

# First Nations Consultation Project



SNAPSHOT SUMMARY

# Acknowledgement

The Kids Research Institute Australia acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Custodians of the land and waters of Australia. We also acknowledge the Nyoongar Wadjuk, Yawuru, Kariyarra and Kurna Elders, their people and their land upon which the Institute is located and seek their wisdom in our work to improve the health and development of all children. We would also like to acknowledge and pay respect to the lands and waters of the communities that we yarned with.

The members of the First Nations Consultation Team deeply value and respect the generosity and sharing of information, experiences, perspectives, and cultural knowledge from the many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples that have yarned with us over the course of this project. We heard and recognise the current inequalities and the enduring impacts of the past and present events on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We also heard and recognise the immense strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities.

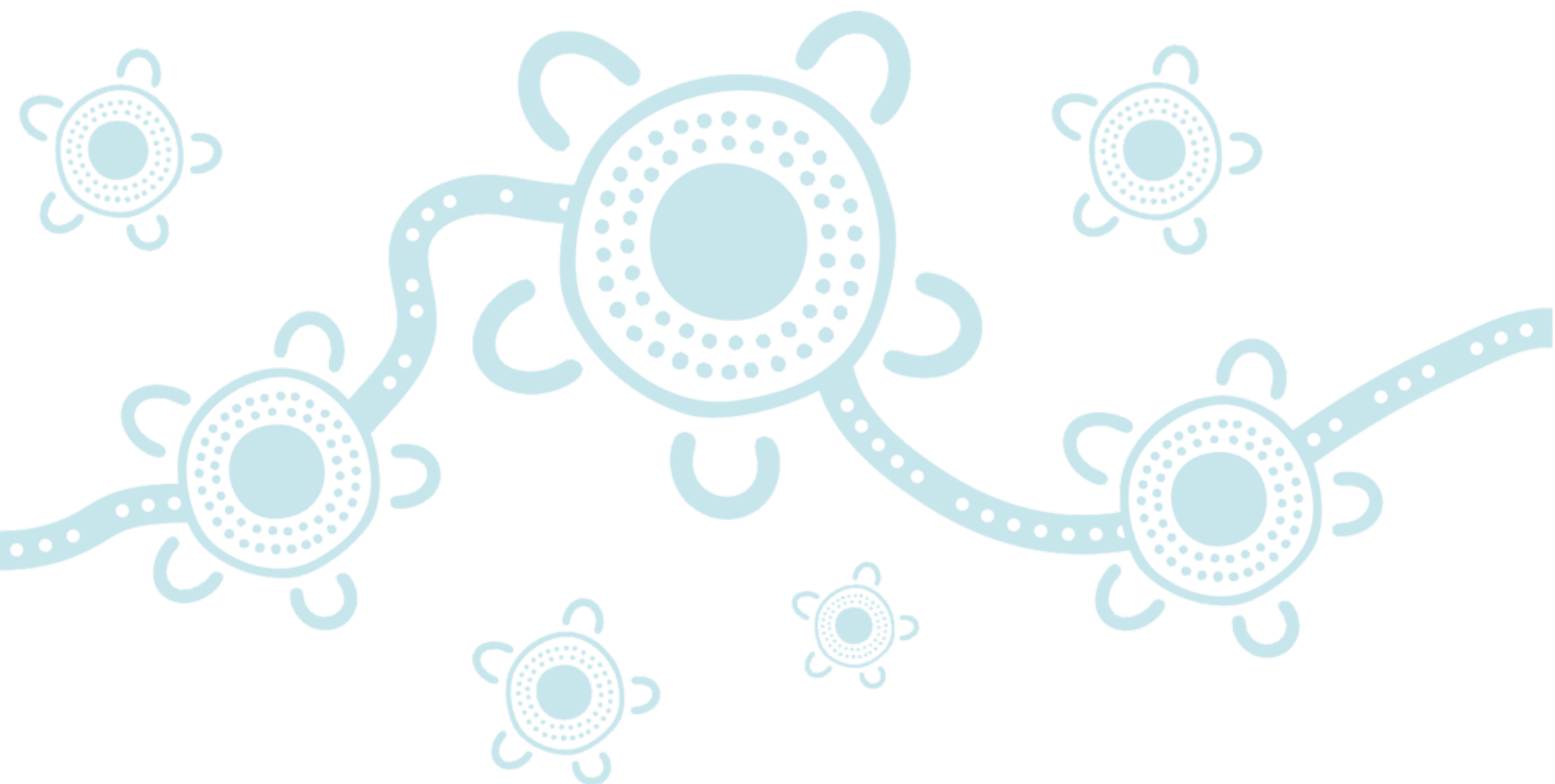
We are dedicated to working with and alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to ensure First Nations voices are heard and elevated and First Nations preferences, perspectives, and priorities guide research, policy and practice in the design and delivery of early childhood supports for First Nations children.

