

Northern Territory: Implementation Plan and Performance Report (Plan) - 2023

Preschool Reform agreement – 2022 to 2025

This Plan covers:

- the implementation activities for the period 1 January 2023 to 31 December 2023 (Tables 2 – 4);
- the performance report for the period 1 January 2023 to 31 December 2023. (Annex 1 &2).

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. This Plan covers the period from 1 January 2023 to 31 December 2023.
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 children 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. The Agreement 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. The Agreement has a focus on improving preschool participation and outcomes including for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and disadvantaged children.

6. This Plan is the second of four annual implementation plans that 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 Early Childhood Education, and the Northern Territory, represented by their 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 2023.*
10. The Commonwealth Government Department of Education and central agencies will develop a new template for Implementation Plans from 2024 in consultation with states and territories (States). The Commonwealth will require new and additional information in accordance with the Agreement and the Federal Funding Agreements Principles from 2024.
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 2023 are set out in **Table 1**.
15. **Table 1** does not include funding for children who repeat the YBFS. This funding will be calculated and paid in arrears per Appendix A.1 to the Agreement.
16. The Commonwealth contribution can only be moved between years with the agreement of the Commonwealth Minister. This would address extraordinary circumstances only and details would be agreed in the context, noting Commonwealth Funding Follows Child requires funding is expended in the year for which it is provided.

Table 1: 2023 Commonwealth financial contribution to the Northern Territory

Category	Amount ¹
Estimated YBFS Financial Contribution	\$4,763,163
Adjustment to YBFS Estimated Financial Contribution	(\$158,455)
Additional funding to maintain 2021 levels	\$67,655
Total Commonwealth financial contribution	\$4,672,363

¹Figures may not add due to rounding.

17. **Table 2** should be used to show how the Northern Territory will use Commonwealth funding to meet the objectives of the 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 Cth funds allocated
Program year funding (Commonwealth Funding Follows Child)					
1.	Maintain universal access to 600 hours of preschool programs for all children in the year before full-time school.	Support quality early childhood education programs which meet the needs of parents and communities, regardless of service type including government and non-government schools and long day care services.	To facilitate children's early learning and development.	All children, including Aboriginal and vulnerable and disadvantaged children, have access to, and are able to participate in, an affordable, quality early childhood education program.	\$4.62 million
2.	Increase participation in a quality early childhood program in the year before full-time school.	Quality early childhood education programs which meet the needs of parents and communities.	To facilitate children's early learning and development.	All children, including Aboriginal and vulnerable and disadvantaged children, have access to, and regularly attend an affordable, quality early childhood education program. All children in remote and very remote	\$0.06 million

				areas have access to free preschool from the age of three.	
Additional funding to maintain 2021 funding levels					
3.	Refer to rows one and two				
Total all programs and activities					\$4.67 million

The Northern Territory will use the following methodology to calculate the number of children accessing a quality preschool program in each of the following service settings to whom Commonwealth Funding Follows the Child will be directed:

- a. Preschool program delivered by a Northern Territory Government school
 - Funding for these preschool programs is allocated through government's school resourcing model, [Government school funding in the Northern Territory | Department of Education](#), noting the Commonwealth Funding Follows the Child represents a small proportion of the total amount of funding allocated for each child.
 - Enrolment data collected in the 2022 Age Grade Census is used to inform the school's average student needs profile and 2023 per student rate. 2023 funding calculations (including for preschool students) are determined based on a school's per student rate and funded student number. The funded student number is determined in Term 1 2023 based on the school's 2022 effective enrolment and movement in week 4, term 1 enrolment.
 - If a child is enrolled in multiple services, funding will be prioritised to a school based preschool program. The Northern Territory's annual Quality Preschool Programs Survey will inform this data.
- b. Preschool program delivered by a remote non-government school where there is no government preschool provision
 - Funding for preschool delivered by a remote non-government school is allocated through a historical per student rate non-government school resourcing model, noting the Commonwealth Funding Follows the Child represents a small proportion of the total amount of funding allocated for each child.
 - Enrolment and attendance data collected by the Northern Territory Department of Education in 2022 and 2023 are used to inform funding calculations.
- c. Preschool program delivered by a long day care service, including preschool provided by an Early Learning Centre and other non-government schools
 - The Northern Territory will administer its Quality Preschool Programs Survey once per annum to determine how many preschool aged children are receiving a quality preschool program through their service.
 - Enrolment and attendance data collected in the 2023 Quality Preschool Programs Survey are used to inform funding calculations.
 - If a child is also enrolled in a school based preschool program, funding will be prioritised to the school.

