and filled me with hope and determination.

Now is a critical time, in which much of the action we see in child protection and youth justice is not working. As inquiries and reports continue to pile up across the country, we must reckon with the fact that many existing systems exclude, harm, or fail Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, with profound effects on their health, wellbeing, and sense of self-worth. We know that these effects reverberate throughout their lives – at a time when the world should be at their feet, not on their shoulders.

If Australians want to see real justice, then these are the injustices we have to address. Justice in education, justice in health, housing, maternity care, early education, digital inclusion, life expectancy, and justice in culture, land, and language. The removal, criminalisation, and incarceration of First Nations children demands immediate, strong, and meaningful action that holds systems accountable.

These changes require courage and fortitude. Systems cannot truly change without the bravery and determination of the people who work inside them. Bold action is needed to transform our ways of working – to prioritise support over separation; to invest in prevention instead of prisons. We must listen to children and young people and be inspired by their fresh perspectives, energy, and their clear sense of justice.

We cannot do this work without the leadership of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, who we must recognise as agents, rights holders, keepers of ancestral knowledge, and experts in their own lives. But, equally, we cannot allow them to shoulder the burden alone. All children have the right to a childhood that is safeguarded, nurturing, and playful – to be free from adult responsibilities, develop at their own pace, and have the space to imagine, explore, and make mistakes.

Every loving parent wants their children to grow up respected, safe, and understood, in a world that values their identity, dreams, and future. We need wider society to want this for our children, too.

When we value children, we uphold their human rights.

When we uphold their rights, we create space for empowerment, self-determination, and leadership.

When communities lead with self-determination, they form genuine relationships to create evidence-based solutions that work for their kids.

And, when we implement those solutions, we build a safer, kinder, and more prosperous country for all.

It is my hope that all Australians will join the National Commission, Elders, leaders, communities, and our children, in bringing this prosperity to life.

It has been a great honour to serve as the Acting National Commissioner. I extend a warm welcome to the recently appointed ongoing National Commissioner, Adjunct Professor Sue-Anne Hunter, and congratulate her on her new role. Commissioner Hunter is a Wurundjeri and Ngurai Illum Wurrung woman with decades of experience working with families and children. More recently, she worked to shine a powerful light on historic and ongoing systemic injustices through Australia's first formal truth-telling inquiry.

Commissioner Hunter will lead the National Commission's forward work, ensuring that the approaches and goals identified in our early work continue to evolve and reflect the priorities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people – and that the National Commission is equipped to meet those goals.



Lil Gordon

Acting National Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People

# About the National Commission

## Our Purpose

**Our purpose is to protect and promote the rights, interests, and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people by amplifying their voices, aspirations, and strengths; embedding their perspectives and priorities in advice to government; and collaborating with key stakeholders to enhance collective impact and drive systemic reform.**

# Our Key Activities

In 2025–26, the National Commission will undertake a range of key activities that reflect our emerging role and lay the groundwork for long-term impact.

1

**Amplifying the voices,**  
aspirations and strengths  
of Aboriginal and Torres Strait  
Islander children and  
young people

2

**Providing advice to government**  
that reflects the voices  
of Aboriginal and  
Torres Strait Islander  
children and young people

3

**Enhancing national coordination**  
on matters related to Aboriginal  
and Torres Strait Islander children  
and young people



## **Amplifying the voices, aspirations and strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people**

### **Engagement and collaboration with children and young people**

The National Commission recognises that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people have unique knowledge, lived experiences and aspirations that must shape the systems, services and supports intended for them.

Across this reporting period, we will prioritise meaningful, safe, and empowering engagement with children and young people to elevate their voices and leadership in national policy conversations and reforms. This reflects our commitment to truth-telling, healing, and structural transformation guided by self-determination.

The National Commission will undertake engagement activities to build trust, connect with existing youth-led initiatives, and create pathways for sustained and meaningful participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in matters that affect them. This phase is crucial to ensure that our engagement is grounded in deep listening, collaboration, and accountability in the ways that we amplify young voices, present advice to government, and keep children and young people informed of the action that government will take in response.

