

JOBS & SKILLS REPORT



National Regional and
Economic Development
Summit 2023

INTRODUCTION

The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) workforce policy position paper released in March 2022[1], suggests businesses of every size, in every industry, in every corner of the country, are experiencing the worst skill and labour shortages in decades - a challenge that is worsening by the day. The ACCI states that beyond the day-to-day impact, businesses are feeling the financial pain of staff shortages with substantial losses being reported as businesses strain to keep up with demand, turn down work and reduce operations. Skills and labour shortages are also acting as a significant barrier to business growth and threatening the viability of major resource and infrastructure projects.

The Foundation's National Regional and Economic Development Summit was held in Toowoomba, following on from events held annually since 1997. The Summit provided a unique opportunity for sectors of rural Australia to explore key issues. Acknowledging the job and skill shortages impacting communities and businesses across Australia, this was a topic of focus at the Summit and will help inform future work by the Foundation.



[1] Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (2022). Overcoming Australia's Labour and Skills Shortages Through Skills Development, Workforce Participation and Migration

METHODOLOGY

Registered attendees of the 2023 Summit received a pre-summit survey asking them to identify the top three challenges their organisation experiences AND the top three challenges their rural, remote, or regional community experiences in attracting, recruiting, and retaining a workforce.

Ten workforce problem statements were shaped from the survey feedback.

During the jobs and skills session on day one of the Summit, participants were asked to discuss and identify potential solutions to these workforce challenges through facilitated group sessions.



PROBLEM STATEMENTS

1. Regional small to medium businesses cannot attract or retain employees
2. Perception that there is a lack of career opportunity in the regions
3. Rural population growth is impeded by housing availability and affordability
4. Inability to retain young people aged 15-39 years in regional Australia
5. Current regional education models do not support regions from growing within
6. Access to childcare is a postcode lottery (i.e., access to childcare services is dependent on your geographical location, the business model of childcare and available subsidies)
7. Visa restrictions exacerbate the regional skills shortage
8. Regional communities are ill equipped to support the needs of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CaLD) communities
9. We cannot access or incentivize the senior skilled workforce (67 years and over)
10. Aboriginal families face greater barriers to achieving early childhood milestones



PURPOSE

The aim of this session was to identify ways that we can work better with government, private sector, and not-for-profit organisations to develop practical workforce solutions for the regions.

REGIONAL SME'S UNABLE TO ATTRACT OR RETAIN EMPLOYEES

What you told us

CHALLENGES	IMPACT	SOLUTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Competition between larger organizations and SMEs• Lack of skills in SMEs around people management/HR• Poaching• Lack of career progression/pathways in SME's• Housing availability and affordability• Liveability (community, sport, childcare, social connection)• Lack of accessible pathways to train/educate• Complexity of employing people (particularly for sole traders)• Access to transport• Pandemic - uptake of ABN's and being self-employed has risen	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• SMEs unable to take on additional work• Reduction in business opening hours• Job vacancies open longer than usual• SME owners end up not doing their role properly or with enough time	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• G21 - community connection program• Formal placement program in the community to connect locals with new workers• Employment data (current and expanded)• Convergence of agriculture and technology to reduce reliance on people• NCVET, Jobs Queensland "printing picture"• Community Insight Organisation• Local procurement (big business "buying local" and help them expand).

SUMMARY

Small to medium enterprises in regional, rural, and remote Australia face a range of challenges in attracting and retaining employees. Roles are typically more difficult and take longer to fill which impacts day to day operations and limits opportunities for business growth and expansion. Better data collection and more localised content will help paint a clearer picture of the exact nature of the issue and enable more effective intervention. Programs that provide a connection to community for prospective employees and a commitment from big business to procure locally may go some way toward elevating the issue.

What others are already doing...

The Queensland Government's *Good people. Good jobs: Queensland Workforce Strategy 2022 - 23* acknowledges that now more than ever, employers need to respond to workforce trends by building diverse workplaces, rethinking recruitment strategies, and implementing innovative ways to attract and retain staff. A number of case studies have been compiled to showcase how Queensland businesses are implementing different workforce solutions.

