SNAICC
National Voice for our Children

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Support

Design Report

September 2024

Contents

Acknowledgements 4

Introduction 5

Recommendations 6

Recommendation 1: 6

Recommendation 2 6

Recommendation 3: 6

Recommendation 4: 7

Recommendation 5 7

Recommendation 6: 7

Recommendation 7: 7

Recommendation 8: 7

Recommendation 9: 7

Why do we need a National Centre for Excellence? 8

The need for a coordinated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led research agenda in relation to children, young people and families 8

The need to resource and undertake more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led research 8

The need for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led knowledge translation 9

The need to support, nurture and grow the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led research workforce, and value the contributions of ACCOs and their staff to research 9

The need to put Indigenous Data Sovereignty into practice 9

The need to support the role of ACCOs in delivering evidence-based supports to their communities . 10

Design summary 11

Principles and values 11

Purpose and priorities 11

Lead Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pedagogy, wisdom and knowledge 11

Reassert Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, being and doing 11

Support existing expertise and grow the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research network 11

Strengthen organisational capacity and support community-led research 12

Serve as a national platform to drive transformation of systems and services 12

Functions 12

Shaping the national research agenda in relation to children, young people and families 12

Research and knowledge creation 13

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data development, management, and sovereignty 13
Infrastructure/ software requirements: 14
Policy / protocol requirements: 14
Commissioning and administration of research grants 15
Knowledge translation and dissemination 16
Advocacy and advice 16
Supporting and growing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research workforce and the participation of ACCOs in research and evidence building 17
Facilitate sharing and showcasing of learnings and best practice 18
Monitoring and evaluating key strategies that impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families 18
Governance 19
Organisational governance through a host organisation 20
Leveraging existing partnerships and relationships 20
Alignment with the Centre's purpose scope, functions, roles and responsibilities 21
Experience working with governments and key governance structures to improve outcomes for children and families 21
A commitment to community-led and culturally centred research to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities 22
Additional requirements 22
Other options considered 22
Standalone model 22
Academic partnership model 23
Tailored governance arrangements 23
Centre Advisory Council 24
Cross-Disciplinary Expert Community of Practice 25
Indigenous Data Sovereignty Knowledge Holders 26
Collaborative Panel 27
Community Advisors 27
Jurisdictional centres, networks and institutes 28
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data governance 28
Operating model 30
Physical hub 30

Virtual spokes 30
Centre staffing model 31
Additional operational and logistical considerations 33
Distinction between national and jurisdictional functions, roles and responsibilities 34
Policies and procedures 34
Resourcing 34
Operating Costs 35
Establishment – process and next steps 36
Phase 37
Operational and logistical steps 37
Appendix A – Governance Structure 38
Appendix B – Staffing Model 38
Appendix C – Expenses Summary 40
Appendix D – Non-research activity model 41

Acknowledgements

SNAICC shows respect by acknowledging the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and their continuing connections to land, waters and communities. SNAICC's head office is located on the lands of the Wurundjeri People of the Kulin Nation, and SNAICC operates nationally.

SNAICC acknowledges Traditional Owners of all lands and waters across this continent and pays respects to Elders past and present. We acknowledge and respect their continued connection to Country, care for community and practice of culture for generations uncounted.

SNAICC would also like to acknowledge the contributions of the Expert Advisory Group who have played a key role in the design of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Centre for Excellence in Child and Family. This group consists of academics and research institutes, representatives from child and family peak bodies, leading Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) and service providers. SNAICC extends its acknowledgement and gratitude to the following people their participation on the Expert Advisory Group and contribution to the design of Centre:

- Professor Leah Bromfield – Australian Centre for Child Protection, University of South Australia
- Professor Cath Chamberlain – Onemda: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health and Wellbeing, Melbourne School of Population and Global Health, Melbourne University
- Sally Cowling – NSW Child, Family and Community Peak Aboriginal Corporation (AbSec)
- Shantai Croisdale – Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA)
- Associate Professor Paul Gray – Indigenous Child Protection Hub, Jumbunna Institute of Indigenous Education and Research, University of Technology Sydney
- Professor Daryl Higgins – Institute for Child Protection, Australian Catholic University
- Professor Raymond Lovett – Yardhura Walani Centre for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Wellbeing Research, National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health, Australian National University
- Garth Morgan – Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak (QATSICPP)

Introduction

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Support (the Centre) will be an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led body to support evidence-based and outcomes-focused approaches to delivering support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families.

The Centre will contribute to the implementation of Action 3 (Data Sovereignty) in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan 2023–2026 (Action Plan) under *Safe and Supported: The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021–2031* (Safe and Supported). Action 3 aims to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people determine the collection and use of their own data, including leading development of the evidence base that informs child protection and family support systems, policies, programs and services relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.[1]

Research priorities and initiatives relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are often not determined by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. As such, the Centre will actively support research and knowledge translation initiatives identified as priorities by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families, communities and sectors. While the Centre originated from Safe and Supported commitments, its remit will be far broader than child protection, encompassing the holistic needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. As such, the Centre will help to drive priorities for child and family wellbeing across a range of sectors.

The Expert Advisory Group has informed the purpose, principles, and functions of the Centre, alongside the structural and operational elements that will be required to bring them to life. This process has focused on the design of a Centre that is effective to ensure self-determination and prioritise the social determinants of child safety and wellbeing in administering research and programs. The Expert Advisory Group has also considered how the Centre would establish Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data and research infrastructure nationally and jurisdictionally.

In addition to the community-led design process, SNAICC has undertaken a targeted desktop scan reviewing existing models of similar research centres and institutes to further strengthen the evidence base underpinning the design. For example, existing models that were reviewed included (but were not limited to) the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak (QATSICPP) Centre of Excellence, the Balit Durn Durn Centre of Excellence for Aboriginal Social and Emotional Wellbeing, and Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS).

[1] Australian Government (2022), *Safe and Supported* Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan 2023-2026, 30, https://www.dss.gov.au/families-and-children-programs-services-children-protecting-australias-children-safe-and-supported-the-national-framework-for-protecting-australias-children-2021-2031/safe-and-supported-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-first-action-plan-2023-2026

This report summarises the findings from Activity 3d) in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan, which commits to delivering an "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led scoping exercise on how an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Support would operate, and how it would help establish Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data and research infrastructure nationally, including in each jurisdiction". This report will be used to inform the funding approach for the subsequent establishment and ongoing operation of the Centre for Excellence.[2]

Recommendations

The following is a list of recommendations made in this report.

Explanations and justifications for these recommendations are contained in the relevant sections throughout the report:

Recommendation 1: The Centre will be designed to address key gaps identified in this report and transform existing systems by supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determined knowledge creation and dissemination.

Recommendation 2**:** The Centre will serve a core purpose of increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led and owned research to build an evidence base that is centred on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pedagogy, wisdom and knowledge.

Recommendation 3: The Centre will be designed and adequately resourced to provide core functions aligned to its principles, values and purpose, including:

- Shaping an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led national research agenda for children and families
- Undertaking, coordinating and collaborating on research to advance research priorities for children and families
- Developing and implementing Indigenous Data Sovereignty infrastructure, policies and protocols
- Commissioning and administering research grants
- Knowledge translation and dissemination to transform systems and improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
- Elevating the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families to influence decision-making
- Supporting and growing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research workforce and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led and governed research centres, networks and institutions

[2] Ibid, 31.

- Sharing and showcasing learning and best practice in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families
- Monitoring and evaluating key strategies that impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families (requires significant additional and dedicated funding).

Recommendation 4: The Centre's governance will reflect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership, authority, and community control in core organisational governance, through an ACCO host organisation and tailored governance bodies that bring in additional focused expertise, research leadership and community voice to drive and oversee the work of the Centre.

Recommendation 5**:** The host organisation for the Centre will be a national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisation that has the necessary children and families sector experience, relationships and cultural authority to lead and support the operations of the Centre.

Recommendation 6: The Centre's operating model will align to its core purpose and functions, and include:

- A physical hub housing core Centre staff with requisite expertise to perform the Centre's functions and providing a meeting space and focal point for the Centre's governance and operations
- Virtual spokes comprised of research partnerships, online sharing and networks, communities of practice, and collaboration with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led and governed research centres, networks and institutions.

Recommendation 7: Long-term, ongoing funding for the Centre's operations is required to ensure sustainable capacity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge creation and dissemination in the children and families sector.

Recommendation 8: State and Territory Governments should identify and provide resources for the development and operation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led and governed research centres, networks and institutions in each State and Territory, and should resource their collaboration with the National Centre.