### **Youth engagement model**

Alongside ongoing engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, the National Commission is committed to supporting the development of a national youth engagement model that centres the voices, aspirations, and leadership of First Nations children and young people. We envisage a platform that creates space for agency, leadership, truth-telling, and driving solutions. It will empower young people to be directly involved in the translation of their knowledge and perspectives into policy positions, priorities, projects, and strategic plans.

We recognise and respect that First Nations children and young people are already engaged through existing mechanisms at the local, regional, state, national, and international levels. These include youth councils, advisory groups, peer networks, and youth-led initiatives, many of which are well-established and embedded within communities, Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), and youth peak bodies. We will commit to building strong relationships with existing models and explore opportunities to amplify these platforms.

The youth engagement model will be:

- Youth-led and co-designed in partnership with First Nations young people
- Culturally safe and strengths-based
- Sustainable and embedded in the operations of the National Commission
- Trauma-informed and healing-centred.

This approach honours the rights of children and young people to participate in ways that reflect their diversity and strengths – as powerful storytellers, leaders, researchers, partners, and knowledge holders.

## Enquiries

The National Commission receives enquiries by email, webform, and mail. Strong principles, processes, and procedures are in place to ensure that all enquiries are managed in a fair, consistent, and timely manner. Each response is guided by respect, empathy, and a commitment to creating a safe and supportive environment for those reaching out.

We take deliberate steps to minimise harm by acknowledging the emotional weight that these enquiries may carry and by ensuring that staff are equipped to respond appropriately and with care. This includes clear protocols for triaging and directing individuals in distress to appropriate support services and ensuring that all communication upholds the dignity and privacy of those who contact us.

## Providing advice to government

One of the core functions of the National Commission is to provide advice to government to drive reform and inform the development of policy, legislation, and systems that are responsive to the rights, needs, and voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

We do this through direct avenues – such as making submissions and reporting, appearing at inquiries, or meeting with elected representatives – and more broadly, through work to align and mobilise stakeholders, target efforts and build momentum, respond to emerging opportunities, exert influence, shape national conversations, and help chart a course for systemic change.

Over the coming period, we will work with children, young people, their communities, and other key stakeholders to inform our advice and how we provide it. This includes supporting children and young people to drive the narrative on issues that affect them. Their guidance will help the National Commission, key stakeholders, and governments understand the issues and their root causes, the context and environmental influences, how well current approaches align with evidence, what values and assumptions underpin the stories we tell about young people, and what needs to change.

Insights and expertise from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people will also inform our deeper thinking on national policy issues, as we consider rights- and evidence-based principles, approaches, and policy positions. These positions will provide government with recommendations on important policy issues, while road mapping and theory of change work will apply substantiated causal logic to set out clear steps for achieving real and lasting change.

Stakeholder and systems mapping will allow us to identify where and how the National Commission should focus its efforts in order to overcome barriers to change and act on opportunities to drive reform, as well as how we will work with key stakeholders to enhance coordination. The National Commission will also lead the development of a shared communications strategy to allow children's commissioners, guardians, and advocates across the country to align and coordinate advocacy and advice to government on cross-jurisdictional issues.

## **Enhancing national coordination on matters related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people**

The National Commission is building strong relationships with the Australian and New Zealand Children's Commissioners, Guardians, and Advocates (ANZCCGA) across areas including leadership, policy, communications, engagement, and strategy. We will complement the strong existing work of these jurisdictional stakeholders and collaborate with them to identify collective priorities for enhancing national coordination.

The National Commission also acknowledges and supports the leadership of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, including the work of ACCOs, peak bodies, Elders, and youth leaders who have long been at the forefront of advocacy, service delivery, and community development.

These relationships help us to understand how systemic issues manifest across the country and what work is already underway to drive better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

While several national frameworks and intergovernmental forums have been created to focus on these issues, the implementation of coordinated action still varies across jurisdictions and sectors, agreements do not always incentivise collaboration, and accountability and decision making is not always shared effectually.