PERCEIVED LACK OF CAREER OPPORTUNITY IN THE REGIONS

What you told us

CHALLENGES	IMPACT	SOLUTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Local Government not seen as a desirable careerFixed views on careers that are dominated by one genderPeople don't realise there are jobs in the regions and diversityWe have an 'image' issuePerceived isolation – losing family and friendships to get a job in the regionsDemand for jobs outstripping supply in the regions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Job deserts/lack of servicesLoss of youthFIFO is not conducive to familiesTransitioning into communities can be difficultDemise of towns/rebirthing of towns	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Grow from withinLearn from other examples and case studiesWorking/studying from homeRegional advocates to promote career opportunitiesGeographical mapping for jobs/skills/careersEducate career advisors in schools about the opportunities in the regionsFlexibility in jobs and services to allow people to move from region to region or out from the citiesTraining organisations to match requirements

SUMMARY

The perception that there is a lack of career opportunity in the regions is perpetuated by negative stereotypes and limited education on job prospects in regional areas. This makes it difficult to attract and keep people in the regions, which can lead to the demise of some towns as young people leave and don't return and increasingly businesses rely on non-resident workers who do not add social, cultural, or economic value to the community. Changing perceptions is not easy. Regional advocacy, enabling greater geographic moveability of employment positions and flexibility in workplace delivery, and a dedicated program of school career advisors connecting young people to regional job opportunities, are some of the possible solutions identified.

What others are already doing...

Pointer Remote provides remote talent with meaningful career opportunities with agile employers.

 [Home\(pointerremote.com\)](https://pointerremote.com)

Future Lady Tradies is a support network to attract, connect and retain female apprentices in the blue-collar industry.

 www.linkedin.com/company/future-lady-tradies

The **Regional Development Australia Riverina Workforce Development Plan 2022/23** is a place-based strategy consisting of eight actions to support workforce development.

 <https://rdariverina.org.au/workforce-development-plan>

POPULATION GROWTH IS IMPEDED BY HOUSING AVAILABILITY AND AFFORDABILITY

What you told us

CHALLENGES	IMPACT	SOLUTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age, quality, and lack of housing stock across communities • Poor state of state government housing stock, maintenance and upkeep is low • Banking regulations; Perceived vs. actual risk of housing in regional areas; Size of deposits/access to a bank; Finance/young people can't build/get homes. • Housing for seasonal workers is limited • There is a link between affordable housing and access/transport • Planning restrictions • Planning for subdivisions rather than infill or diversity of housing • Airbnb - second homes and not utilised • Financial pressure when regions become attractive when in close proximity to metro area, pushing up cost of homes • Builders insurance and home valuations • Site taxes being added • Building code of Australia requirements • Rental rights - no control for landlord • Interest rate rises 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult to get finance to build/purchase in regional areas due to perceived risk or return on investment • Limited options for right sizing and downsizing e.g. worker accommodation and suitable homes for older people • No land made available for development by planning authorities • Homelessness • Employers buying up homes • Unable to attract key staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Airbnb can provide short-term accommodation. • Tiny homes provide an opportunity - planning constraints/national solution. • Employers partnering with the community investors to build worker housing • Need 'best practice examples' of medium density suitable for rural, remote and regional areas • State government investment in headworks in the regions • Repurpose vacant housing e.g. Devonport Showgrounds • Review planning regulations

POPULATION GROWTH IS IMPEDED BY HOUSING AVAILABILITY AND AFFORDABILITY

SUMMARY

Housing is a complex and multi-faceted issue. In regional, rural, and remote locations banks are tighter with their purse strings; builders charge higher prices and outdated planning schemes are restrictive. Added to this is the second home buyer who looks to the regions for an affordable income property or holiday home, driving the property market higher and creating stranded or underutilised accommodation assets. In a tight rental and buyers' market, finding any, let alone the right type of housing makes it difficult to attract people to regional areas and may even be the reason that someone leaves. Letting go of the concept of the traditional house and looking at the housing issue in an entirely novel way is needed including exploring relocatable and smaller homes and different rental models (both short-and-long-term) to suit the needs of different segments of the population.

What others are already doing...

Housing Now is an alliance aimed at magnifying the voice of community and industry and helping the NSW Government tackle the housing shortage challenge.