Recommendation 9: All decisions relating to the design, development, implementation and evaluation of the Centre will be made in line with the principles of shared decision-making, as agreed in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.[3]

[3] Joint Council on Closing the Gap (2020), *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*, Clause 28-41. https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/sites/default/files/files/national-agreement-ctg.pdf

Why do we need a National Centre for Excellence?

There is a clear need for a National Centre for Excellence to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families and to transform existing systems through self-determined Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge creation. The current research landscape often fails to embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives on child and family wellbeing at the heart of research, perpetuating a cycle of inadequate responses.

The Centre will play a pivotal role in shaping a national research agenda that is grounded in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pedagogy, wisdom, and knowledge, as well as producing and commissioning innovative research initiatives that are designed and led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The need for a coordinated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led research agenda in relation to children, young people and families

The current absence of a centralised mechanism for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to identify child and family wellbeing-related research needs and priorities risks the fragmentation of efforts at both national and jurisdictional levels, reducing their collective benefit. There is a need to provide national connectivity to ensure that jurisdictional initiatives are complementary and achieve maximum impact for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The Centre will serve as a national mechanism to align research initiatives and focus areas, at both national and jurisdictional levels, with the needs and priorities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families. The Centre will serve as a conduit between jurisdictional efforts, community-led research and evidence-building infrastructure, and national efforts, acting as a mechanism for coordinating research at all levels. It will facilitate the sharing of national and global best practices and showcase learnings to foster collaboration and innovation across jurisdictions.

The need to resource and undertake more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led research

There is a significant gap in the amount of, and resources provided for, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led research on what is required to address the needs and priorities of children, young people and families. This gap often sees policymakers and program designers drawing on international and non-Indigenous evidence-based programs, seeking to apply them out of context to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, with the result that they have limited effect or act to the detriment of families and communities. In research that is done by non-Indigenous researchers about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, there are also clear gaps in ethical practice and oversight by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of research ethics.

The reliance upon and use of non-Indigenous research is a colonising process of displacing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and practice. This process limits funding opportunities for communities and organisations that don't conform to Western practice models. In this context, ACCOs that deliver culturally designed and driven programs lack resources and

opportunity to monitor, evaluate and build the evidence base demonstrating how they are driving improved outcomes for families.

The Centre will play a critical role in defining and focusing a national agenda for investment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led research, including playing a key role in advocating and partnering with governments and other funders. This includes better integrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led and governed research and evidence into existing colonial systems.

The need for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led knowledge translation

There remains a significant gap between the creation of knowledge and its translation into practical solutions and policy design and implementation. Bridging this divide is essential for ensuring that research and evidence effectively inform decision-making processes at all levels. It is essential that knowledge translation is led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, applying their unique frameworks, knowledge and perspectives to determine what knowledge is useful and how it applies to solutions. The Centre will bridge the gap between research and practice by supporting jurisdictional efforts and ACCOs, and by disseminating findings and practical insights to inform policy and community decision-making.

The need to support, nurture and grow the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led research workforce, and value the contributions of ACCOs and their staff to research

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers face significant barriers within the current academic system. These can include, but are not limited to, restricted pathways for career advancement; inadequate support systems; a lack of cultural safety; and at times may include institutionalised racism. This inhibits the growth and development of a diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research workforce essential for driving meaningful change. Supporting and strengthening the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research workforce is critical in ensuring community voices are amplified in research about our peoples.

The Centre will provide guidance and support to emerging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers and grow the number of researchers by providing access to research networks and pathways to support training and career development. There is also a role for the Centre to support ACCOs to participate in research, including non-Indigenous research, and to ensure contributions from ACCOs and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff are properly valued. The Centre will increase opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander academics and researchers to thrive and achieve success, and advocate for the value and recognition of their achievements within non-Indigenous processes and systems.

The need to put Indigenous Data Sovereignty into practice

Genuine recognition and implementation of Indigenous Data Sovereignty persists as a gap in the way that research data collection and analysis are undertaken. There is a pressing need to establish data collection and management frameworks nationally that implement and uphold Indigenous Data Sovereignty principles, to protect intellectual property and embed Aboriginal and

Torres Strait Islander cultural intellectual property protocols. The Centre's design and operation will give effect to the principles of Indigenous Data Sovereignty and demonstrate best practice in upholding the sovereignty of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data in the research environment. This includes ensuring consent for the collection, use, acknowledgment and sharing of this knowledge and its benefit for the community.

The need to support the role of ACCOs in delivering evidence-based supports to their communities

ACCOs often lack adequate resources, networking infrastructure, and support to deliver evidence-driven support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, or to capture and describe the evidence of their impact. It is critical that ACCOs have access to the resources they need to help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families thrive, and that the needs of ACCOs are understood and communicated through community-driven advocacy and advice.

In addition to providing the evidence and practical guidance that ACCOs need to deliver innovative supports to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, the Centre will advocate for the needs of ACCOs at the national level.

Recommendation 1: The Centre will be designed to address key gaps identified in this report and transform existing systems by supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determined knowledge creation and dissemination.

Design summary

The following section summarises findings and outcomes developed with the Expert Advisory Group through the design process.

Principles and values

The Centre must reflect, in both its approaches and structure, the principles that are central to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander wellbeing, including self-determination, connection to culture and reciprocity through the authority and obligations of community control.

Developing detailed guiding principles and values to govern the ongoing operation of the Centre will be completed by the Centre's governing bodies when it is established. Embodying the principles will be an obligation not only for the Centre, but also any partner organisations. Following the principles being agreed, the Centre will identify processes for applying them.

Purpose and priorities

The Centre's overarching purpose is to build an evidence base that is centred on reasserting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pedagogy, wisdom and knowledge, and increase research that is led and owned by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

This will include increasing research that is of benefit to communities, enabling a shift in how evidence is directed and governed, showcasing outcomes focused approaches and driving community-led research. Ultimately, this work will seek to drive transformation of the systems and services that impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. To achieve this purpose, the Centre will pursue the following key priorities:

Lead Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pedagogy, wisdom and knowledge

In shaping approaches to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, the Centre will build and disseminate an evidence base that is centred on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pedagogy, wisdom and knowledge. This includes defining child and family wellbeing from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspective, and centering research on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander world views.

Reassert Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, being and doing

The Centre will seek to reassert Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, being and doing, to inform culturally safe approaches to supporting Aboriginal communities. This objective acknowledges the intentional systems which have supported children and families to thrive since before colonisation and seeks to de-colonise mainstream research.

Support existing expertise and grow the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research network

The Centre will work to support, provide networking opportunities for and showcase the existing expertise of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers. The Centre will also seek to grow the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers by providing pathways and opportunities for researchers to develop skills, qualification and experience, and pursue their

research goals, acknowledging the lack of suitable supports and development pathways provided within the current academic environment.

Strengthen organisational capacity and support community-led research

The Centre will support ACCOs to deliver evidence-driven support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, and to engage in research and evaluation that captures the story of their unique, culturally grounded programs and services for children and families. This includes a strong focus on knowledge translation, providing access to resources, demonstrating best practice, and creating a network of researchers that can be accessed by communities for their research priorities.

Serve as a national platform to drive transformation of systems and services

The Centre will uphold and represent the priorities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations, including jurisdictional centres and similar organisations. This includes articulating and advocating for the needs of children, families, and the ACCO sector.

Recommendation 2: The Centre will serve a core purpose of increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led and owned research to build an evidence base that is centred on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pedagogy, wisdom and knowledge.

Functions

The Centre's functions are convergent with its overarching purposes and priorities outlined above. In practice, undertaking these functions will help to operationalise the Centre's purpose and priorities.

Shaping the national research agenda in relation to children, young people and families

The Centre will produce an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led national research agenda, including a suite of research priorities and focus areas based on the identified needs and priorities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, and gaps in the evidence base informed by a review of existing research and evidence. The agenda will also focus on alignment and coordination with planned and existing research being undertaken across various research institutions and jurisdictions.

A national research agenda will provide a framework for the Centre to focus and prioritise its work in building partnerships and collaborations and providing support to researchers to progress aligned research opportunities. It will also provide a platform to promote government and philanthropic investment in the children- and family-focused research priorities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Research and knowledge creation

The Centre will undertake and coordinate research to build an evidence base that informs innovative and effective approaches to supporting the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. It will work to increase research practice that reflects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research standards and methodologies. This will involve initiating and leading research at times, and/or working collaboratively with other centres and research bodies on joint research initiatives.

