

Northern Territory Implementation Plan and Performance Report (Plan) - 2022

PRESCHOOL REFORM AGREEMENT - 2022 TO 2025

PART 1: PRELIMINARIES

1. This plan is a schedule to the Preschool Reform Agreement 2022 – 2025 (the agreement) and should be read in conjunction with the Agreement. It covers the period from 1 January 2022 to 31 December 2022.
2. The agreement reaffirms a national commitment to provide universal access to, and improved participation by, children in quality preschool programs in the year before full-time school (YBFS), with a focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and disadvantaged children. These programs should be delivered in a manner that meets the needs of children, parents and communities at a cost which does not present a barrier to participation.
3. The objective of the agreement is to facilitate children's early learning and development and transition to school by maintaining universal access to quality preschool programs for all children, improving participation in preschool programs and maximising the benefit of the preschool year by improving outcomes for children.
4. It supports the delivery of 15 hours a week, or 600 hours a year of quality preschool programs, by a degree qualified early childhood teacher for all children, regardless of the setting in which programs are delivered, in the year before school.
5. It has a focus on improving preschool participation and outcomes including for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and disadvantaged children.
6. This is the first of four annual implementation plans that will build on each other to deliver the reforms outlined in the agreement.

PART 2: TERMS AND DEFINITIONS OF THIS PLAN

7. This plan will commence as soon as it is agreed between the Commonwealth of Australia, represented by the Minister for Education and Youth and the Northern Territory, represented by the Minister for Education.

8. As a schedule to the agreement, the purpose of this plan is to provide the public with an indication of how the Northern Territory demonstrates its capacity to achieve and deliver the outcomes of the agreement.
9. This plan will cease on completion of the final performance reporting and the processing of final payments against the performance benchmarks or milestones set out within it for 2022.
10. The Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment and central agencies will develop a new template for implementation plans from 2023 in consultation with States and Territories. The Commonwealth will require new and additional information in accordance with the Preschool Reform Agreement and the Federal Funding Agreements Principles from 2023.
11. This plan may be varied by written agreement between the Commonwealth and the responsible State Minister.
12. The parties to this plan do not intend any of the provisions to be legally enforceable. However, that does not lessen the parties' commitment to the plan and its full implementation.

PART 3: FUNDING CONTRIBUTION

Commonwealth Funding Contributions

13. The Commonwealth's estimated total financial contribution to the Northern Territory is set out in Tables 1a (program year) and 1b (financial year) of the Agreement.
14. However, the Commonwealth's financial contribution in individual program years is adjusted in accordance with the notes to Tables 1a and 1b of the Agreement. Consistent with the agreed adjustment process, the final amounts for 2022 are set out in **Table 1**.
15. The Commonwealth contribution can only be moved between years with the agreement of the Commonwealth.

Table 1: 2022 Commonwealth financial contribution to the Northern Territory

Category	Amount
Estimated YBFS Contribution	\$4,472,691
Adjustment to Estimated YBFS Contribution	N/A
Top-up to maintain 2021 levels	\$199,672
Implementation Project funding	\$1,000,000
Total Budget	\$5,672,363

16. **Table 2** should be used to show how the Northern Territory will use Commonwealth funding to meet the objectives of the Preschool Reform Agreement. This may include strategies to facilitate preschool attendance by children in the year before full-time school.

Table 2: Program/activities objectives and outcomes

	Program/activity	Outputs	Objectives	Outcomes	Estimated C'th funds allocated
1.	Maintain universal access to 600 hours of quality preschool for all children in the year before full-time school	<p>Implementing accessible quality early childhood education programs which meet the needs of parents and communities at a cost which does not present a barrier to attending a quality early childhood education program, particularly for vulnerable and disadvantaged children.</p> <p>Support all children's quality early childhood education attendance, regardless of whether quality early childhood programs are delivered through schools (non-government and government) or long day care centres.</p>	To facilitate children's early learning and development and transition to school by maintaining universal access to, and improve attendance at an affordable, quality early childhood education programs for all children.	All children, including vulnerable and disadvantaged children, have access to, and regularly attend an affordable, quality early childhood education program	\$4.0 million
2.	Increase participation in quality early childhood program in the year before fulltime school	Implementing accessible quality early childhood education programs which meet the needs of parents and communities at a cost which does not present a barrier to attendance, particularly for vulnerable and disadvantaged children.	To facilitate children's early learning and development and transition to school by maintaining universal access to, and improving participation in, affordable, quality early childhood programs for all children, including the Families as First Teachers program.	<p>All children, including vulnerable and disadvantaged children, have access to, and regularly attended an affordable, quality early childhood education program.</p> <p>All children in remote and very remote areas have access to free preschool from three years of age.</p>	\$0.7 million

		<p>Delivery of strategies and actions targeting the attendance of Aboriginal children at a quality early childhood education program, including in remote areas.</p> <p>Delivery of strategies and actions targeting the attendance of vulnerable and disadvantaged children at a quality early childhood education program.</p>			
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State context and funding contributions

17. Context influencing the Northern Territory delivery of preschool and the Northern Territory's investment in preschool for 2022 is covered in this section.

