

COMMUNIQUÉ

24 February 2026

The Northern Territory Children and Families Tripartite Forum held its 28th meeting in Mparntwe (Alice Springs) on 24 February 2026. The previously scheduled 27th meeting, planned for 22 November 2025 in Darwin, was cancelled due to Tropical Cyclone Fina impacting the Top End.

The Forum was chaired by Mr Rob McPhee and attended by members and observers from Northern Territory and Australian Governments, Northern Territory Council of Social Service (NTCOSS), North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency (NAAJA), and Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory (APO NT). A Welcome to Arrernte Country was provided by Auntie Rosalie (Kumalie) Riley, reaffirming the Forum's commitment to the children and families of the Northern Territory.

Members undertook a Deep Dive into Closing the Gap Target 3 (Children are engaged in high quality, culturally appropriate early childhood education in their early years) and Target 5 (Students achieve their full learning potential). The Forum noted significant increase in Aboriginal employment within schools across the Northern Territory, recognising this as an important structural shift strengthening cultural capability, student engagement, and community connection.

Members discussed further required actions to improve early years participation and school attendance, emphasising consistent engagement in the early years is foundational to long-term educational and social outcomes. The Forum reaffirmed the critical role of culturally responsive education systems and the importance of "getting it right" early to improve long-term attainment.

Members reiterated their commitment to strengthening and integrating early childhood services, particularly in remote communities. Members agreed that improved alignment between early learning, family support, health and child development services is essential to achieving sustainable progress.

Discussions also focused on opportunities to reform funding approaches to better balanced access and quality. Members reflected on the importance of ensuring that expanded access is matched by quality educational settings, stable and culturally capable workforces, and integrated service delivery models that span prevention, early intervention and crisis response.

Members acknowledged small but significant improvements in Year 12 attainment across the Territory. While attainment rates remain an ongoing priority, members recognised these gains as evidence that sustained investment and partnership are delivering incremental progress. Continued focus will be placed on strengthening transition pathways and improving retention through secondary schooling.

Members reiterated that progress under Closing the Gap requires coordinated effort, culturally informed policy design, and strong partnerships between governments and Aboriginal leadership. The Forum will continue to use its governance role to drive reform, improve integration and ensure that investment decisions are aligned with long-term outcomes for Aboriginal children and families.

Members reaffirmed their commitment to progressing a forward work plan that will directly contribute to the Closing the Gap: NT Implementation Plan 3 (IP3) and strengthen the Forum's formal functions. Members emphasised the importance of clearly articulating the Forum's purpose and priorities, including the strategic actions required to align its work with the broader efforts of the Generational Strategy and Closing the Gap measures under Safe and Supported Framework.

The next meeting is scheduled for **25 May 2026**.