 [Housing Now!](#)

Common Equity Housing Limited (CEHL) is a not-for-profit organisation that partners with member co-ops to deliver an effective, sustainable and member-led co-operative housing program. Each co-op is an independent organisation that meets the needs of its own community within the framework of the CEHL Housing Program. The CEHL Housing Program is an alternative to private rental and homeownership. It provides long-term tenancies along with co-operative management of housing.

 <https://www.cehl.com.au/>

INABILITY TO RETAIN YOUNG PEOPLE AGED 15-39 YEARS IN REGIONAL AUSTRALIA

What you told us

CHALLENGES	IMPACT	SOLUTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Young people want a city experience.• Regional universities sometimes have limited course choices.• Lack of programs to connect young people with employers.• Poor advice from career advisers.• Rural environments can be “dull” to young people.• Lack of housing options for young people e.g. units.• Moving away to school and board due to lack of local options• Difficulty of identity in small communities.• Limited career paths.• Some RRR jobs are not valued.• VET training in RRR skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Participation numbers in sport and community youth groups.• Unbalanced demographics.• Lack of workforce.• Lack of innovation/new ways of thinking.• Population decline.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• RAI research on attracting people to regions.• Fund regional universities to provide “in demand” courses and link early years to late years of study.• Collate good examples of community retention strategies.• Gather opinions of young people.• Ask young people: why are you leaving?• Improve telecommunications

SUMMARY

The outmigration of young people from regional areas is an age-old problem. Whether it be to access a more diverse or a higher level of education, chasing dreams of a high-profile career and the glamour of city life or simply out of necessity because the opportunities don't exist locally, young people leave the regions and often never return. The impact of this is significant. Populations decline as do prospects of future generations being “grown” from within, sports and community groups become harder to sustain and the local pool of workers is diminished. Understanding the reasons why young people leave, investigating avenues to attract them back and learning from the successes of communities that have been successful in their retention of young people are some of the ways that that this challenge could be addressed.

What others are already doing...

The Redlands Regional Jobs Committee aims to connect Redlands schools with local industry. The committee hosted a 2023 future forum which aimed to explore the opportunities that a \$6.5b investment would bring to the region over the next decade and focused on linking that investment to future jobs and the aspirations of young people on the Redlands Coast.

 [School To Work | Redlands Coast Chamber of Commerce](#)

INABILITY TO RETAIN YOUNG PEOPLE AGED 15-39 YEARS IN REGIONAL AUSTRALIA

What others are already doing...

The **Australian Centre for Rural Entrepreneurship** (ACRE) offers learning and development programs for young people to give them a voice and build skills for the future. ACRE aims to develop the entrepreneurial mindset, skills and behaviours in every young person across rural Australia by 2035, to reverse rural decline. One of the programs delivered by ACRE is Social Enterprise Schools, which is a collaborative, hands-on experience that shows young people how to run a business. The program brings students, teachers, local entrepreneurs and community leaders together to develop skills, build confidence and make a positive social impact.

 <https://acre.org.au/what-we-offer/for-young-people/social-enterprise-schools/>

Toowoomba and Surat Basic Enterprise (TSBE) Education works directly with member high schools to ensure that students have the knowledge and tools to take up local career opportunities and that industry has engagement opportunities with schools and students.

 <https://www.tsbe.com.au/health>

CURRENT REGIONAL EDUCATION MODELS DO NOT SUPPORT REGIONS FROM GROWING WITHIN

What you told us

CHALLENGES	IMPACT	SOLUTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HECS, living away from home – no help. • TAFE model ineffective/lack of access. • Lack of local input/co-design. • Accommodation shortage. • Scholarships not tailored. • Funding models. • Lack of educators. • Lack of permanent contracts. • Inequality of school funding – private/public. • Boarding school perception. • Uni – lack of childcare. • Connectivity and digital access. • Antiquated semester structure of Uni courses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less educated/skilled. • Brain drain and skills drain – urban areas. • Permanency can be held by people who aren't staying in or benefiting the region. • FIFO teacher mentality and impact. • Hard to attract families with school-aged students. • Truancy, crime, unemployment, low confidence, feeling of being forgotten as young people. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immersion program for new regional teachers. • Train locals for skills gaps. • Upgrade of existing education facilities. • Encourage increasing opportunities for international students. • University study hub models. • Intensive short courses (more online delivery). • Regions to share teachers and resources. • Councils could extend their services to provide work placements, apprenticeship opportunities and support the facilitation of this.