State context and funding contributions

18. Context influencing the Northern Territory delivery of preschool and the States' investment in preschool for 2023 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 smallest population of all states and territories, with a population of approximately 250 600 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 and Torres Strait Islander people of all states and territories, with 76 736 people, representing approximately 30.8 per cent of the Northern Territory's total population, most of whom reside in remote and very remote areas.
 - iii. Of the 76 736 who identify as being Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin, approximately 2.7 per cent are aged 0 to 4 years, compared with 0.41 per cent for the same cohort nationally.
 - iv. Approximately 25.7 per cent of Northern Territory children are vulnerable on two or more domains of the Australian Early Development Census compared with 11.4 per cent nationally.
 - v. 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 and five year old children, and three year olds in very remote locations. This Agreement contributes to the Northern Territory's base preschool provision of 490 hours per year (historical offering in schools), increasing the provision of quality preschool to 600 hours per year.
- c. The *Northern Territory's Education Engagement Strategy 2022 – 2031* identifies goals and actions that aim to engage every child in learning and improve their educational outcomes - <https://education.nt.gov.au/statistics-research-and-strategies/education-engagement-strategy>.
- d. The Northern Territory Government Department of Education's *Education NT Strategy 2021-2025* includes system priorities and strategic actions that aim to support every child to engage, grow and achieve - https://education.nt.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0007/1061386/education-NT-strategy-2021-2025.pdf.

- e. The Northern Territory Government Department of Education is undertaking a number of projects that will help inform how to build a contemporary early childhood system for the Northern Territory. These projects include review of the Families as First Teachers program, trialling two years of quality early learning from the age of three years in urban and regional government school settings, evaluating the standard and capacity of 4¹ Community Child Care Funded Restricted services (Commonwealth funded) and review of the funding and delivery of preschool in the Northern Territory (funded under this Agreement).
- f. Complementary Northern Territory Government Department of Education activities include:
- i. working closely with schools and system leaders to implement school attendance strategies;
 - ii. supporting vulnerable and disadvantaged children, Aboriginal children, parents and caregivers in remote and very remote communities to engage in quality early childhood education programs through programs and services such as the Families as First Teachers program, Child and Family Centres and Connected Beginnings programs;
 - iii. developing resources to support the delivery of quality preschool programs including the *NT Preschool Curriculum: a supporting resource for the Early Years Learning Framework* and the *Preschool STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Maths) Games*;
 - iv. supporting schools and early childhood services and programs to develop effective transitioning periods for children and their families to and from preschool using the *Northern Territory Early Childhood Transitioning Package*;
 - v. developing a framework to promote and support children's Continuity of Learning from birth to year 12;
 - vi. partnering with key early childhood stakeholders and financial support to deliver the annual *Northern Territory Education and Care Awards* and *Little People Big Dreams Conference*, which aim to promote quality early childhood practices and raise the profile of the sector;
 - vii. continuing to provide the Early Childhood Services Subsidy to all regulated long day care services in the Northern Territory to help with the cost of providing a service and subsequently reduce the cost of education and care for parents;
 - viii. implementing the Northern Territory Quality Preschool Programs Survey to determine if long day care, early learning centers and other non-government schools are providing a quality preschool program to children in the year before full-time school, delivered by a qualified early childhood teacher, for at least 600 hours per year, using the Early Years Learning Framework;

- ix. Co-chairing the Early Childhood Policy Group: Workforce Subgroup with the Australian Government; and
- x. publicly reporting preschool expenditure annually in the Northern Territory's Budget Paper (BP3) publication available on the Northern Territory Treasury website - <https://budget.nt.gov.au/budget-papers>.

