



Victorian Aboriginal
Children & Young
People's Alliance

Removal of Activity Test for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Children in Early Childhood Education

The Victorian Aboriginal Children and Young People's Alliance welcomes the Federal Government's commitment to remove the childcare subsidy Activity Test and to provide 3 days of subsidised childcare per week for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. This change will increase access to early childhood education and care, improving outcomes and opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Karen Heap, Chair of The Alliance, said, "Research shows that children who access quality ECEC for 30 hours per week experience significant developmental benefits. The Government's announcement of 100 hours of subsidised care minimises a key barrier and opens new opportunities for Aboriginal children to flourish."

Removing the Activity Test is an important step in ensuring Aboriginal children have access to early wrap-around services, particularly through Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations that provide culturally safe and relevant services. Jason Kanoa, CEO of The Alliance, stated, "This reform benefits children and has broader community advantages. Early intervention in ECEC for vulnerable children is linked to reduced youth crime and better social outcomes."

The Alliance highlights the importance of investing in early childhood education to build stronger, healthier communities for future generations. "Supporting children today is an investment in the future," Mr Kanoa added. According to the Australian Early Development Census, 42.3% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are considered developmentally vulnerable by school entry.

Access to Early Childhood Education and Care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in regional and remote areas is severely limited. Many of Victoria's regional areas are childcare deserts, with more children than available spaces—specifically, more than three children per spot or fewer than 0.333 spaces per child under four. Among the Alliance's 15 members, three are in childcare deserts, and six others provide services in such areas. "While removing the activity test is a step forward, it won't address the issues of service availability, long waiting lists, or structural barriers that prevent families from accessing quality care through their local ACCOs," said Kanoa.

The 2023 Work and Play study by the Productivity Commission and ACCC found that 58% of Aboriginal families had to adjust their work schedules due to a lack of accessible or affordable childcare, with 39% in regional and remote areas facing cost challenges. "To address this inequity, the Government needs to proportionately resource ACCOs to meet growing community demand," Heap stressed. "The government must invest in local expertise, infrastructure, workforce funding, sector wage parity, and dedicated professional development to help ACCOs manage rising costs and cultural responsibilities."

Creating Pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Educators

The Alliance also calls for the Victorian Government to collaborate with ACCOs to create pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to gain Early Childhood Education qualifications. To meet the demand for services, the workforce must expand proportionally, which means investing in training and support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to enter the ECEC sector and ensuring that the workforce reflects the communities it serves.