SUMMARY

The educational inequity between urban and rural areas of Australia has long been acknowledged by Government but a truly impactful solution has so far been elusive. Issues persist around the lack of educators, inequitable funding of private and public schools, limited support for regionally based students to live away from home to complete tertiary studies and barriers to accessing online course content due to poor digital connectivity. Statistics show that attainment rates of secondary and higher education are lower amongst people from regional, remote, and rural areas compared to metro areas. This educational divide is a significant deterrent to people living regionally and has flow on effects to a range of socio-economic outcomes. Resource sharing within the education sector, intensive short-course delivery models and a university study hub model were proposed as potential solutions to this issue.

What others are already doing...

Grow Our Own is an industry led alliance of business, industry, education, employment providers and government agencies who seek to inform and inspire young people, on-the-job trainees and graduates with the opportunities to live, work and learn in the Riverina.



[Home - Grow Our Own](#)

CURRENT REGIONAL EDUCATION MODELS DO NOT SUPPORT REGIONS FROM GROWING WITHIN

What others are already doing...

Grow Your Own Workforce is a place-based workforce model that focuses on attracting, developing, supporting and retaining local residents to create a sustainable pipeline of workers.

 <https://www.gyoworkforce.com.au/>

Illuminate Education Australia deliver authentic and immersive education programs where students address and solve problems in their own community. The programs and workshops teach business and entrepreneurial skills and provide an opportunity for young people to develop a core set of skills and capacities they can use immediately in the program through to the rest of their life.

 <https://illuminateeducation.com.au/>

Wheatbelt & Beyond Youth Mentoring (WBYM) is a Not-for-Profit organisation providing mentoring opportunities for high school students throughout regional Western Australia. WBYM have developed a program that is simple and flexible that can be easily incorporated into a variety of settings across the country, in order to address the limited engagement with education and training and marginalisation that is being experienced by rural and remote youth.

 <https://www.wbym.com.au/>

ACCESS TO CHILDCARE IS A POSTCODE LOTTERY

What you told us

CHALLENGES	IMPACT	SOLUTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Undervalued market doesn't solve problem.• Available workforce.• Learning/training.• Line of sight.• Low wages.• Highly regulated.• High capex.• Lack of collective investment.• Industry not investing in solving problem.• Workload (huge).	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Killer of productivity/flexibility.• Community health and wellbeing.• Public safety.• Closure of services.• Re-entering workforce.• Local economy.• Gender disparity.• Attract retain workforce.• Lose community members.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• REED model – Wheatbelt.• Career pathways.• Child minding/family daycare.• Industry investment/co-investment.• Pooling resources.• Research/trusted partners.• Measuring ROI in other ways.• Systems mapping exercise.• Local government incentive to deliver the service when there is market failure.

SUMMARY

In rural, regional, and remote Australia limited access to childcare is one of the greatest hinderances to workforce participation, particularly for women. In some areas there are simply no services at all, while in others there are too few places available to meet demand. Challenges exist both in finding the necessary capital to fund the development and operation of centres and then in keeping them open by finding appropriately qualified staff to run them. The Regional Early Education and Development Inc. (REED) model in Western Australia is an example of how a small regionally based service has managed to achieve scale by providing centralised service and support to 20+ locally based centres. This model could provide the solution for other regional areas.

What others are already doing...

In 2020, Child Australia supported by BHP, founded **Thriving Futures** to address the ongoing shortage of childcare availability in the Pilbara so that all children could have access to high quality early learning experiences. The program has since expanded to Roxby Downs, South Australia and the Goldfields region in Western Australia. Thriving Futures creates career pathways within the Early Childhood Education and Care sector for Educators with qualifications or for people without qualifications who are seeking a career in the sector.