The Centre will need to manage relationships in a way that ensures research centres community knowledge and reflects self-determination. At its heart, this will mean ensuring that all research it undertakes, supports and collaborates on is led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and driven by community priorities. For example, research partners will be required to embody aligned principles when working in collaboration with the Centre and connected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, organisations and researchers.

The Centre will be highly collaborative and partnership-based in its approach to research and knowledge creation, working to establish partnerships with jurisdictional bodies, academic institutes, ACCOs, peak bodies, communities and individual researchers through informal and formal agreements such as Memoranda of Understanding or sub-contracting arrangements.

These partnerships will provide multiple benefits for community, researchers and the Centre, including building the amount and scope of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led research, improving research coordination and collaboration, and enabling access to key research infrastructure that sits in existing non-Indigenous research institutions. This could include access to existing Commonwealth research grants schemes such as the Australian Research Council, National Health and Medical Research Council, and Medical Research Future Fund grants. Over time the Centre may seek its own accreditation to access these research schemes directly.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data development, management, and sovereignty

Indigenous Data Sovereignty is operationalised through the dual mechanisms of Indigenous Data for Governance and Indigenous Governance of Data.[4] Indigenous Data Governance is the right of Indigenous peoples to autonomously decide what, how and why Indigenous data are collected, accessed and used.[5] Governance of Data means Indigenous people decide what rules and processes apply to Indigenous data throughout the data lifecycle.[6]

[4] Taking control of our data guide – Maiam nayri Wingara Indigenous Data Sovereignty Collective (2024), *Taking Control of Our Data: A Discussion Paper on Indigenous Data Governance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People and Communities*, Discussion Paper, Lowitja Institute, Melbourne. https://www.lowitja.org.au/news/taking-control-of-our-data-a-discussion-paper-on-indigenous-data-governance-for-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-people-and-communities/

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

The Centre's design and operation, including the development of the national research agenda, subsequent research priorities, and the related data required for decision making, will be identified and determined in accordance with the principles of Indigenous Data Sovereignty as specified for the Australian context by the Maiam nayri Wingara Indigenous Data Sovereignty Collective ('Maiam nayri Wingara principles').[7]

The Centre will also align its practices with the protocols of intellectual property and Indigenous Cultural Intellectual Property (ICIP) to ensure that collected knowledge is only shared and attributed in a way that benefits Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. ICIP refers to the rights that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have, and want to have, to protect their cultural heritage.[8]

The Centre will appropriately store, protect and manage access to any research data collected by the activities of the Centre, and enter any required data sharing arrangements with Centre partners. This requires the design and building of data infrastructure within the host organisation for the Centre and development of policies and protocols to ensure that data is appropriately managed, stored and used.

Reflecting Priority Reform 4 under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (National Agreement)[9], key features of this infrastructure could include, but are not limited to:

Infrastructure/ software requirements:

- Data storage system (data warehouse / lake) that houses all research data generated by the Centre
- Data access platform that enables access and analysis of data for researchers, organisations and communities
- Data analysis software to perform analysis of qualitative and quantitative data

Policy / protocol requirements:

- Indigenous Data Sovereignty policy and protocols that set out how governance bodies will oversee access to the data. Including but not limited to:
    - Assessing applications to access or use any data collected by the Centre
    - Prioritising and supporting access to the data for communities and ACCOs
    - Restricting the use of data by non-Indigenous researchers or governments to circumstances where Governance bodies are satisfied that the standards for ethical

[7] Maiam nayri Wingara Indigenous Data Sovereignty Collective (2018), *Indigenous Data Sovereignty Communique*, https://www.maiamnayriwingara.org/s/Communique-Indigenous-Data-Sovereignty-Summit-x5rk.pdf

[8] Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) (2020), *A Guide to Applying: The AIATSIS Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research*, https://aiatsis.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-02/aiatsis-guide-code-ethics-jan22.pdf

[9] Joint Council on Closing the Gap (2020), *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*, Clause 69-77, https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/sites/default/files/files/national-agreement-ctg.pdf

research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have been met and the request for access aligns with the priorities of communities and the Centre.

- Intellectual property and ICIP protocols applied in the partnership, design and planning stages of any research to promote ethical practices, collaboration, and recognition of the significant contributions Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make to research, through the sharing of cultural heritage and collective rights[10]
- Data access policy and associated protocol to protect access to data and prevent data breaches
- Data training protocol to ensure staff using data or supporting access to data are appropriately trained and have required skills and expertise
- Managing data breaches and near-misses policy and protocols to prevent and respond to data breaches or near-misses
- Participant consent policy and protocols to ensure transparency for participants in research about how data will be stored, protected, used, managed and their rights as data owners.

Embedding these principles and protocols into the Centre's governance and operations will enable best practice standards in research and engagement.

Commissioning and administration of research grants

The Centre will have the ability and infrastructure to commission research and administer research grants. This will support efforts to directly progress identified priorities in the Centre's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led research agenda.

Embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led commissioning processes in the Centre will support community voice and self-determination in the allocation and administration of research funding. This will require the Centre to establish a range of commissioning policies and processes that enable it to support and administer research grants effectively, including:

- Commissioning governance and decision-making that centres Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community voice and leadership in funding design and decision-making
- Probity frameworks that embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander understanding of ethical decision-making in funding allocation
- Contract and grant administration functions that focus on supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to succeed and deliver on their research priorities
- Agreements and protocols with governments that ensure that where the Centre is administering government funding, there is both the ability to satisfy government funding

[10] CSIRO (2024), *Indigenous Cultural Intellectual Property Principles*, https://www.csiro.au/en/about/Policies/Science-and-Delivery-Policy/Indigenous-Cultural-and-Intellectual-Property-Principles

administration and probity requirements, while ensuring an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led approach to funding administration.

It is noted that to effectively implement a research commissioning function, the Centre would need to access substantial additional research funding streams outside of the current Commonwealth funding allocation for the Centre's operation. The Centre would initially focus on undertaking grant-funded research, with the aim of scaling up to fulfil a grants commissioning role over time.

Knowledge translation and dissemination

There is a critical role for the Centre in bridging the gap between research and practice, by ensuring that research is accessible and meaningful to funding bodies, policymakers and practitioners, and can inform community-led decision-making at local and regional levels. This will involve drawing practical conclusions from research and reflecting research findings through the development of practical tools and resources, and hosting training, seminars and forums, to support effective, evidence-informed policy, program, and practice development and implementation. Knowledge translation will recognise unique jurisdictional, regional and local contexts, with outputs tailored accordingly.

While the Centre will prioritise knowledge translation activities that support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations directly, this work will also contribute to the achievement of Priority Reform 3 (Transforming Government Organisations) under the National Agreement.[11] Bridging the gap between research and practice will help governments and non-Indigenous organisations to improve engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and work towards delivering culturally safe services in partnership with community.

Advocacy and advice

The Centre will provide a trusted voice on matters related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families. The ability to provide evidence-informed advocacy for the community and advice to government is a crucial role for the Centre. The Centre will work alongside ACCOs, peaks, and community leadership to enable the voice, needs and priorities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to directly influence decision-making at the local, jurisdictional and national levels. This will include producing evidence and research to inform the development of policy and programs.

This evidence base and research can be shared across governments and non-Indigenous NGOs to be used in position papers, submissions and funding applications for program design and delivery. The Centre will also create a space for conversation, through activities such as hosting roundtable discussions and regular in-person gatherings for sharing knowledge and best practice.

[11] Joint Council on Closing the Gap (2020), *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*, Clause 58-68. https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/sites/default/files/files/national-agreement-ctg.pdf

The Centre will provide support and guidance for ACCOs to self-advocate in relation to research and evidence, as well as provide an avenue for ACCOs to escalate concerns regarding their involvement in research that may not align with ethical standards of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research.

Supporting and growing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research workforce and the participation of ACCOs in research and evidence building

There is a clear need to provide effective support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers, who experience a lack of cultural safety and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership within the academic sector. The Centre can offer support to emerging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers and post-graduate students, such as scholarships, career guidance, training and connection to national and international research networks.

The Centre can grow the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers by providing suitable pathways to training, as current mainstream pathways do not account for factors such as community commitment, financial pressures, and cultural load. Practical supports provided by the Centre could include:

- creating a national network of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers
- providing training and mentoring services to strengthen career pathways for emerging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers, and
- hosting secondments, to provide emerging researchers with sustainable opportunities to gain experience and form connections across the research sector
- facilitating research collaborations between established and emerging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers.