- a. In developing this implementation plan, consideration has been given to the unique demographic, geographic, economic and historic characteristics which differentiate the Northern Territory from other jurisdictions that affect the delivery of services and achievement of outcomes.
 - i. The Northern Territory has the lowest population of all states and territories with a population of approximately 246 300 people representing approximately one per cent of the total Australian Population, spread over an area of 1 349 129 sq.km.
 - ii. The Northern Territory has the highest proportion of Aboriginal people of all states and territories, with 74 546, or approximately 30 per cent of the total of the Northern Territory's total population identifying as Aboriginal.
 - iii. Approximately 77 per cent of the Aboriginal population live in either remote (23 per cent) or very remote localities (54 per cent).
 - iv. Northern Territory children have high levels of developmental vulnerability across all five domains of the Australian Early Development Census: physical health and wellbeing; social competence; emotional maturity; language and cognitive skills; and communication and general knowledge.
 - v. 23.4 per cent of Northern Territory children are vulnerable on two or more domains of the Australian Early Development Census compared with 11.1 per cent nationally.

- vi. Government schools represent approximately 75 per cent of all services that provide a quality preschool program in the Northern Territory, and provide preschool for the majority of the Aboriginal and vulnerable and disadvantaged cohorts.
- b. Northern Territory Government schools provide 600 hours per year of free preschool for four year-old children. This Agreement contributes to increasing the Northern Territory's base preschool provision of 480 hours of quality preschool per year to 600 hours per year. The Northern Territory has adopted a number of strategies to boost enrolment and support the participation of Aboriginal, vulnerable and disadvantaged children, and to promote quality preschool service provision.
- c. Complementary Northern Territory Government Department of Education activities include:
 - i. implementing initiatives under *A Share in the Future – Indigenous Education Strategy 2015-2024* including evidence-based, quality early childhood education programs and parental engagement in supporting their children's learning and development;
 - ii. continuing to embed the NT Preschool Curriculum;
 - iii. working with families, communities and agencies to deliver quality early childhood education services to improve child wellbeing and ensure a positive transition to school;
 - iv. working closely with schools to implement school attendance strategies;
 - v. continuing to provide the Early Childhood Services Subsidy to all regulated long day care services in the Northern Territory to offset the cost for families and to encourage participation of children;
 - vi. assessment of long day care services and preschools to determine if they provide a quality preschool program to children in the year before full-time school, delivered by a qualified early childhood teacher, for 600 hours per year, in accordance with the Early Years Learning Framework, in a manner that meets the needs of children and their families, and at a cost that does not present a barrier for children, families and the community to access;
 - vii. providing quality early childhood education programs to engage vulnerable and disadvantaged children, Aboriginal children, parents and caregivers in remote and very remote communities including the Families as First Teachers program; and
 - viii. Northern Territory preschool expenditure reported annually as part of the Budget Paper publication. Preschool outputs can be found in the BP3 2021-22 paper published on the Northern Territory Treasury website at <https://budget.nt.gov.au/budget-papers>.

Implementation Project Funding Contributions

18. This section will include a summary of details of implementation project funding provided by the Commonwealth including funding amounts and purpose. Table 3 provides details of how Implementation Project Funding will be used to deliver reforms, including key performance indicators (KPI) and timing.

Table 3: Overview of Implementation Project Funding for Northern Territory - Statement of Allocations (updated by 31 January 2022)

Implementation Project (details)	Commonwealth funding	Actions (incl. deliverables)	KPI	Timing (incl. delivery schedule)
Preschool in the NT Review	\$0.75 million	Procure external consultant to conduct a review that will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> understand the current situation of preschool delivery and funding in the NT identify best practice approaches and opportunities for preschool reform, including ways to maximise existing funding engage and consult with NT stakeholders. 	Consultant engaged	30 June 2022
		Consider final report and recommendations to government.	Final Report	30 October 2022
		Develop a strategic approach to the review's recommendations.	Strategy agreed	31 December 2022
Develop capacity to deliver PRA from 2023	\$0.25 million	Assess existing system capacity and impact of proposed changes to attendance collection and reporting system, including FFC. Implement approaches to support delivery of PRA.	Actions undertaken	31 December 2022

19. Consistent with the terms of the Agreement, Commonwealth funding for implementation projects will be provided as part of the first milestone payment of the Agreement, subject to the Commonwealth and the Territory agreeing to this Plan.

Risk Management

20. The Northern Territory will actively identify, monitor and manage the risks associated with delivering outcomes under the agreement, through maintaining a risk management plan.