The National Commission will play a role in supporting frameworks and systems to work in the best interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. In considering the landscape, we will identify where we can best add value, strengthen shared responsibility and cross-sector collaboration, exert influence, and achieve results. This includes developing strategies for action and communication that promote and progress rights-based systems-transformation and youth-led initiatives.

Through these efforts, the National Commission aims to contribute to a national landscape that is responsive, coordinated, and accountable to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and their communities.

## Children and Young People's Rights

The rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people form the basis of the National Commission's work, and we approach our key activities in alignment with these rights.

Australia's obligation to uphold the rights of First Nations children and young people is detailed in the international human rights instruments that Australia has ratified and endorsed, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The rights set out in these international instruments include children's right to:

- Express their views in all matters affecting them
- Have their views taken seriously
- Not be discriminated against
- Be safe from violence and harm
- Receive culturally appropriate care
- Have their best interests prioritised and their identity respected
- Be connected to family, community, culture and country
- And more.

As part of the National Commission's purpose to protect and promote the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, we engage with international processes and mechanisms to:

- **Amplify voices:** Support children and young people to understand and engage with their rights
- **Provide advice to government:** Inform expert international advice and promote a national focus on rights
- **Enhance national coordination:** Enhance coordination between civil society and government and promote a nationally consistent approach to rights.

# Operating Context

## Environment

The National Commission operates in an environment marked by open, public acknowledgement that our systems are failing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, as well as persistent challenges and barriers to changing those systems. Piecemeal reforms and limited actualisation of shared decision-making have fallen far short of upholding the right to self-determination and reaching the objectives of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. The Productivity Commission's 2024 review of the National Agreement showed that, without fundamental change, it will fail.<sup>1</sup>

The establishment of the National Commission follows calls for greater systemic accountability and dedicated voices for children's rights. While evidence is widely available, community-led solutions are readily achievable, and governments express bipartisan support for Closing the Gap, the implementation of commitments often falls short without accountability and a strong foundation in human rights. Jurisdictional differences also affect the visibility and accountability of systemic issues.

A dedicated, unified, rights-based approach to accountability will present opportunities for shared learning, coordinated action, and the comprehensive systems transformation required to Close the Gap and facilitate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people's full enjoyment of their rights.

## Diversity and strength

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people make up over half of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population,<sup>2</sup> and they are diverse – representing hundreds of distinct Nations, languages, and cultures across the continent. Each community has unique ways of being that shape the identities and worldviews of their children – whether they grow up in urban, regional, or remote areas. Strong cultural identity and connection to community are powerful protective factors for children and young people. Work at a national level must recognise and respect this diversity and the vital role that culture and community play in supporting children and young people to thrive.

Similarly, intersections with factors such as disability, gender identity, sexuality, and socio-economic status mean that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people grow up with a diverse range of experiences, strengths, and challenges. Communities require flexibility in tailoring and implementing initiatives that reflect the unique priorities and needs of their children and young people.

Our work will honour and accommodate this diversity, including creating space and opportunities for children and young people with different types of lived experience, expertise, and perspectives to be heard and to have their views taken seriously.

## National initiatives

Several national initiatives occupy adjacent or intersecting policy spaces with the National Commission and affect the environment in which we operate. These initiatives focus on collaboration and shared decision-making between governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experts, organisations, and leaders. The National Commission will look for opportunities to engage with these initiatives and their work to strengthen accountability and outcomes.

### National Agreement on Closing the Gap

The National Agreement on Closing the Gap commits all Australian governments to working to eliminate systemic inequalities affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. However, inconsistent actions, attitudes, and approaches across jurisdictions creates a dynamic, complex, and changing environment at a national level. The work of the National Commission is closely tied to outcomes 11 and 12 – which focus on reducing the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in youth detention and out-of-home care – and more broadly to the priority reforms, which are essential to reaching all outcomes under the National Agreement.

### Safe and Supported

Safe and Supported: the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021–2031 (Safe and Supported) is a ten-year blueprint for ensuring Australia's vulnerable children have the right frameworks, systems, and supports to thrive. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan 2023–26 focuses on achieving safety and wellbeing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, including establishing advocacy and accountability roles, like the National Commission, in all jurisdictions.<sup>3</sup>

### Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership

The Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership (ECCDPP) supports shared decision-making between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders and Australian governments. It identifies reforms to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and opportunities to work across government and non-government sectors. The establishment of a fully empowered and legislated National Commission is a ECCDPP priority,<sup>4</sup> and the two bodies will share some stakeholders, policy landscapes, and objectives.