Implementation Project Funding Contributions

19. This section will include a State's summary of details of implementation project funding provided by the Commonwealth in 2022 including funding amounts, purpose and the State's progress in implementing the project to date. States will be required to provide details of how Implementation Project Funding will be used to deliver reforms, including key performance indicators (KPIs) and timing. Details will be captured at **Table 3**.

Table 3: Overview of Implementation Project Funding for Northern Territory - Statement of Allocations

Implementation Project (details)	Commonwealth funding	Actions (incl. deliverables)	KPI	Timing (incl. delivery schedule)
Preschool in the NT Review	\$0.75m	Support 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. 	Interim project deliverables (interim report and options paper)	Jan-May 2023 (Ongoing)
		Consider final report and recommendations to government	Final Report	May 2023
		Develop a strategic approach to the review's recommendations	Strategy developed	July 2023
Develop capacity to deliver PRA from 2024	\$0.25million	Assess existing system capacity and impact of proposed changes to attendance collection and reporting system, including FFC.	Actions undertaken	31 December 2023

		Implement approaches to support the delivery of this reform element.		
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³Timeframes including delivery schedule has been updated for 2023.

20. Consistent with the terms of the Agreement, Commonwealth funding for Implementation Projects was provided as part of the first milestone payment of the Agreement, when the Commonwealth and State agreed the 2022 Implementation Plan.

Risk Management

21. The Northern Territory will actively identify, monitor and manage the risks associated with delivering outcomes under the Agreement, such as through maintaining their own risk management plan.

PART 4: REFORMS

22. 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.
23. 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 2023 to 31 December 2023 for the Northern Territory

Reform Element	Actions	Timing
Reform Element One: Implement Commonwealth Funding Follows Child		
<p>Details of how the Commonwealth Funding Follows Child at the setting level will be implemented in the State.</p>	<p>To support the Northern Territory’s administration of the Commonwealth’s Funding Follows the Child, the Northern Territory will develop and implement a communications strategy.</p> <p>Funding will be disseminated in each setting as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Preschool program delivered by a Northern Territory Government school: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - School resourcing funding allocated to schools in Term 1 of 2023 - Confirmation of the funding allocation will occur via the Northern Territory Government Department of Education’s centralised datasets. - Funding contributes to the provision of free access to a preschool program. - Develop internal mechanisms to provide transparency of Commonwealth contribution b. Preschool program delivered by a remote non-government school where there is no government school provision: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Funding allocated to schools in Semester 2 of 2023 based on 2022 and 2023 enrolment and attendance data. - Confirmation of the funding allocation will occur via Northern Territory Government Department of Education’s centralised datasets. - Develop and administer an annual acquittal statement to confirm expenditure of the Commonwealth Funding Follows the Child. c. Preschool program delivered by a long day care service including preschool provided by an early learning centre and other non-government schools: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Administer the Northern Territory Quality Preschool Programs Survey 2023. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Term 1, 2023 b. Semester 2, 2023 c. Term 2, 2023