# Snapshot Summary

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (hereafter, First Nations) cultures are among the oldest living continuous cultures in the world. Culture is a known strength and protective factor for First Nations children and families (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan 2023-2026; Lohoar et al., 2014), and connection to culture and identity is an important determinant for a wide range of long-term outcomes for First Nations peoples, including young people (Murrup-Stewart et al., 2021).

*“Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents understand ‘what works’ to keep their children safe and to raise them to be active contributors to family and community life.”* (Lohoar et al., 2014). A strong, collective, community approach to child rearing exists within First Nations culture – “one community, many eyes” (Lohoar et al., 2014). This contrasts with Western conceptualisations of ‘family’ as a single unit. It is known that these strong and nurturing connections to family and kinship networks within First Nations communities are integral to supporting the social and emotional wellbeing of First Nations peoples (Dudgeon et al., 2021).

Despite these known strengths, the impacts of colonisation, ongoing marginalisation, racism, and intergenerational transmission of trauma especially related to the Stolen Generations, have contributed to substantial health inequities for First Nations peoples (Productivity Commission, Closing the Gap Annual Data Compilation Report, 2024). Pertinent to this consultation project is the current, worsening progress towards Target 4 on the National Agreement on Closing the Gap – *“Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children Thrive in their Early Years”* (Closing the Gap Annual Data Compilation Report, 2024).



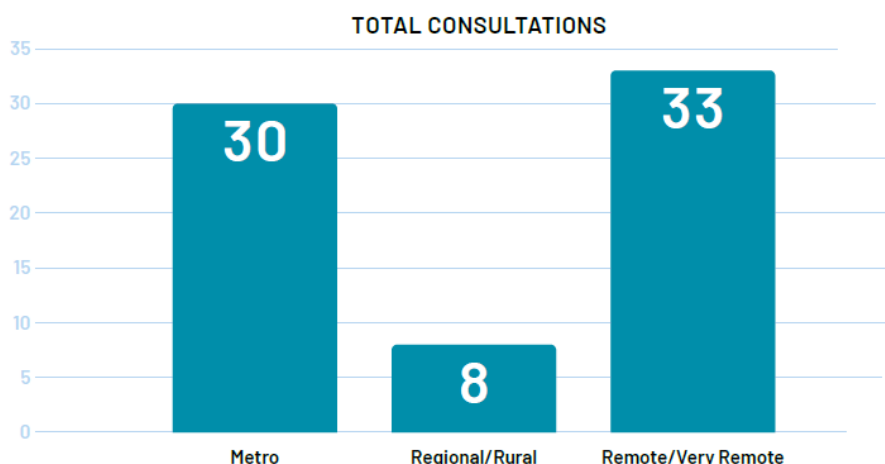
It is imperative these cultural strengths in conceptualisations of 'family', child rearing, and determinants of health are considerations for the design and delivery of early support programs for First Nations children.

We have a responsibility to ensure we are taking steps to not exacerbate current health inequities but to work meaningfully to closing the gap in those inequities. This consultation project was part of a broader process to address these considerations.

In parallel to the Pilot of Inklings (an early support program for babies and caregivers) across Western Australia, the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) also funded a First Nations-focused consultation project. This project was led by The Kids Research Institute Australia ('The Kids') and as per the agreement, involved "completing a 12-month period of consultation to determine if an adapted version of the Inklings Program is a priority for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Western Australia."

