

Independent Evaluation of The Children's Ground Approach

Allen + Clarke Consulting August 2025 Commissioned by the
Australian Government Department of Health, Disability and Ageing



Purpose of the Evaluation

In 2024, the Australian Government Department of Health, Disability and Ageing (the Department) engaged Allen + Clarke Consulting to undertake an evaluation of the Children's Ground Approach with a view to making recommendations to inform the Australian Government's consideration of future funding for Children's Ground.

The evaluation was designed to answer five Key Evaluation Questions:

- How well are the activities being implemented under the Children's Ground Approach?
- How effective is the Children's Ground Approach?
- To what extent are the activities delivered under the Children's Ground Approach contributing to improved outcomes?
- How well do the activities delivered under the Children's Ground Approach align with government priorities?
- What do the evaluation findings mean for how the Australian Government funds Children's Ground?

About the Children's Ground Approach

Children's Ground is a First Nations organisation focused on addressing intergenerational poverty and driving sustainable change within First Nations communities over a 25-year timeframe.

The approach is an integrated, place-based system of services that targets whole-of-community change, focusing on prevention, early intervention and empowerment across five service areas: learning, family health and wellbeing, economic development, community development and creative and cultural development.

Evaluation Findings

Implementation

Children's Ground delivers a wide range of mutually supporting activities to First Nations people in communities facing significant challenges such as overcrowding, environmental health and limited services. Activities are delivered by community members employed or volunteering for Children's Ground in partnership with non-community staff.

"Activities are implemented well (i.e., efficiently and effectively) under the Children's Ground approach, primarily because their delivery responds directly to the needs and circumstances of the communities that Children's Ground works with."

The cost of implementation was considered reasonable given context and alignment with leading practice. Greater efficiency and effectiveness will require consistent and long-term funding.

Effectiveness

"The Children's Ground approach is an effective mechanism for service provision and aligns with leading practice for prevention and responsiveness to complex disadvantage through holistic design, place-based design and First Nations-led design."

Children's Ground shows strong capability in leading whole-of-community and First Nations system design. Its employment pathway addresses key barriers to work and its community governance processes empower people and enable control of the approach. These factors greatly increase effectiveness.

Contribution to outcomes

The evaluation found significant progress towards shorter-term outcomes across all service areas.

"the Children's Ground approach makes a direct contribution to First Nations children engaging in early years, cultural, and on-country learning, First Nations people engaging in health promotion and support, and First Nations employment."

The evaluation found significant progress towards shorter-term outcomes across all service areas.

Alignment with government priorities

The evaluation found that activities delivered under the Children's Ground approach align closely with government priorities, including:

- 10 Closing the Gap outcomes (and indirectly with seven more)
- 10 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan priorities (and indirectly with two)
- All eight Early Years Strategy outcomes
- All five Early Childhood Strategy goals
- All four National Justice Reinvestment Program principles.

Key Recommendations

Government commits to a coordinated, multi-departmental funding approach over an initial seven-year period to support long-term delivery and evidence of outcomes in Central Australia and Darwin.

Government establishes an inter-agency governance group to oversee funding implementation, including Northern Territory Government representation where costs are shared.

Children's Ground should increase engagement with under-represented groups to strengthen its potential as a justice reinvestment option.

Children's Ground should consider enhancements to its already effective cultural governance processes.

Children's Ground should strengthen and formalise relationships with other service providers in Central Australia and Darwin.

The Australian Government and Children's Ground should establish processes to share and generate data that measure progress towards outcomes.

Children's Ground should improve communications with government stakeholders.

Children's Ground should continue to work to expand the amount and maximise the effectiveness of philanthropic funding.

Funding implications

Allen + Clarke found "strong evidence that Children's Ground is achieving the shorter-term access and engagement outcomes specified in the program logic."

It recommended that the Australian Government establish "a comprehensive multi-departmental, long-term funding approach for Children's Ground" including an initial seven-year commitment.

Departments identified as best placed to fund specific service areas include the

- Department of Health Disability and Ageing
- Department of Social Services
- