

COMMUNIQUÉ

22 August 2025

The Northern Territory Children and Families Tripartite Forum met in Mparntwe (Alice Springs) on 22 August 2025 for its 26th meeting.

The Forum was chaired by Mr Rob McPhee and attended by members and observers from the 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 Aunty Rosalie (Kumalie) Riley.

Members conducted a follow up discussion on their June 2025 Deep Dive on Closing the Gap Target 4 – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children thrive in their early years – which included recognition of the:

- uplift and maturity required of local datasets such as ASQ-TRAK and ASQ-STEPS to support real-time monitoring and local evidence bases related to this target; and
- the need for immediate action to improve the early years service system.

Tripartite members agreed their priority for Target 4 – to better leverage diverse Northern Territory and Commonwealth funding streams to support integrated early years services in remote communities.

Members conducted a Deep Dive on Closing the Gap Target 12 – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are not overrepresented in the child protection system – which included consideration of longitudinal data on Northern Territory children in out-of-home care. While members acknowledged the positive overall reduction of children in care, further investigation is required to determine whether this reduction reflects a genuine decline in children experiencing harm or changed policy and practice settings.

Members will host a follow up policy discussion on Target 12 at the November 2025 meeting to consider the Tripartite Forum's priorities for this target.

Noting the current review of the Northern Territory *Care and Protection of Children Act*, community sector members emphasised their desire to be consulted on proposed amendments given Tripartite Forum holds responsibility for Target 12, is the principal source of advice to government on children and families and can bring vital knowledge and diversity to the review.

Members thanked the Assistant Children's Commissioner for presenting to the Forum and sharing insights from young people with lived experience. The Assistant Commissioner emphasised that the key challenge for vulnerable families in the Northern Territory lies not in the absence of evidence-informed strategies, but in the consistent and coordinated effort required for their implementation.

While Tripartite Forum awaits direction from the Northern Territory Executive Council on Aboriginal Affairs regarding the lead policy partnership for Target 13 – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and households are safe – members continue to keep domestic family violence on their agenda. At the August meeting this included an update from the Department of Social Services (DSS) on national strategies, federally funded, country-wide initiatives and federally funded NT programs. Members raised the importance of understanding the rates at which Aboriginal Territorians access national services and the process used by DSS to allocate funding and evaluate the impact of directly funded, NT based programs.

Across Tripartite's responsible Closing the Gap targets, members reflected on whether the service system has become overly complex, and on opportunities to improve access, efficiency, and quality. Members also discussed the potential benefits of services that span prevention, targeted intervention, and crisis responses, compared with narrow programmatic approaches.

The newly released Northern Territory Crime Reduction Strategy was tabled, with initial discussion on Priority 3 – parental accountability. Northern Territory Government members will provide additional detail on the strategic initiatives and how they interrelate at the next meeting.

Members considered the future of the Generational Strategy, acknowledging it as a foundational initiative that reflected significant community input and set a shared vision for the Northern Territory Government, the Commonwealth, and the community sector. Members recognised that the strategy's influence is evident in policy and partnership approaches now embedded at Territory and national levels.

Given this evolved policy landscape, members agreed the Generational Strategy's outcomes can be pursued through key Northern Territory and national strategies and that the Generational Strategy as a standalone program is no longer required.

Tripartite Forum will continue to pursue the objectives of the Generational Strategy through its responsibility for Closing the Gap targets, now articulated as four priority areas for the Forum:

- Early childhood
- Education
- Child protection and out-of-home care
- Domestic and family violence.

Tripartite members expressed their deep gratitude to the members of the Generational Strategy Steering Group, who have been advised of their dissolution, and to the Aboriginal community for their expertise, commitment, and leadership of the Generational Strategy. This leadership and insight, captured in the Generational Strategy, will continue to guide reforms that better support Aboriginal children and families.

The next meeting is scheduled for **November 2025**.