The exact nature of these initiatives, including the scale, implementation and any additional dedicated resourcing requirements will be determined with guidance of the core governing bodies and in the design of strategic and operational plans as part of the Centre's establishment.

The Centre can provide support to jurisdictional Centres and networks that are providing local capacity building and support functions in research and evidence building. For example, if jurisdictional initiatives are supporting ACCOs and their workforce to participate and lead research projects and use research in practice, the National Centre could support this work by providing national infrastructure, frameworks and guidance. This could include providing overarching and consistent support and advice on establishing partnerships, draft agreement templates or service agreements relating to things such as intellectual property protocols.

The Centre could also provide guidance to academic institutions on addressing systemic challenges faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, including advising on strategies and approaches to increase cultural safety and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge systems and cultural load.

Facilitate sharing and showcasing of learnings and best practice

The Centre can act as a national facilitator for sharing learnings and best practice initiatives emerging from jurisdictions, for other jurisdictions to adapt and learn from. As jurisdictions specialise in their own agendas and priorities, they can test innovation, trial different approaches and explore what success looks like in that jurisdiction. The Centre could provide a space to share learnings, identify gaps and highlight the common elements of success.

Monitoring and evaluating key strategies that impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families

There may also be an opportunity for the Centre to undertake or support monitoring and evaluation of key national frameworks, strategies and plans impacting on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

Specifically, the Centre could play a role in implementing the Monitoring and Evaluation Strategies (MES) for Safe and Supported and its Action Plans. SNAICC is currently working with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership Group and governments to develop the MES and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander MES. Both strategies will bring together diverse sources of data to evaluate the implementation of Safe and Supported, including how effectively it is delivering outcomes and positive changes to the lives of children, families and communities.

Given the ongoing development of the MES, detailed exploration of the Centre's potential involvement in implementing the strategies can be conducted during the establishment phase, including an assessment of additional resource requirements.

Recommendation 3: The Centre will be designed and adequately resourced to provide core functions aligned to its principles, values and purpose, including:

- Shaping an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led national research agenda for children and families
- Undertaking, coordinating and collaborating on research to advance research priorities for children and families
- Developing and implementing Indigenous Data Sovereignty infrastructure, policies and protocols
- Commissioning and administering research grants (requires significant additional and dedicated funding)
- Knowledge translation and dissemination to transform systems and improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
- Elevating the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families to influence decision-making

- Supporting and growing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research workforce and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led and governed research centres, networks and institutions
- Sharing and showcasing learning and best practice in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families
- Monitoring and evaluating key strategies that impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families (requires significant additional and dedicated funding).

Governance

The governance of the Centre will be primarily designed to reflect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership, authority and community voice in driving and overseeing the work of the Centre. As recognised in the National Agreement, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community control is an act of self-determination, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations are best placed to drive improved outcomes for their children, families and communities.[12]

Aligned with the definition of community control as reflected in the National Agreement, the Centre will be:

a. incorporated under relevant legislation and not-for-profit (with incorporation being through a host ACCO)
b. controlled and operated by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people
c. connected to the community, or communities, in which it operates
d. governed by a majority Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander governing body.[13]

The governance will have two parallel and intersecting components as outlined below:

- A core Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled governing body provided through an existing host ACCO with the appropriate national authority, relationships and expertise to host the Centre
- Tailored governance bodies through which the host organisation devolves and shares governance responsibility for the Centre with a broader range of key stakeholders that bring focused expertise to drive its strategic focus and priorities.

[12] Joint Council on Closing the Gap (2020), *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*, Clause 44. https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/sites/default/files/files/national-agreement-ctg.pdf

[13] Joint Council on Closing the Gap (2020), *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*, Clause 25-27. https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/sites/default/files/files/national-agreement-ctg.pdf

Organisational governance through a host organisation

Positioning the Centre within a host national ACCO will be essential to its ability to deliver on its core purpose and functions, and to ensure its accountability to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and broader stakeholders. In alignment with principles of self-determination and the Priority Reforms under the National Agreement, the host organisation must hold the authority, governance, and leadership to shape and implement the Centre's program of work in line with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community priorities and expectations.

In line with these requirements, a national ACCO with the necessary children and families sector experience, relationships and cultural authority to lead and support the operations of the Centre would be well positioned to host the Centre. The Centre host will need to have the standing and influence to provide effective evidence-informed advocacy for the community and sector and advice to government and policy makers.

The host organisation's operation of the Centre would not displace the necessity of resourcing the operation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led and governed research centres, networks and institutions in the field of child and family services in states and territories. In fact, as this proposal recognises, the national leadership and coordination functions intended for the Centre would be strengthened and facilitated through the resourcing of jurisdictional bodies with the ability to collaborate at the national level.

The coordination function of the Centre requires a national body that is able to serve as a conduit between jurisdictional efforts, community-led research and evidence building bodies, and national efforts, in order to coordinate research at all levels. This can be done through facilitating the sharing of best practices nationally and showcasing learnings to foster collaboration and innovation across jurisdictions. Increased investment to support ACCOs to develop their capacity and infrastructure to lead the development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander evidence base in each jurisdiction is recommended.

The following section outlines additional criteria the host organisation should meet to ensure success of the Centre. These features span both governance and operations and highlight how the role of the host organisation will intersect with the Centre to support its purpose.

Leveraging existing partnerships and relationships

The host organisation requires a vast nationwide network across a range of sectors relating to the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. The Centre can leverage these multidisciplinary and cross-sector networks to convene leading academics, researchers, jurisdictional peak bodies and service providers in collective governance and decision-making.

There is an opportunity for the Centre to leverage the existing governance mechanisms and collective expertise of an ACCO host. This will avoid duplication of governance functions and reduce the administrative burden on the Centre. A host ACCO with a strong national presence

will bring together national ACCO sector leaders and experts from every state and territory to support connectivity, partnership and collaboration.

The host organisation's existing relationships across the sector can support joint appointments, partnerships and collaboration with jurisdictional bodies and non-Indigenous research and academic institutes for activities such as:

- partnering on specific research activities, in line with the National Research Agenda and locally identified priorities, to ensure community-controlled processes are included and considered in commissioned work
- providing access to research infrastructure and resources (e.g. library resources and literature); and
- supporting ACCOs and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research and evidence bodies to participate in the work of the National Centre and strengthen existing research and evidence capabilities.

The host organisation should have deep connections to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Established pathways to a broad range of communities will be critical to support the Centre's ability to undertake research that is grounded in the interests and priorities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Alignment with the Centre's purpose scope, functions, roles and responsibilities

There is a need for clear alignment between the host organisation and the intended purpose, functions and responsibilities of the Centre. This alignment will provide an opportunity for the Centre to leverage the experience, expertise and infrastructure of the host organisation, and ensure the work of the Centre complements other initiatives.

For example, an existing involvement in research and evaluation across the country, including relating to Indigenous Data Sovereignty, would reduce the risk of duplicating or overriding the work and decision-making power of jurisdictional peaks and local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations. This connection is critical to ensuring the Centre's work is well-coordinated and complementary to existing or planned initiatives at the jurisdictional level.

Experience working with governments and key governance structures to improve outcomes for children and families

It is important that the host organisation has extensive experience working within the landscape of commonwealth, state and territory government reform on behalf of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families. This includes a deep understanding and experience working through existing governance structures for the strategies, plans and frameworks that impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. This will provide an opportunity for the Centre to leverage host mechanisms for working with governments to implement evidence-based reform agendas, including under Safe and Supported.

A commitment to community-led and culturally centred research to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

The host organisation must be able to demonstrate a commitment to community-led research and the application of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, being and doing to inform research, policy and advocacy. This will help to ensure the host can adequately support the Centre to drive research that is led by the community and centred on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. Furthermore, the host organisation must be able to demonstrate its commitment to addressing the Priority Reforms under the National Agreement.

Additional requirements

In addition, the host ACCO must also be equipped to lead:

- *The design of research and Indigenous Data Governance* – a core requirement for the Centre's establishment will be the design of research and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data governance, including to ensure the Centre's operations give effect to the principles of Indigenous Data Sovereignty. It is important that the host organisation can facilitate the design and implementation of these governance arrangements, including by leveraging host governance mechanisms where possible.
- *Integration with existing governance models* – as described above, the host organisation should have extensive experience working across broader governance structures relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child and family wellbeing. It is critical that, as part of the Centre's establishment, the host organisation can lead the Centre's integration with existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance, to ensure its accountability to relevant communities and stakeholders
- *Ongoing establishment* – there are a range of considerations for the Centre's ongoing establishment, such as establishing the required physical and virtual infrastructure to support the Centre's operational needs. The host organisation must be able to lead the ongoing establishment of the Centre.

Other options considered

A number of other governance options were considered through the design process, including a standalone governance model and establishing the Centre through formal partnership with an academic institution. These options were deemed unfeasible and are not recommended as outlined below.

Standalone model

Establishing the Centre independently of an ACCO host organisation would result in a missed opportunity to provide the Centre with the critical foundation it requires to successfully fulfil its core purpose and functions. A standalone model would hinder the Centre's ability to leverage deep connections to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and cross-sector networks

across all jurisdictions, and to operate in a way that is directly accountable to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through an established community-controlled governance structure. In turn, this would reduce the Centre's capacity to build an evidence base for supporting children and families that is led by, and centred on the perspectives of, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

An option to establish the Centre as a new ACCO was considered, however it was concluded that this would result in extensive additional time and expense in the Centre's establishment and operation given the significant community-led design required to create a new community-controlled institution, and the inability to leverage existing infrastructure. This option was also considered to have high potential to overlap and displace existing community-controlled governance. Establishing the Centre as a non-ACCO standalone model was not in scope for the design given the specific requirement that the Centre be Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led, which is not possible without an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled governance structure.

Academic partnership model

The Centre is intended to be an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led body that builds the evidence base around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pedagogy, wisdom and knowledge. Formal integration of the Centre with an academic institution would diminish community control over the Centre and potentially compromise its ability to operate without conforming to a western academic framework and being influenced and directed by non-Indigenous organisational leadership. The determination that an academic partnership model is unsuitable also considered that some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities lack trust in non-Indigenous research institutions, owing to a history of unethical and harmful research practices.

Academic representation through the appropriate tailored governance bodies described below will provide a mechanism for the Centre's connection and collaboration with academic institutions. See page 28 for additional information on the Centre's connection to non-Indigenous research institutes.

Tailored governance arrangements

There is a need to establish tailored governance functions, the nature and composition of which will be determined by the host organisation's Board, based on the existing governance mechanisms that are accessible through the host organisation. Through the overarching governance structure of the ACCO host organisation, the Centre will have a national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled governance structure. The host organisation's Board will provide cultural and corporate governance and strategic direction for the Centre, with ultimate decision-making authority. The host organisation body responsible for finance, audit and risk management will ensure the Centre has a robust corporate governance and risk framework, with responsibility for monitoring and reporting on financial sustainability and performance.

Additional tailored governance bodies will bring in broader expertise with a focus on research, data, evaluation and knowledge translation to provide direct and focused oversight of and input to drive the Centre's work. Anticipated administrative overheads relating to the tailored governance bodies, including reimbursement for members' time, are included in the projected operating costs (see page 30) and subject to the final composition of the governance structure to be determined through the establishment phase. Subject to the nature of existing governance mechanisms that are accessible through the host organisation, opportunities to minimize the size and complexity of the governance structure will be prioritised.

Tailored governance structures will include six core elements:

1. A ***"Centre Advisory Council"*** that provides the overarching governance and oversees the strategic direction and operation of the Centre, with delegated decision-making authority from the host organisation's Board.
2. A ***"Cross-Disciplinary Expert Community of Practice"*** that provides specialist and technical expertise and assists in the development of the Centre's research, training and capacity building strategy and agenda
3. An ***"Indigenous Data Sovereignty Knowledge Holder Panel"*** that supports the development, implementation and compliance with a strong Indigenous Data Governance framework and data management system
4. A ***"Collaborative Panel"*** that provides a forum for Centre partners to meet, exchange ideas and stay up to date on the collaborative work of the Centre
5. ***"Community Advisors"*** that bring the knowledge, voice and expertise of community to inform and guide the work of the Centre, informing regional and local priorities, building networks and collaborations, drawing on specialised expertise, and supporting knowledge translation and dissemination
6. ***Jurisdictional centres, networks and institutes*** that bring key knowledge, voice and expertise specific to the priorities, needs and community contexts in each state and territory that helps to inform and guide the work of the Centre.

These tailored governance elements are described briefly below. See **Appendix A** for a visual representation of the Centre's networked governance model.

Centre Advisory Council

An overarching governance body that operates as a sub-committee of the host organisation's Board, with appropriate decision-making delegations and oversight of the strategic direction and operation of the Centre.

Primary functions

- Governance, cultural and financial oversight
- Establishing the Centre's guiding principles and values

- Strategic oversight and direction, including developing and monitoring the strategic agenda and plan
- Performing standard organisational oversight responsibilities in accordance with delegations, including signing off Centre specific policies, and appointing and overseeing the Centre's Executive Director.

Co-chairs

- Host Organisation Board Member (to ensure connectivity with Host Board)
- Non-Executive Council Member nominated by the Council

Composition

A core membership of up to 12 multidisciplinary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders with collective expertise and relevant cultural and operational governance, financial, legal and commercial experience, including:

- A minimum of two host organisation representatives (either two Board Members or one Board Member and the Host Organisation Executive Director)
- A minimum of two jurisdictional partner representatives (nominated by jurisdictional partners or holding positions on a rotating term cycle)
- Other representatives from across the Child and Family sector and system including leaders in practice and academic research, ACCOs and ACCO peaks, Indigenous Data Sovereignty, policy, training and capacity development.
- The Council must include representatives that have relevant cultural and operational governance, financial, legal and commercial experience

Meeting cycle

The Council will meet a minimum of 4 times per year with its meeting cycle to be aligned with the Host Organisation's Board meeting calendar.

Cross-Disciplinary Expert Community of Practice

The Cross-Disciplinary Expert Community of Practice that provides specialist and technical support to the Council and assists in the development of the Centre's research, training and capacity building strategy and agenda.

Primary functions

- Provide a network of knowledge holders to advise on community research and capability development needs and priorities, and inform / support the Centre Advisory Council in developing a national research and learning agenda
- Advise on partnerships and collaboration (MoUs) with jurisdictional bodies / universities / research centres / practice peaks
- Assist in identifying research, capability building, collaboration and funding opportunities that support three-way (community, practice and academic) research and learning

- Advise on innovative approaches to undertake the work of the Centre that enable and support three-way collaboration and cross jurisdiction learning and development
- Support research-based publication and peer review processes, and the translation of research into practice.

Co-chairs

- The Centre's Executive Director
- Non-Executive Advisory Council Member (to ensure connectivity with Council)

Composition

The Community of Practice will have a membership of up to 14 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous multidisciplinary experts from across the Child and Family Support Sector and system, including:

- A majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members
- The Centre's Executive Director and at least one Centre Advisory Council member
- A minimum of two jurisdictional partner representatives (nominated by jurisdictional partners or holding positions on a rotating term cycle)
- Other representatives from across the Child and Family Support Sector and system, including leaders in practice and academic research, ACCOs and ACCO peaks, Indigenous Data Sovereignty, and training and capacity development.

Meeting cycle

The Community of Practice will meet a minimum of 4 times per year with its meeting cycle to be aligned with the Advisory Council's meeting calendar.

Indigenous Data Sovereignty Knowledge Holders

A panel of Indigenous Data Sovereignty Knowledge Holders will provide guidance to the Centre on Indigenous Data Sovereignty and Governance.

Primary functions

Development, implementation and compliance with a strong Indigenous Data Governance framework and data management system.

Co-convenors

- Indigenous Data Governance Manager
- Non-Executive Convenor appointed by the Advisory Council (may be a Council Member)

Composition

A membership of up to 14 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander multidisciplinary knowledge holders, including:

- The Centre's Indigenous Data Governance Manager
- Indigenous data sovereignty subject matter experts

- A minimum of two jurisdictional partner representatives (nominated by jurisdictional partners or holding positions on a rotating term cycle).

Meeting cycle

The Knowledge Holders will meet a minimum 4 times per year, with their meeting cycle to be aligned with the Centre's operational Advisory Council's meeting calendar.

Collaborative Panel

This panel will provide a forum for the Centre partners to meet, exchange ideas and stay up to date on the collaborative work of the Centre.

Co-convenors

- The Centre's Partnerships Coordinator
- Non-Executive Convenor appointed by the Advisory Council (may be a Member of the Council)

Composition

The Panel will have a membership of up to 14 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including:

- Representatives from each of the jurisdictions and the Centre's research and practice partners
- The Centre's Partnership Coordinator and Communities of Practice Coordinator.

Meeting cycle

The Panel will meet a minimum of four times per year, with its meeting cycle to be aligned with the Centre's operational and Advisory Council's meeting calendar.