[Thriving Futures](#)

Thrive by Five is advocating for a high-quality, universally accessible and affordable early learning system to allow parents, mainly women, to get back into the workforce and remove the financial barriers to women taking on full-time work. Reform of early learning and childcare is the key economic reform that will drive workforce participation, productivity, GDP and government revenue.



www.thrivebyfive.org.au

VISA RESTRICTIONS EXACERBATE THE REGIONAL SKILLS SHORTAGE

What you told us

CHALLENGES	IMPACT	SOLUTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Limited number of categories in skills list (and definitions).• Wage limits – raise TSMIT (\$70,000).• Disparity between states in how implement TSMIT and also the skills list.• Expensive business case process for a DAMA.• Housing (employers need to provide under DAMA).• Justification process for accessing skills list (ads, etc.)• Broaden categories to include unskilled (hospitality!!)• Pathways to PR (particularly students) end of study training.• Complex process.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No one knows where to start.• Reducing productivity of the region.• Aging workforce – we need new workers!• Lack of diversity.• People with visas don't know about job opportunities.• State enforced rules are seeing existing migrants leave for other states.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Simplify – comms and process – step through process.• Make it more affordable.• Make process shorter and more timely.• Clearer position descriptions.• Update skills list and also where/who has jobs (feed in spatial data on shortages).• Simplify amount of visa options.• Clearer guidance/training for lawyers/agents interpreting immigration law.• Visa round table (place-based stories).

SUMMARY

Working visas are intended to enable employers to fill job vacancies that can't be filled by an Australian citizen or permanent resident. There are a range of visa options available each with different work rights. The ability of visa programs to address regional skills shortages is limited by complexities such as disparity in visa income thresholds between States, some of the hardest to fill roles in regional areas not being eligible because they are not on the "skilled occupation list" and a very complicated application process. Simplifying the process and making it more affordable to more businesses and expanding the eligibility requirements to encompass skilled as well as unskilled or semi-skilled occupations could make visa's a viable option for improving regional skills shortages.

What others are already doing...

Immigration Lawyer and Migrant Agent, Work Visa Lawyers, have provided their view and suggestion on the migration policy reforms required to address skills shortages for Australia's Future.

 [Seven migration policy reforms to address skills shortage for Australia's Future | Work Visa Lawyers](#)

On 27 April 2023, the Minister for Home Affairs, the Hon Clare O'Neil MP, released for discussion **A Migration System for a More Prosperous and Secure Australia** – Outline of the Government's Migration Strategy. The Outline was informed by the [Migration Review](#) and stakeholder consultation. It articulates the government's proposed policy shifts needed to reform Australia's migration system.

 <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/programs-subsite/files/migration-strategy-outline.pdf>

REGIONAL COMMUNITIES ARE ILL EQUIPPED TO SUPPORT THE NEEDS OF CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE (CALD) COMMUNITIES

What you told us

CHALLENGES	IMPACT	SOLUTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of critical mass. • Lack of cultural activities. • Lack of social planning. • Employer reluctance to employ. • Lack of consultation with CALD communities. • Not identifying strengths of CALD communities. • No sense of belonging and connecting. • Lack of leadership. • Ignorance and racism (sometimes unconscious). • Communication barriers. • Housing. • Lack of cultural awareness. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Segregation. • Underutilisation of workforce, volunteer base and cultural richness within the community. • Weakens social capital. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing success stories amongst employers. • Leadership to enable a structured response. • Gaining knowledge of successful case studies i.e., Biloela (buddy system), Goldfield's migrant employment program. • QLD multicultural affairs – research.

SUMMARY

People from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, are underutilised in the regional workforce. One of the most common obstacles to employment is the language and communication barrier. Learning from and expanding on existing programs and research that aim to support better integration of CaLD people into not only the workforce but the community, could enable better access to this pool of workers.

What others are already doing...

The **Goldfields Migrant Employment Project** was initially a pilot program funded by the Western Australian government that aimed to connect Perth-based migrants with work in the Goldfields. The program, facilitated by the Goldfields Community Legal Centre, provides job readiness, employment connection and assistance in relocation and settlement.

 [Goldfields Migrant Employment Project \(GMEP\) – Goldfields Community Legal Centre \(gclc.com.au\)](https://www.gclc.com.au)

Welcoming Australia exists to cultivate a culture of welcome and create a future where people of all backgrounds have equal opportunity to belong, contribute and thrive. Welcoming Workplaces is a network to inspire and support Australian workplaces to develop a culture and practice of welcome, inclusion and belonging within their organisation and the community.