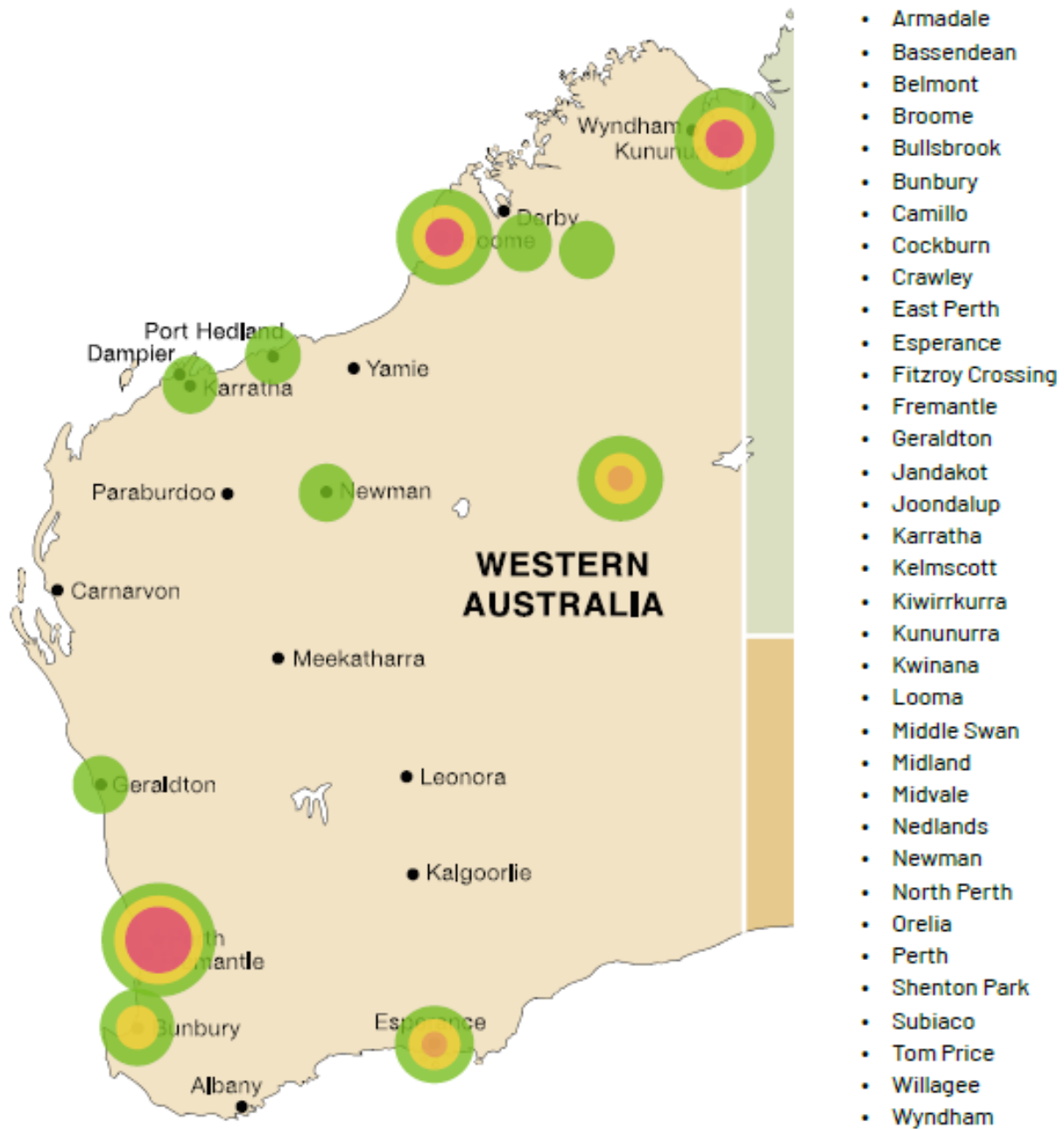
The First Nations Consultation Project commenced on 1 November 2023. The project concluded on 1 November 2024 with the delivery of a final report to the NDIA on 15 November 2024.

We held 71 consultation meetings with First Nations peoples and/or people from services that were identified as important for us to consult with by First Nations communities. Consultations were held across the majority of economic regions within Western Australia (WA), from the metro area to very remote communities. Consultations were conducted by our Aboriginal Community Coordinator and/or by Aboriginal team members from the project working group. There was relatively equal representation from First Nations individuals and organisations across metro and remote/very remote areas of the State.