Community Advisors

A panel of up to 14 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Advisors will bring the knowledge, voice and expertise of community to inform and guide the work of the Centre.

Primary functions

- Informing regional and local priorities
- Building networks and collaborations
- Drawing on specialised expertise
- Supporting knowledge translation and dissemination.

Co-convenors

- The Centre's Communities of Practice Coordinator
- Community Representative

Composition

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members from across regions
- The Centre's Communities of Practice Coordinator

Meeting cycle

- Minimum four times per year, with meeting cycle to be aligned with the Centre's operational and Advisory Council's meeting calendar.

Jurisdictional centres, networks and institutes

This is not one established group with membership, but a network of broader supporters and interested parties (including individuals and existing groups) that will be engaged and brought together in different ways to inform and interact with the Centre, such as:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander jurisdictional centres and research infrastructure
- ACCOs
- Community governance groups
- Broader researchers and academics (including local researchers),
- Universities and research institutes
- NGOs in the child and family service sector
- Commonwealth and state and territory governments
- Data custodians and bodies that control associated architecture.

Primary functions

- Community and sector voice
- Informing regional and local priorities
- Two-way exchange of data/research to inform community decision-making
- Building networks and collaborations
- Drawing on specialised expertise
- Knowledge translation and dissemination.

The Centre will engage closely across the broader network to ensure its work complements existing and planned initiatives and avoids duplication. The exact nature of broader networks that are engaged to contribute to the Centre's work will be developed with guidance of the core governing bodies and in the design of the strategic and operational plans for the Centre.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data governance

The Centre's design and operation will give effect to the principles of Indigenous Data Sovereignty (Maiam nayri Wingara principles). The Centre will enact the principles through an effective Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data governance model, which can be established using existing frameworks, such as the guidance recently published by Maiam nayri Wingara.

This framework can be used to develop a detailed plan for implementing Indigenous Data Sovereignty, through the Indigenous Data Sovereignty governance body, as part of the Centre's establishment. The following high-level activities are an example of processes that could be considered, based on the guidance developed by Maiam nayri Wingara:

- Establish a governance group with responsibility for determining how Indigenous Data Sovereignty principles should be applied within the design and operation of the Centre.
- Involvement in the governance process should be informed by the community. This aims to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can control their data ecosystem at every stage.
- Engage with relevant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to raise awareness around key data concepts and identify the community's needs and priorities in relation to data. This enables Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to shape the organisation's data agenda and define what constitutes 'meaningful' and relevant data.
- Establish a strong data system with the ability to monitor the impact of data on communities, and identify how data will be stored, analysed and communicated. This is important to ensure that data is managed and used in a way that protects and respects the individual and collective interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Establish and implement a plan for accessing data that aligns with the priorities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and considers relevant privacy and legislative frameworks This may involve establishing data agreements to access Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data that is held by external organisations, or undertaking data collection where there are identified gaps in currently available data.
- Undertake audits and engage with organisational partners to ensure that relevant external data structures uphold Indigenous Data Sovereignty and are accountable to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.[14]

Recommendation 4: The Centre's governance will reflect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership, authority, and community control in core organisational governance through an ACCO host organisation, and tailored governance bodies that bring in additional focused expertise, research leadership and community voice to drive and oversee the work of the Centre.

Recommendation 5: The host organisation for the Centre will be a national peak body with a membership and elected governance body that is representative of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled child and families sector, and is recognised by the Coalition of Peaks as having that role and authority.

[14] Maiam nayri Wingara Indigenous Data Sovereignty Collective (2024), *Taking Control of Our Data: A Discussion Paper on Indigenous Data Governance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People and Communities, Discussion Paper*, Lowitja Institute, Melbourne, 19-25. https://www.lowitja.org.au/news/taking-control-of-our-data-a-discussion-paper-on-indigenous-data-governance-for-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-people-and-communities/

Operating model

The Centre's operating model will be Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led and managed, consistent with its core purpose, and tailored to fulfill all its functions as a physical hub with virtual spokes. This will provide the Centre with an ability to work collaboratively with a range of communities and experts across jurisdictions, while having requisite centralised capacity to deliver on the Centre's functions and strategic objectives and to convene forums and collaborative efforts at the national level.

The staffing model will support administrative functions and coordinate the governance groups and broader involvement of stakeholders, as well as providing a minimum level of internal expertise and capacity in research, data development, governance, leadership and knowledge translation.

Physical hub

The physical hub would house the core staffing of the Centre and provide a physical national office and meeting space as a focal point for the Centre's governance and operations at the national level. The physical space would provide workspaces for Centre staff and visiting researchers and partners, as well as collaborative meeting spaces to facilitate central governance meetings and national forums. Recognising the flexible nature of work in the online environment, the physical hub may incorporate hybrid elements, such as remote-based staff that bring necessary skillsets but are unable to be permanently based in the Centre's national office.

Virtual spokes

Virtual spokes would be established and supported by the central Centre team and assist to extend the reach and impact of the Centre into jurisdictional, regional and local community contexts. In practice these virtual spokes would be constituted by:

- **Collaboration with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community led and governed research bodies:** The Centre will work in close collaboration with any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community led and governed research centres, networks and institutions focused on the safety, development and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to ensure efforts at the national level are coordinated and complementary to jurisdictional work. This will provide opportunities to learn from and showcase jurisdictional research and evidence that can influence excellence nationally and in other jurisdictions. For states and territories that don't have existing infrastructure, these functions could be auspiced as part of the Centre, with an agenda to build jurisdictional infrastructure.
- **Research partnerships:** The Centre will form and support partnerships with and between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers and research institutes to

progress key areas of research within its research agenda, and to undertake knowledge translation and dissemination.

- **Online networks and communities of practice:** The Centre will facilitate online networks that bring the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research and knowledge translation community together at the national level to explore collaborations, share practice, learnings and knowledge, and showcase excellence.

Centre staffing model

To deliver on the Centre's core functions and establish an institution with highly respected national leadership in research, policy and practice excellence, it will be necessary that the staffing complement of the Centre includes a small team of professionals with high-level expertise in relevant fields. Specific areas of expertise and specialisation on the staff team will include:

- Organisational leadership and management
- Executive and governance secretariat support
- Centre administration, including policy and systems development and compliance
- Research agenda development, commissioning, and oversight
- Coordinate research programs and undertaking research
- Research partnership development and management, including coordination with collaborating institutions and jurisdictional networks
- Data development, management and communication including coordination of data sharing arrangements and Indigenous Data Sovereignty
- Administrative and data support to support ACCO and Partner data access
- Establishing and managing online communities of practice
- Training and networking events management
- Knowledge translation and dissemination
- Contract management
- Marketing, public relations and media support
- Finance and organisational administration, including Legal, People & Services, Audit & Compliance, Information and Communication Technology.

A detailed breakdown of the staffing model is included at **Appendix B**. The Centre's core staff will grow from 9 FTE following establishment in 2024-25 to 17 FTE by 2029-30[15], with staffing split across five key categories:

- Executive leadership: 3 FTE (by 2029-30)
- Research: 7 FTE (by 2029-30)
- Indigenous Data Sovereignty and Governance: 2 FTE (by 2029-30)
- Virtual networks and communities of practice: 3.5 FTE (by 2029-30)

[15] The Centre would maintain a small pool of trained community researchers employed on a casual basis equivalent to 1 FTE by 2029-30.

- Grants administration and communications: 1.5 FTE (by 2029-30).

Initial recruitment will focus on establishing the core operational, research and Indigenous Data Sovereignty leadership to support the Centre's establishment and development of its research agenda and partnerships. Early investment will also prioritise staff to support development of the Centre's online networks, research collaborations and communities of practice. Expansion of the Centre's broader research team will be linked to the growth of project-based funding. A small consultancy provision is included to support the initial establishment of the Centre.

Recommendation 6: The Centre's operating model will align to its core purpose and functions, and include:

- A physical hub housing core Centre staff with requisite expertise to perform the Centre's functions and providing a meeting space and focal point for the Centre's governance and operations
- Virtual spokes comprised of research partnerships, online sharing and networks, communities of practice, and collaboration with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led and governed research centres, networks and institutions.

Additional operational and logistical considerations

Core organisational infrastructure

There is potential to leverage existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander core organisational infrastructure. For example, the Centre could potentially leverage the host organisation's existing corporate services, policies and procedures provided they are tailored to the needs of an ACCO. The host organisation's premises could also support a physical hub for the Centre, including core staffing and facilities for hosting regular in-person gatherings.