Reform Element	Actions	Timing
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop and administer an annual acquittal statement to confirm expenditure of the Commonwealth Funding Follows the Child. 	
Reform Element Two: Implement a new national preschool attendance measure		
<p>Work to ready the State to measure preschool attendance in 2025 and provide baseline data to the Commonwealth in 2024.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Northern Territory will work collaboratively with the Australian Government to prepare for the commencement of an attendance measure in 2024 and baseline data collection. • The Northern Territory will develop internal systems to ensure capacity to deliver on this reform element from 2024. Specific actions are outlined in Table 3. 	<p>Throughout 2023</p>
<p>Strategies to facilitate participation in preschool 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>	<p>The Northern Territory will undertake the following activities in 2023:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop targeted communications including key messages and resources to promote enrolment and participation of preschool aged children, particularly with Aboriginal and vulnerable families. • Increase the number of Early Childhood Education and Care educators that will receive cultural responsiveness training. • Develop and implement targeted strategies to effect quality improvements across service settings. • Support schools to improve student outcomes as part of their focus on engagement, as outlined in their annual school improvement plan and the Northern Territory's annual regional plans. • Promote and support preschool children's engagement in a quality preschool program through the following programs: Families as First Teachers Program, Learning with Families, Literacy for Parents, Child and Family Centres and Connected Beginnings. • Actively promote data collected via the Australian Early Development Census with communities and government and 	<p>Throughout 2023</p>

Reform Element	Actions	Timing
	<p>non-government agencies to highlight the levels of vulnerability and help inform strategies to improve children’s outcomes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to promote the use, and review and update where necessary: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. <i>NT Preschool Curriculum: a supporting resource for the Early Years Learning Framework</i> to embed the Early Years Learning Framework; and ii. <i>(ii) Northern Territory Early Childhood Transitioning Package</i> to help services to develop effective transitioning periods for children and their families to and from preschool. <p>The Northern Territory’s review of preschool delivery and funding, outlined in Table 3, aim to assist the NT to identify possible future reforms, including how to support our most vulnerable and disadvantaged children and reduce barriers to participation.</p>	
Reform Element Three: Implement a new national preschool outcomes measure from 2025		
Plans for how the State will work collaboratively with the Commonwealth to develop the preschool outcomes measure.	The Northern Territory will work collaboratively with the Australian Government on the development of a preschool outcomes measure and prepare to trial in 2024.	Throughout 2023
Reform Delivery/Implementation		
State-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 Northern Territory specific data and implementation issues and develop strategies to minimise any effects on the Northern Territory’s performance under the Agreement.	Throughout 2023

PART 5: PERFORMANCE AND REPORTING ARRANGEMENTS

24. Part 5 sets out the performance and reporting arrangements for the Northern Territory for 2023.
25. The Commonwealth and State 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.
26. These data and performance specifications will be used to report Northern Territory performance, except for the supplementary data agreed by the Parties to this Plan.
27. 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 2023

28. Performance Reporting for 2023 will capture progress against planned actions undertaken by the Northern Territory as detailed at Table 4.
29. 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

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

Signed for and on behalf of the Northern Territory by

Signature Eva Lawler Date 5/3/22

The Hon Eva Lawler MLA
Minister for Education

Signed for and on behalf of the Commonwealth of Australia by

Signature Ann Oly Date 24/3/23

The Hon Dr. Anne Aly MP
Minister for Early Childhood Education | Minister for Youth

Annex 1 – Funding Follows Child Acquittals

Commonwealth Funding Follows Child acquittals (updated by 31 March 2024)

Requirements for Commonwealth Funding Follows Child can be found in Appendix A to the PRA.

Examples of the types of program expenditure and subsidies that meet these requirements include:

- a. For enrolled children (in each setting):
 - i. Fee relief for families
 - ii. Provision of early childhood teachers to deliver preschool programs
 - iii. Quality improvements, including teacher recruitment and retention
 - iv. Program subsidies, including needs-based funding models or additional support

- b. For funding that cannot be attributed to children enrolled in a quality preschool program:
 - i. Communication and outreach
 - ii. Enrolment and attendance strategies, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and disadvantaged children.
 - iii. Specialised programs, without which children would have no access to preschool programs, or programs that meet their individual needs

It is not the intention of Funding Follows the Child that per-child contributions are used to support:

- c. For enrolled children (in each setting):
 - i. Programs that cannot be attributed to settings
- d. For children who are not enrolled:
 - i. Universal program subsidies and fee relief for children enrolled in preschool programs.