PART 4: REFORMS

21. As part of the agreement, the Northern Territory and the Commonwealth agree to work collaboratively to implement reforms outlined in the Additional terms in the agreement.
22. The actions that the Northern Territory will undertake to meet these commitments are detailed in **Table 4**.

Table 4: Planned Actions for the period 1 January 2022 to 31 December 2022 for the Northern Territory

Reform Element	Actions	Timing
Reform Element One: Implement Commonwealth Funding Follows Child		
Steps to ready the Territory to ensure Commonwealth Funding Follows Child can be implemented in 2023.	<p>The Northern Territory will undertake the following activities in 2022:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quantify the number of children who access preschool programs in long day care and early learning centres. Develop policy mechanisms regarding enrolments across early childhood sectors for the purpose of applying Funding Follows Child in 2023. Consultations with key stakeholders and the sector on proposed changes. Develop internal processes for the allocation and distribution of funds to services. Develop an acquittal process of funds at a service level. Review of preschool aimed at optimising available funding and resources to deliver an evidence-based and best-practice approach, particularly to support our most vulnerable children and reduce barriers to participation. Specific actions are outlined in Table 3. 	Throughout 2022
Reform Element Two: Implement a new national preschool attendance measure		
Work to ready the Territory to measure preschool attendance in 2024 and provide baseline data to the Commonwealth in 2023.	<p>The Northern Territory will work collaboratively with the Australian Government to prepare for the commencement of an attendance measure in 2023 and baseline data collection.</p> <p>The NT will develop internal systems to ensure capacity to deliver PRA from 2023. Specific actions are outlined in Table 3.</p>	Throughout 2022
Strategies to facilitate preschool attendance by children in the YBFS. For strategies relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, consistent with the Closing the Gap agreement, engage those communities and/or representative bodies in the design process.	<p>The Northern Territory will undertake the following activities in 2022:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with families, communities and agencies to deliver quality early childhood education services to improve child wellbeing and ensure a positive transition to school. Continue to promote parent choice for families in remote areas through the provision of other supported quality early learning programs in the year before full time schooling. Work closely with preschools in school settings to implement school attendance strategies. 	Throughout 2022

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to use the Department of Education's student needs-based funding model to allocate funding to non-government preschools to support the delivery of a quality preschool. Continue to use the NT Preschool Curriculum to provide quality programs that embed the Early Years Learning Framework. <p>Review of preschool aimed at optimising available funding and resources to deliver an evidence-based and best-practice approach, particularly to support our most vulnerable children and reduce barriers to participation. Specific actions are outlined in Table 3.</p>	
Reform Element Three: Implement a new national Preschool Outcomes Measure from 2025		
Plans for how the Territory will work with the Commonwealth to develop the preschool outcomes measure.	The Northern Territory will work collaboratively with the Australian Government to prepare for the commencement of an outcomes measure and the work for the trial in 2023.	Throughout 2022
Reform Delivery/Implementation		
Territory-specific data and implementation issues and strategies for how these will be overcome in the context of assessing performance under the Agreement.	The Northern Territory will work collaboratively with the Australian Government to identify NT-specific data and implementation issues and develop strategies to minimise any effects on the Northern Territory's performance under the Agreement.	Throughout 2022

PART 5: PERFORMANCE AND REPORTING ARRANGEMENTS

23. Part 5 sets out the performance and reporting arrangements for the Northern Territory for 2022.
24. Commonwealth and Territory based collections or data sources and methodologies, agreed by both the Parties to this Plan, to measure progress against the performance milestones and benchmarks and targets in the Agreement, are set out in Part 5 of this plan and Appendix B of the agreement.
25. These data and performance specifications will be used to report Northern Territory's performance, except for the supplementary data agreed by the parties to this plan.
26. Supplementary data reports must contain the following details for each Performance Indicator (PI) where the method is not consistent with the Early Childhood Education and Care Minimal Data Set (NMDS):
 - a. PI calculation description (numerator, denominator, computation and presentation)
 - b. numerator information (collection name and population description)
 - c. denominator information (collection name and population description)
 - d. calculation notes (including any information about how the PI is calculated)
 - e. methodology
 - f. rationale for supplementary data and reporting (including any additional information to explain how and why the specifications for the supplementary data differ from the specifications in the NMDS).

Performance requirements, reporting and payment summary 2022

27. Performance Reporting for 2022 will capture progress against planned actions undertaken by the Northern Territory as detailed at Table 4.
28. Performance results and reporting will be signed off by the Commonwealth Minister who will then inform the Northern Territory Minister of the outcome through an exchange of letters.

Sign off

29. The Parties have confirmed their commitment to this agreement as follows:


 21/3/2022

Signature

Date

The Hon Lauren Moss MLA

Minister for Education

 23/3/2022

Signature

Date

The Hon Stuart Robert MP

A/g Minister for Education and Youth