Communications infrastructure

There is a need to establish communications infrastructure to support the Centre's operations, including a strong online presence and established networks that includes a website for accessing and sharing research, services and resources that drive improved outcomes nationally. Communications and materials must be accessible to ACCOs, academics, governments, and mainstream organisations. The Centre could potentially leverage existing communications infrastructure within the host organisation.

Partnerships with non-Indigenous research institutes and centres

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities hold many deep and well-founded concerns about research practices and engaging in research, especially with non-Indigenous researchers and institutions. These concerns are the result of extensive unethical and harmful research practices, both historical and contemporary. Guidance from and collaboration with the Centre will assist in mitigating these harmful practices and promoting ethical research.

The Centre would establish partnerships with non-Indigenous institutes such as academic institutes on a needs and opportunity-basis, to promote effective and ethical research and to ensure community-controlled processes are included and considered in research. For example, there may be opportunities to provide guidance or support to non-Indigenous institutions on research that disproportionately effects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, such as population, whole-of-system or practice-based research.

Collaborations with non-Indigenous institutes could also take place where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led research might require or benefit from non-Indigenous collaboration. This could include where non-Indigenous researchers have specialist expertise and knowledge that is valuable to inform and strengthen supports for children and families and are committed to working in genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to advance the evidence base. It could also include accessing existing Commonwealth research grants schemes, funding opportunities, and/or essential infrastructure (e.g. library resources and literature).

The Centre will independently manage and lead partnerships and collaborations on research and evidence through its commissioning function to ensure connections with the academic sector. The organisations which partner with the Centre will be wholly determined by the Centre's governance. Partnerships should be established through formal agreements, such as deeds and

formal partnership documents, Memoranda of Understanding, and data sharing agreements. The Centre will retain its independence and ability to determine the nature of any partnerships. For example, partner organisations may be required to respect and embody the Centre's principles, such as self-determination and culturally centred practice.

Distinction between national and jurisdictional functions, roles and responsibilities

Consistent with self-determination, it will be crucial to the success of the national Centre that it does not duplicate or override the work and decision-making power of jurisdictional peaks and local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations. To be effective, there needs to be clear distinction between how the Centre operates and how local entities feed into those structures. This includes clearly defining the role and responsibilities of the Centre versus those at jurisdictional level, and how the Centre is supporting the efforts of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander lead and governed research and evidence bodies at the jurisdictional level.

Policies and procedures

The corporate and organisational policies and procedures of the host organisation should be leveraged, where they meet the needs of the Centre. For example, it will be important to establish Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ethics processes that meets the expectations of community and align with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research standards.

Importantly, the Head Agreement developed as part of the Centre's establishment must reinforce the four Priority Reforms under the National Agreement. For example, this includes the need to ensure that considerations around intellectual property and legal status reflect the principles of self-determination and Indigenous Data Sovereignty.

Resourcing

Central to the success of the Centre is ongoing and adequate funding. A long-term operational funding commitment beyond the initial three-year funding period is required to ensure the ability of the Centre to engage in longer-term initiatives, reflecting a commitment to sustainable capacity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge creation and dissemination in the children and families sector. Long-term funding commitments must also consider the opportunities to transition investment over time, recognising that the overwhelming proportion of research infrastructure and funding relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families currently sits with institutes that are not Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led and governed.

Activity 3f) in the Safe and Supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan commits jurisdictions to consider and work towards agreeing ongoing funding arrangements to support the national, state and territory operations of the Centre.[16] It was a key consideration in

[16] Australian Government (2022), *Safe and Supported* Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan 2023-2026, 30, https://www.dss.gov.au/families-and-children-programs-services-children-protecting-australias-children-safe-and-supported-the-national-framework-for-protecting-australias-children-2021-2031/safe-and-supported-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-first-action-plan-2023-2026

the design process that in recognition of the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, research and knowledge across the country, it was critical that states and territories invest to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led and governed research infrastructure in each jurisdiction to operate in collaboration with the national Centre. In the short to medium-term this may require some states and territories to invest through the national Centre to auspice and support the development of jurisdictional infrastructure where there is not existing capacity in states and territories.

There may also be opportunities for non-governmental funders to support the work of the Centre through financial contributions.

Operating Costs

It is estimated that a total of $22.54 million will be required to sustain the Centre's operations from 2024-25 to 2029-30. This includes $7.55 million over three years to 2026-27 aligned to the existing Commonwealth Government budget allocation for the Centre's establishment, with a further $14.99 million required over the subsequent three years to 2029-30.

A summary of projected expenses is at **Appendix C**.

The costings are based on a conservative estimate of core operating expenses including:

- set up costs, such as branding and artwork, basic office equipment and recruitment
- governance costs, relating to establishing and maintaining the governance model
- people-related expenses, including remuneration of core staffing to perform operational functions
- core operating expenses, including ongoing infrastructure, utilities and travel expenses
- activity-related operating costs linked to the Centre's activity model (**Appendix D**), which includes the following non-research activities:
    - a national conference
    - collaborative forums
    - training sessions (hosted in-person / online)
    - community researcher training.

Recommendation 7: Long-term, ongoing funding for the Centre's operations is required to ensure sustainable capacity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge creation and dissemination in the children and families sector.

Recommendation 8: State and Territory Governments should identify and provide resources for the development and operation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led and governed research centres, networks and institutions in each state and territory and resource their collaboration with the National Centre.

Establishment – process and next steps

Decisions relating to the design, development, implementation and evaluation of the Centre will be made through a shared decision-making approach. Should the Commonwealth Government identify any barriers to adopting the recommendations presented in this proposal, these barriers should be made transparent and raised for discussion and resolution with the Expert Advisory Group in the first instance, and with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership Group through the governance of Safe and Supported (as required). This aligns with the commitments made under Priority Reform One (Shared Decision Making) under the National Agreement and the shared decision-making principles agreed to under Safe and Supported. This is critical to ensure that the process for establishing the Centre is grounded in self-determination and community-led decision-making.

As highlighted by the Productivity Commission in its recent review of the National Agreement, governments have failed to adequately implement genuine shared decision-making in practice, instead opting for a 'consultative' approach where there is often a pre-determined solution.

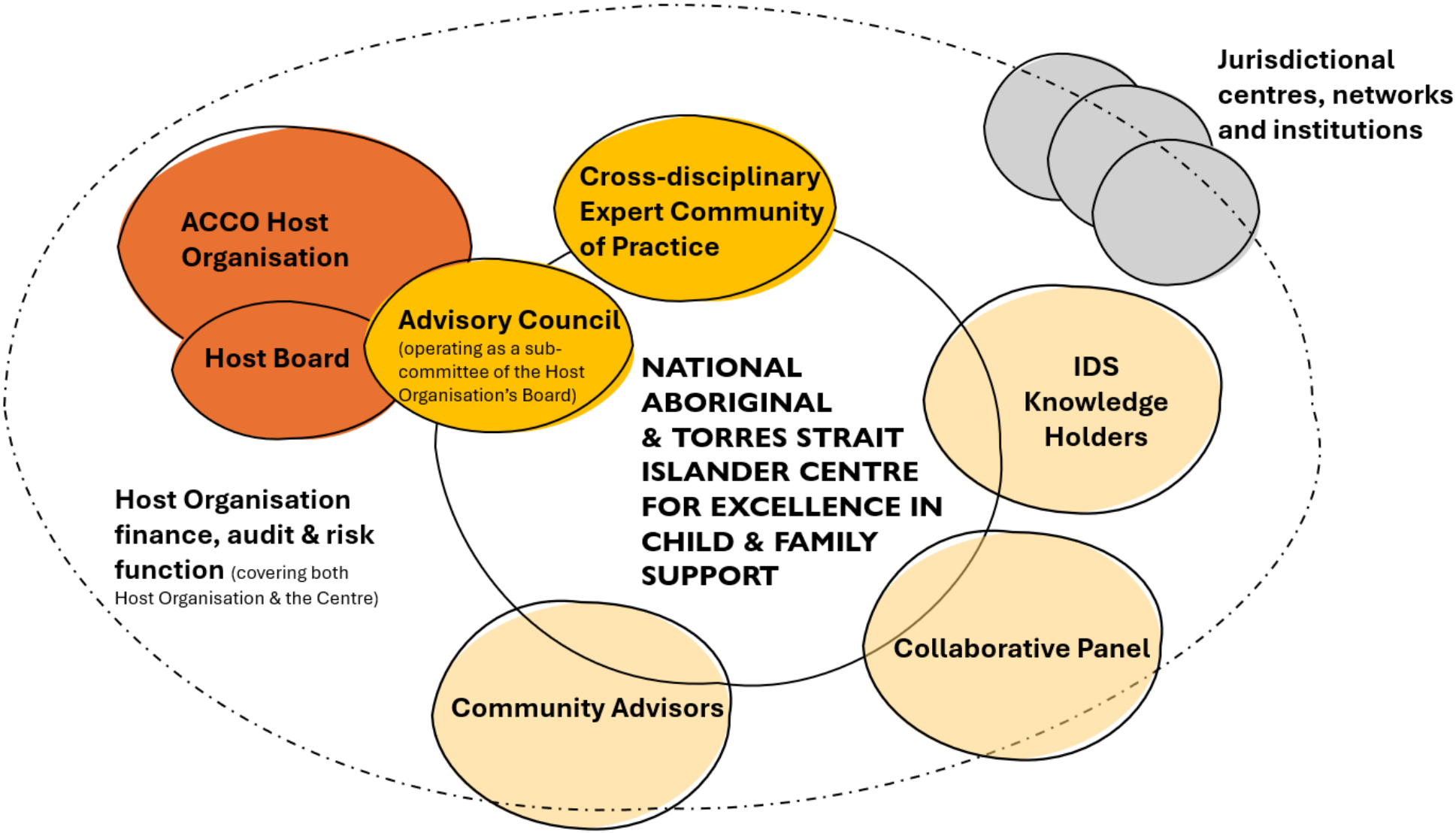
Recommendation 9: All decisions relating to the design, development, implementation and evaluation of the Centre will be made in line with the principles of shared decision-making, as agreed in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