 <https://welcoming.org.au/initiatives/welcoming-workplaces/>

Rainbow Coast Neighbourhood Centre manage Great Southern Migrant Services over three locations; Albany, Katanning and Mt Barker, which provide advocacy, practical assistance, information, activities and links to other community networks and referral services to people who have arrived from another country within the last 5 years, under humanitarian or refugee visas.

 <https://www.rcnc.org.au/our-migrant-services>

WE CANNOT ACCESS OR INCENTIVIZE THE SENIOR SKILLED WORKFORCE (67 YEARS AND OVER)

What you told us

CHALLENGES	IMPACT	SOLUTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Earning threshold is too low. Impacts pension and senior's card. Discrimination/ageism. Economy – can't afford to retire but ready to. Some communities aren't welcoming. Information flow (opportunities/connections) lacking. People don't know what is available. No way to recognise untapped skills. People want to give back but not over commit. Employers may not be looking for older employees. Digital literacy. Government expectation of business. Employees are tired. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wisdom and intuition are lost. Experiential learning and institutional history. Loss of skillsets: e.g., hospitality/customer service. Not maximising productivity in business. Easier pathways e.g. leave trades then teach. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrate commitment to workforce diversity. Flexibility, try new things (as an employer). Reverse mentoring – rethink positions. Attract empty nesters. More seasonal work. Rethink roles e.g., older people, childcare. Provide house. Invite into community – be welcoming. Broaden definition of volunteering: may not be 'retirement'. Concept of 'integrated retirement' gradually retire. Succession planning. Case examples of employing older people and advantages. Labour pool for more flexibility. Capture people at transition e.g., ex-serviceman.

SUMMARY

Older Australian's are a valuable source of labour but are underrepresented in the workforce for a myriad of reasons. A low-income threshold for the age pension, limited flexibility in hours and location of work, and a perception amongst some employers that older people are less productive or less suited to certain types of work, are all barriers to workforce participation amongst older people. This is a lost opportunity as older people often hold a wealth of institutional knowledge, practical work experience and skills sets that could be utilised and passed on to the next generation of workers. Providing more flexible working arrangements, using case studies to educate businesses on the benefits of employing older workers and facilitating phased retirement are avenues that could be pursued to improve access to the senior skilled workforce.

What others are already doing...

Work45+ was created by Council on the Ageing (COTA) Tasmania following focus group consultation with older job seekers, employers, and job service providers. It includes information aimed at helping more older job seekers be employed and valued.

ABORIGINAL FAMILIES FACE GREATER BARRIERS TO ACHIEVING EARLY CHILDHOOD MILESTONES

What you told us

CHALLENGES	IMPACT	SOLUTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make a lot of assumptions from position of privilege.• Less literacy and more practical (orally).• Learning style.• Not feeling valued (aboriginal people).• Recognition of the past.• Differing values – systems.• Cultural relativity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Vulnerable children not provided care they need.• No escape from cycle.• Cyclical.• Rest of community misses richness of culture.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Elder aides.• QLD police liaison initiative – Serpentine Primary School.• Aboriginal childcare initiatives – SNAICC.• Roebourne – funding approval by community.• Elder education.• Look at successful Indigenous communities (AEDC results).

SUMMARY

A child's foundational years from birth through to five years of age have whole-of-life impacts across education, employment, health, and connection to community. Aboriginal children are 2.5 times more likely than other Australian's to be behind in two or more development milestones when they start school[1]. A significant barrier to effective early learning is that educational programs are not delivered in a culturally appropriate way and do not take into account different learning styles. To improve outcomes in this area we can look to programs that have had success in delivering appropriate early childhood programs for Aboriginal people and utilise community Elders to drive these initiatives.

[1] [Family Matters Report 2020 reveals Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children continue to be separated from families and culture at an alarming rate - SNAICC](#)

What others are already doing...

Winanga-Li Aboriginal Child and Family Centre (Winanga-Li) is one of nine centres in New South Wales (38 nationally) that were established and funded as a Closing the Gap initiative. The organisation aims to provide culturally safe and appropriate education and care and support services for children aged 0 to 8 and their families. The organisation and others like it are built on the premise that early childhood education, particularly via centres led by First Nations people is the key to closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.