**FIGURE 1:** Total Consultations classified according to the Modified Monash Model of complete consultations.

Between November 2023 – July 2024, the consultation team conducted 71 consultations across WA, in person or via teleconference, with individuals and organisations based in the following locations (see Figure 2):



**FIGURE 2:** Heatmap of completed consultations

It is important to acknowledge that while we were able to gather a wide array of First Nations perspectives across the State’s regions, the views of those consulted still do not necessarily reflect those of all First Nations peoples in these regions.

There were some consistent messages that emerged throughout the consultation regarding access and engagement with early developmental supports. Key themes that cut-across geographical regions included:



**The early years are a priority for First Nations communities, even within the context of very limited access to services in many regions.**



**There is a need and want for more education and awareness around early development and when to seek support.**



**Programs must be culturally safe to support family engagement.**

We also heard that:

- The Inklings Program will be accessible to First Nations families, including some in remote communities.
- There are minor modifications that can be made to the current model of the Inklings Program to mitigate some of the barriers to access and enhance the cultural safety for First Nations families.
- Investing in the development of a significant adaptation of the Inklings Program for delivery with First Nations families in remote communities is not a priority. Instead, the scoping and design of program needs in the early years for First Nations families in remote communities should be directed to Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs).

To reflect the sentiment of communities that we consulted with, we recommend that any future investment in the design, implementation, and evaluation of early supports for First Nations families should be directed to ACCOs that service the various regions of WA. This recommendation is in line with the outcomes of the independent review into the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) (Recommendation 14; Working together to deliver the NDIS Final Report, 2023).

It also directly aligns with priorities, goals, actions, and directions recommended in multiple, current national initiatives including the:

- National Agreement on Closing the Gap (2020)
- National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood Strategy (2021)
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan (2023-2026)
- Early Years Strategy (2024-2034)
- National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan (2021-2031)
- National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan (2021-2031)

We recognise that the steps to ensuring programs and services are culturally safe has no endpoint. This consultation is one step and one process in an ongoing journey of listening, adapting, enhancing and changing practices to ensure we are taking meaningful steps to improve accessibility and health outcomes for First Nations families. We hold, and value, the position at The Kids that First Nations health is everyone's business.

## References

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## The Story

This artwork is a tribute to the Inklings Program, painted in aquas and blues that evoke the serene yet powerful palette of the brand. The scene unfolds beneath a vast night sky, with vast sandy plains and rolling hills that echo the landscape of Western Australia, grounding the piece in a sense of place and belonging.

Upon the sky, six stars shine, symbolising the six dots in the Inklings logo. An infant figure, drawn from the logo itself, reaches out towards four rivers. These rivers, filled with tiny dots, represent all the young lives that the Inklings Program touches, connecting communities across Country. Each dot signifies an infant being nurtured, supported, and uplifted through the program, symbolising an interconnected network of care.

In the top left circle, the theme of 'Caregivers' comes to life through gum nuts, visualising the caregivers as vessels that carry and protect both the infant and their family. Like the nourishing fruit of the gum tree, these caregivers provide strength, support, and guidance—feeding the family's journey just as nectar sustains wildlife.

On the top right, the circle of 'Community' is depicted through gum leaves. A single leaf may seem insignificant, but together, branches of leaves form a protective canopy. This circle reflects the strength of a united community, embodying the shelter and protection that community provides. At the centre of this circle is a campfire, encircled by elders. These elders, guardians of stories, traditions, and wisdom, anchor the community in history and knowledge.

The lower circle represents 'Aboriginal Empowerment' and is depicted by a gum blossom seen from above. Resembling fireworks, this gum blossom bursts with energy, symbolising the light ignited within an individual's heart and mind when they feel empowered. It shines brightly in the night sky, serving as a beacon of inspiration and a testament to resilience.



Kelli Savietto, a graphic designer based in Boorloo (Perth), draws on her Nyikina and Yawuru heritage from the Kimberley region of Western Australia. Passionate about Indigenous representation, she specialises in brand identity, publication design, and illustration. Through her artwork, Kelli brings her clients' stories to life, weaving cultural narratives that resonate and connect. [kellisavietto.com](http://kellisavietto.com)



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