### Justice Policy Partnership

The Justice Policy Partnership focuses on a national approach to Closing the Gap Outcomes 10 and 11, which aim to address the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults, children, and young people in the criminal justice system. While the Partnership has value as a forum for discussion, the Productivity Commission's 2024 review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap found that structural reform is required to provide it with the ability to coordinate government actions and enhance accountability.<sup>5</sup>

## Human rights

International human rights experts regularly express concerns regarding persistent and systemic human rights issues facing First Nations children and young people in Australia – particularly in youth justice and child protection. As part of the National Commission's role in promoting a national focus on children's rights, we will engage with international mechanisms and support the application of international instruments, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

### **Convention on the Rights of the Child**

Australia has ratified the CRC and is legally obliged to abide by it. However, we do not currently have a national Human Rights Act or Child Rights Act through which to comprehensively incorporate the CRC into domestic law. The Australian Government submits periodic reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child on how it is implementing the CRC. The Committee considers supplementary information from human rights institutions and non-government organisations, conducts a constructive dialogue with government representatives, and makes concluding observations and recommendations for improvement.

The Committee also provides authoritative guidance on how to interpret and implement the CRC through the publication of General Comments addressing emerging issues and incorporating new evidence. For example, General Comment No. 24 (2019) on children's rights in the child justice system considers improved knowledge of child development and youth justice responses to guide States towards a holistic implementation of effective child justice approaches that promote and protect children's rights.

### **Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples**

UNDRIP sets out the individual and collective rights of First Nations peoples around the world. It affirms their right to self-determination, to maintain and strengthen their institutions, cultures, traditions, and to participate fully in decisions that affect them. It recognises the rights of First Nations children to be raised in their own cultures and communities, and to access education, health, and social systems that reflect and respect their identity.

Australia endorsed UNDRIP in 2009 but has not yet incorporated it into domestic law. Nevertheless, it provides a crucial framework to inform Australia's efforts towards Closing the Gap and reconciliation.



## Public sentiment and youth justice reform

Public sentiment towards youth justice in Australia is complex, with tension between perceived community expectations and a growing awareness of the profound harms of child incarceration. Often, upholding children's rights can be mistakenly perceived as a barrier to reducing crime – rather than the key to it.

In recent years, media investigations, inquiries, and grassroots campaigns have drawn public attention to systemic injustices and human rights abuses in the youth justice system. More people are aware of alternative approaches, like raising the age of criminal responsibility, expanding diversionary programs, investing in community-based early intervention, and justice reinvestment – where resources are redirected from the criminal justice system towards services and supports that address the social determinants of crime, such as housing, health and mental healthcare, education, and family support.<sup>6</sup>

At the same time, political discourse, media coverage, and social media have fuelled public anxiety about youth crime. Sensationalist coverage can contribute to the perception that youth crime is 'spiralling out of control', while government responses are framed as either 'tough' or 'soft'. These narratives can contribute to a rise in 'tough-on-crime' initiatives, such as increased policing, harsher sentencing, and presumption against bail, which are often framed as necessary responses to community concern.

While these measures may garner outspoken support from some sections of the media and the public, they are often neither supported by evidence nor compatible with human rights. These initiatives can instead serve to further reinforce punitive attitudes and carceral approaches that entrench cycles of abuse, trauma, and recidivism.

Not only do these narratives and responses compound the harm caused by systemic racism and intergenerational trauma, but they also serve to normalise it – suggesting that children's inviolable rights are subordinate to perceived community expectations and the public's sense of safety. The ineffectiveness of these reforms can lead governments to fall into cycles of escalating promises to be 'tougher' on crime, as well as fuelling a desire to take personal action among frustrated and fearful members of the public.