A high-level overview of initial steps, including the phases and sequencing of key operational and logistical steps is shown in the following table. The Centre's ACCO host could be engaged to implement the final stages of design to implementation through a staged approach, commencing with, for example, the phases described below.

Phase	Operational and logistical steps
Phase one	• Supplier engaged and initial host organisation staff onboarded • Commence process for establishing the governance model and organisational structure • Establish the organisational and communications infrastructure • Continue discussions for establishing funding arrangements, in line with and beyond activity 3f in the Safe and Supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan • Scope the virtual spokes and commence extending the reach and impact of the Centre into jurisdictional, regional and local community contexts
Phase two	• Inaugural meetings for the governance bodies • Develop a strategic plan, work plan and timeline for implementing the functions • Develop a National Research Agenda • Develop best practice principles and values
Phase three	• Develop the data and research model • Establish networks and pathways for contributions
Phase four	• Commence full implementation of the Centre's functions in line with its strategic plan and work plan

END

Appendix A – Governance Structure



Appendix B – Staffing Model

				(1)(2) 2024|25	2025|26	2026|27	2027|28	2028|29	2029|30
				FTE	FTE	FTE	FTE	FTE	FTE
	Role	**Description**	**Level**						
	Chief Executive Officer | Executive Director	Organisational leadership and management	ED2	0.25	1	1	1	1	1
	Executive Assistant	Executive & governance secretariat support	4.1	0.25	1	1	1	1	1
	Administration & Compliance Officer	Centre administration, including policy and systems development and compliance	4.4	0.125	0.5	0.5	1	1	1
(3)	Research Director	Research agenda development, commissioning, and oversight	ED1	0.25	1	1	1	1	1
	Research Administration Assistant	General administrative support	4.4	0.25	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	1
	Partnerships Coordinator	Research partnership development and management, including coordination with collaborating institutions and jurisdictional ne	6.4	0.25	1	1	1	1	1
(4)	Research Group Leader	Coordinate research programs and undertake research	8.4			1	2	3	4
(5)	Indigenous Data Governance Manager	Data development, management and communication including coordination of data sharing arrangements and IDS	8.4	0.25		1	1	1	1
	IDS Officer	Provide administrative and data support to support ACCO and Partner data access	4.4		1	1	1	1	1
(6)	Communities of Practice Coordinator	Establishing and managing online communities of practice	6.4	0.25	1	1	1	1	1
	Online Systems Administrator		5.3	0.125	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5
	Training & Events Officer	Organising training and networking event	4.4	0.25	0.5	1	1	1	1
	Knowledge Translation & Dissemination Coordinat	Knowledge translation and dissemination	6.4		1	1	1	1	1
(7)	Grants Administrator	Contract management	5.3		0.5	0.5	1	1	1
(8)	Marketing, Media & Communications	Marketing, PR and media support	6.1		0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5
(9)	Corporate Services	Finance and organisational administration (inc. Legal, People & Services, Audit & Compliance, ITC)	NA						
(10)	**Total**			9	10	12.5	14.5	15.5	17
			No. staff	10	13	15	16	18	18
	Community researchers			2024|25	2025|26	2026|27	2027|28	2028|29	2029|30
(11)	Community researchers (casual)		2.1	0	25	25	50	50	75
	Avg hours		38	0	950	950	1900	1900	2850

	Assumptions
1	25% pro rata (funding secured allowing recruitment of staff in Q3 FY2024|25 for commencement Q4)
2	Initial FY2024|25 recruitment focused on establishing core operational team and research team leadership so that focus can be placed on developing research agenda and partnerships before building out research team
3	Anticipated that research will be conducted through collaborative research arrangements as well as through Centre-based team, with the growth of that team being linked to project based funding (and not included in these cost estimates)
4	Anticipated reseach team will build to consist of four core tresearch team leads over projected timeline
5	Anticipated Indigenous data governance team will be responsible for internal IDG as well as providing IDS training to external parties and managing external access to data resources
6	Early investment in online systems and staff to support development of research network, research collaborations and communities of practice
7	Anticipated that grants administration support will increase over time alongside growth in research team and collaborative work
8	Provision made for some specialist marketing and media based support
9	Corporate services covered through internal administration charge from host organisation
10	Provision made for recruiter to be engaged to cover Level 8 and above roles
11	Maintain a pool of trained community researchers (1 week per annum paid to support general actiivty, project based activity covered in research project grants)

Appendix C – Expenses Summary

Expenses Summary	2024|25	2025|26	2026|27	2027|28	2028|29	2029|30
Establishment	$ 153,082	$ 26,690				
Governance Related Costs	$ 3,250	$ 13,520	$ 13,520	$ 13,520	$ 13,520	$ 13,520
People Related Costs	$ 386,121	$ 1,839,858	$ 2,333,816	$ 2,848,284	$ 3,183,056	$ 3,677,101
Core Operating Costs	$ 340,261	$ 973,742	$ 1,199,684	$ 1,425,552	$ 1,544,392	$ 1,708,487
Activity Related Operating Costs (exc. Grant funded Research Program Costs)	$ 39,000	$ 87,980	$ 144,380	$ 177,260	$ 197,660	$ 206,560
Total Expenses	$ 921,713	$ 2,941,790	$ 3,691,400	$ 4,464,617	$ 4,938,628	$ 5,605,668
Three Year Total			$ 7,554,904			

Three Year Expenses Summary	FY24-FY26	FY24-FY26
Establishment	$ 179,772	2.4%
Governance Related Costs	$ 30,290	0%
People Related Costs	$ 4,559,794	60%
Core Operating Costs	$ 2,513,687	33%
Activity Related Operating Costs (exc. Grant funded Research Program Costs)	$ 271,360	4%
Total Expenses	$ 7,554,904	100%

Appendix D – Non-research activity model

		2024|25	2025|26	2026|27	2027|28	2028|29	2029|30
		No.	No.	No.	No.	No.	No.
(1)	National conferences hosted		1	1	1	1	1
(2)	Collaborative forums hosted	4	2	4	4	4	4
	Training sessions hosted		4	6	8	10	10
	Training sessions online		4	10	10	10	10
	Community researcher training		1	4	4	4	4
(3)	Guest speakers		1	2	3	4	4
(5)	Research collaboration hubs	1	3	4	5	6	7
	No. events	4	12	25	27	29	29
	Assumptions						
1	Assume annual 1 day conference with approximately 100 people commencing in 2025|26						
2	Assume 2 - 3 hour collaborative forums ramping up to and average of 1 per quarter						
3	Provide to engage paid guest speakers at some events						
4	Provide for limited activity in set up period to support early awareness building and engagement						
5	Assume gradually work to establish and support collaborative hubs in each state and territory						

© SNAICC – National Voice for our Children, 2023

Level 8, 36 Wellington St, Collingwood VIC 3066 | ABN 42 513 562 148 | T: (03) 9419 1921
www.snaicc.org.au