States should provide an account of how FFC is allocated across settings and describe their approach or methodology to derive their calculation for the number of children in the YBFS within a particular setting. States should also provide some explanation of their method for estimating the YBFS population which is not yet participating in preschool.

To acquit funding by setting, states will need to complete Tables 1, 2 and 3 below and submit these to the Commonwealth by 31 March 2024.

In Table 1, States should set out the number of children that attended preschool in their YBFS in each setting as determined using the methodology outlined in their implementation plans. They should also include the total funding spent in each setting.

Table 1. Summary of children and Commonwealth funding spent by setting

Setting	Number of Children attending preschool in the YBFS	Total Commonwealth funding spent in setting
CBDC	State calculation of [n] children in YBFS counted against setting.	\$N.Nm
Stand-alone	State calculation of [n] children in YBFS counted against setting.	\$N.Nm
School-based preschool	State calculation of [n] children in YBFS counted against setting.	\$N.Nm
Total Commonwealth Funding spent in all settings		\$N.Nm

In Table 2, states should provide a summary of expenditure by program for initiatives that were undertaken to promote enrolment and attendance in preschool in reference to clause 7 of Appendix A. Again, this should reflect the methodology described in the State's implementation plan.

Table 2. Summary of expenditure of Commonwealth funding not attributed to children in the YBFS enrolled in preschool (children in the YBFS who are not enrolled)

Estimated number of children in the YBFS, for which funding cannot be attributed to children in any setting	Total Commonwealth funding spent
State calculation of [n] children	\$N.Nm

In Table 3, States should acquit funding against programs outlined in Table 2 of Implementation Plans. Where a program runs across more than one setting, a row should be added for each setting. This table relates to clauses 6 and 7 of Appendix A which outline the purposes for which Commonwealth funding should be used.

Table 3. Commonwealth funding by program and setting

Item	Setting	Program description	Amount (\$)
<i>Auto #</i>	<i>e.g. School-based</i>	<i>Type a description of the program.</i>	<i>\$NNN,NNN</i>
1.	Choose an item.	Click or tap here to enter text.	\$0
			\$ 0.00

Additional funding to maintain 2021 levels is not required to be acquitted through this template. However, States may choose to acquit this funding in these tables if this cannot be separated. States may also choose to include state funding at their own discretion.

Annex 2 – Progress Update

Progress update on actions agreed in the Implementation Plan

States reporting should provide updates on work agreed in Implementation Plans (Table 4) including implementation of attendance strategies in the following tables. The below table provides a template for the submission of this progress update.

Table 1: Reporting on delivery of Planned Actions for 2023 (update by 31 March 2024)

Element	Agreed Action	Progress Update
Reform Element One: Implement Commonwealth Funding Follows Child		
How Commonwealth funding follows child at the setting level will be implemented in the State	As per Table 4 in the Implementation Plan in 2023	A progress update on actions agreed at Table 4 provided in Annex 1
Reform Element Two: Implement a new national preschool attendance measure		
Work to ready the State to measure preschool attendance in 2025 and provide baseline data to the Commonwealth in 2024.	As per Table 4 in the Implementation Plan in 2023	A progress update on actions agreed at Table 4
Strategies to facilitate participation in preschool by children in the year before full-time school. 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.	As per Table 4 in the Implementation Plan in 2023	A progress update on actions agreed at Table 4
Reform Element Three: Implement a new national preschool outcomes measure from 2025		
Plans for how the State will work collaboratively with the Commonwealth to develop the preschool outcomes measure.	As per Table 4 in the Implementation Plan in 2023	A progress update on actions agreed at Table 4
Reform Delivery/Implementation		
State-specific data and implementation issues and strategies for how these will be overcome in the context of assessing performance under the Agreement.	As per Table 4 in the Implementation Plan in 2023	A progress update on actions agreed at Table 4

ATTACHMENT B