Tragic and senseless deaths in custody, in out-of-home care, and in racialised attacks have laid bare the consequences of systems, narratives, and attitudes that dehumanise and villainise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. Three decades on from the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, these devastating, avoidable incidents underscore the urgency with which we must shift public sentiment and foster a national focus on children's rights to deliver independent oversight and effective, evidence-based policy and legislative action that delivers real self-determination and community control.

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are already courageously speaking out and working to transform the narratives and systems that affect their lives. It is vitally important that the National Commission provide support and protection for young voices on this issue, given the prevalence of racism in both traditional media and social media, as well as public, interpersonal, and physical aggression, bullying, and violence that has escalated since the 2023 Voice referendum.<sup>7</sup>



## Technology, media and digital safety

Technology and digital media are embedded in the everyday lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. Digital tools offer new ways to connect with peers, explore identity, access learning, and express creativity.

However, digital environments also present significant risks. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people are disproportionately affected by online harms, including cyberbullying, racial abuse, algorithmic bias, data surveillance, and the spread of harmful stereotypes and misinformation through mainstream and social media.<sup>8</sup> Regulatory and policy frameworks continue to lag behind technological shifts.

The National Commission will work collaboratively with key stakeholders, such as the Office of the eSafety Commissioner, to influence the development and implementation of online safety initiatives that are responsive to the experiences and needs of First Nations children and young people.

## Capability

The National Commission comprises a small team working across policy, governance, engagement, and communications through three broad streams:

- Operations, Government Relations, Compliance, and Reporting
  - supports functions such as risk management, fraud control, and governance frameworks and ensures our compliance with our legislative obligations
  - manages enquiries and associated frameworks, protocols, and operating procedures
  - works with the Department of Social Services through a shared services agreement to provide corporate services to the National Commission, and with the department's Audit and Risk Committee for advice on our reporting, risk management, and internal controls.
- Collaboration and Engagement
  - facilitates engagement and collaboration with children and young people, and their families, and key stakeholders that is culturally safe, trauma informed, rights based, accessible, inclusive, and accountable
  - undertakes consultation on the roles, powers and functions required to fulfil the National Commission's purpose, which will inform primary legislation
  - collaborates with young people to support the co-design and establishment of a youth engagement mechanism to lead engagement initiatives, provide advice and insights, and engage with strategic policy activities to inform the National Commission's work on issues that matter to them.
- Strategic Analysis and Policy, Rights, and Communications
  - conducts strategic analysis, anticipates change, identifies risks and opportunities, shapes the National Commission's priorities, and ensures our work is rights-based, evidence-informed, and aligned with the perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people
  - drives and shifts national conversations, builds rights literacy, influences policy, provides advice to government, and enhances cross-jurisdictional alignment and coordination.

## Outcome Statement

As documented in our Portfolio Budget Statement for the Social Services portfolio, we are responsible for the outcome:

**Amplifying the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, by providing strategic, independent and impartial advice about policy, reforms and services, and promoting and enhancing coordination on matters related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.**

## Functions

The National Commission's current functions are set out in the Order to Establish the National Commission for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People as an Executive Agency:<sup>9</sup>

- promote and protect the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people through strategic policy advice and reports to government on matters affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, and their families
- provide advice to Government on and inform the implementation of key policy frameworks which seek to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people and their families
- promote and enhance coordination across Commonwealth and state and territory governments, commissioners, guardians and advocates and non-government organisations on matters related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people
- undertake consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people and their families, relevant Commonwealth and state and territory governments, commissioners, guardians and advocates and non-government organisations
- ensure the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people and their families are reflected in advice to government.

The establishment of the National Commission under the executive order with the functions outlined above is an important first step in the realisation of an ongoing, fully legislated and empowered National Commission.

## Primary Legislation

The Department of Social Services will lead the development of primary legislation that will establish the National Commission as a statutory body that reports to Parliament and articulate our mandate, powers, functions, and responsibilities. This is the second phase of our establishment, which will deliver the independence and authority needed to drive systemic, transformational, and sustainable change.

We will work with the Department of Social Services to inform and support the development of legislation and ensure that it meets the requirements identified by key stakeholders.

## Risk

The National Commission is committed to fostering a workplace environment where staff at all levels are supported to identify and raise risks early, propose solutions, and exercise sound judgement.

Our Risk Management Framework outlines the methodology and processes for identifying, assessing, monitoring, and treating risks across all aspects of our operations. Our approach integrates risk consideration into strategic and operational planning, policy development, engagement activities, and organisational capability.

We are supported by an Audit and Risk Committee, which works independently to ensure the appropriateness of the National Commission's financial and performance reporting, system of risk oversight and management, and system of internal controls.

### Our strategic risks

The National Commission has identified six risks to its strategic objectives. These risks and associated mitigations are outlined below.

Risk	Mitigations
The National Commission does not fulfil its functions as outlined in the Executive Order	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Integrate the National Commission's functions into its work plan, performance indicators, and workforce development</li><li>• Develop and maintain effective working relationships with enabling areas and key stakeholders</li></ul>
The National Commission is unable to achieve outcomes associated with enhancing cross-jurisdictional coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Develop shared strategies to build the collective impact of commissioners, guardians, and advocates</li><li>• Develop trusting, two-way relationships with communities, organisations, and youth bodies</li></ul>
The National Commission's integrity is compromised	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Adopt and implement integrity processes that meet the requirements of the National Anti-Corruption Commission</li><li>• Educate staff on their responsibilities for maintaining integrity through the delivery of mandatory training on APS values, code of conduct, fraud awareness and corruption, employment principles and expectations.</li></ul>
The National Commission is unable to recruit and retain the workforce capability it requires	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Promote staff learning and development through individual performance management processes</li><li>• Adopt government work health and safety policies</li><li>• Utilise APS seconded staff where skills cannot be directly engaged</li></ul>
The National Commission does not comply with child safety requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Maintain a child safety framework aligned with mandatory reporting and child protection requirements</li><li>• Screen for safety and suitability checks during recruitment and engagement processes and deliver ongoing training</li></ul>
The National Commission is unable to maintain, protect and use its data effectively	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Manage data through procedures that comply with relevant legislation and requirements, including the Privacy Act and Australian Government data handling standards</li><li>• Promote staff awareness and learning on importance of securing and managing data and information</li></ul>

## Cooperation and collaboration

The National Commission's work includes connecting with a large network of stakeholders to collaborate on advancing the rights, interests, and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, including:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, families, and communities
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders, community leaders, and advocates
- Commonwealth and state and territory governments, elected representatives, and agencies
- National and jurisdictional partnerships, working groups, committees, and forums
- Commonwealth and state and territory commissioners, guardians, and advocates
- Peak bodies, ACCOs, and frontline services
- National and international human rights bodies and research institutes.

Our key activities detail how working with these stakeholders to enhance coordination will contribute to the development of a connected, responsive, and rights-based national focus on issues affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

## Key supporters

We recognise the longstanding advocacy of First Nations Elders, leaders and organisations – including the instrumental role of SNAICC<sup>10</sup> and the Safe and Supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership Group<sup>11</sup> – in championing the establishment of the National Commission. Strong, ongoing collaboration with these stakeholders will form a critical part of our efforts to strengthen systemic accountability to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

### **Australian and New Zealand Children's Commissioners, Guardians and Advocates**

The National Commission is a member of the ANZCCGA group, which comprises national, state, and territory children's commissioners, guardians, and advocates. ANZCCGA promotes and protects the rights, interests, and wellbeing of children and young people in Australia and New Zealand through information sharing and collective advocacy on shared priorities.

### **Department of Social Services**

The Department of Social Services delivers corporate services and systems to the National Commission under a shared services agreement. This includes office accommodation, human resources, financial services, IT systems and services, security, and information management. The agreement is reviewed every two years.

# Performance

## Performance Measures and Indicators of Success

During this reporting period, we continue to focus on outputs that reflect the establishment of our operations, including building and strengthening our foundational systems and governance structures. This includes embedding our ways of working, operationalising our shared services arrangements, and ensuring that our internal capability is aligned with our strategic intent.

The National Commission's success indicators for 2026–27 and beyond are currently under consideration.

Activity	Performance Measure	2025–26 Indicators of Success
<b>Key Activity 1</b> Amplify the voices, aspirations and strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish co-designed youth mechanism</li> <li>Amplify voices from existing initiatives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Co-design youth mechanism</li> <li>At least one partnership has been established with youth initiatives in each jurisdiction</li> <li>Sustained engagement with young people through identified opportunities</li> <li>Establish strategy sessions to involve young people in the translation of knowledge and shape the National Commission's priorities</li> </ul>
<b>Key Activity 2</b> Provide advice to government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Progress development of a strategic plan</li> <li>Generate buy-in</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop theory of change</li> <li>Partnership plan endorsed by key stakeholders</li> </ul>
<b>Key Activity 3</b> Enhance national coordination on matters related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lead development of ANZCCGA communications strategy</li> <li>Collaborate on submissions, statements, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Collaboration protocol agreed</li> <li>Style guide agreed</li> <li>Standard words agreed</li> <li>Publish submissions, joint statements, and other collaborative products</li> </ul>

# Endnotes

- 1 Australian Government Productivity Commission (2024), *Review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap: Study Report*. Available at: <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/closing-the-gap-review/report>
- 2 Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2022, July 1). *Australia: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population summary*. Available at: <https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/australia-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-population-summary>
- 3 Commonwealth of Australia (2022), *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan 2023-2026*. Available at: [https://www.dss.gov.au/system/files/resources/final\\_aboriginal\\_and\\_torres\\_strait\\_islander\\_first\\_action\\_plan.pdf](https://www.dss.gov.au/system/files/resources/final_aboriginal_and_torres_strait_islander_first_action_plan.pdf)
- 4 Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership (2023), *Annual Report 2023*. Available at: <https://www.snaicc.org.au/resources/early-childhood-care-and-development-policy-partnership-annual-report-2023/>
- 5 Australian Government Productivity Commission (2024), *Review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap: Study Report: Supporting Paper*. Available at: <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/closing-the-gap-review/report>
- 6 UPR NGO Coordinating Committee (2020), *Australia's 3rd Universal Periodic Review: Joint NGO Submission on behalf of the Australian NGO Coalition*. Available at: [UPR-Australian-NGO-Coalition-Submission-domestic-publication-version-july-2020-new.pdf](https://www.upr.org.au/sites/default/files/2020-05/rr09_justice_reinvestment_in_australia_160518_0.pdf); Australian Government Australian Institute of Criminology (2018). *Justice reinvestment in Australia: A review of the literature*. Available at: [https://www.aic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-05/rr09\\_justice\\_reinvestment\\_in\\_australia\\_160518\\_0.pdf](https://www.aic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-05/rr09_justice_reinvestment_in_australia_160518_0.pdf)
- 7 Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research, University of Technology Sydney (2025), *'If you don't think racism exists come take a walk with us'. The Call It Out Racism Register 2023-2024*. Available at: <https://callitout.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Jumbunna-Call-It-Out-Annual-Report-2023-2024-Final.pdf>
- 8 Australian Government eSafety Commissioner (2022), *Cool, beautiful, strange and scary: The online experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their parents and caregivers*. Available at: [https://www.esafety.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-03/Cool\\_beautiful\\_strange\\_and\\_scary\\_report.pdf?v=1753770790785](https://www.esafety.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-03/Cool_beautiful_strange_and_scary_report.pdf?v=1753770790785)
- 9 Australian Government (2025), *Order to Establish the National Commission for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People as an Executive Agency*. Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.au/C2024G00584/asmade/text>
- 10 SNAICC is a national peak body organisation that advocates for and represents Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. More information available at: <https://www.snaicc.org.au/>
- 11 The Safe and Supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership Group engages in shared decision-making with governments implementing Safe and Supported. More information available at: <https://www.dss.gov.au/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-leadership-group>
- 12 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) (2024), *Health of Children*. Available at: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/children-youth/health-of-children>
- 13 AIHW (2021), *Australia's Youth*. Available at: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/children-youth/australias-youth/contents/introduction>

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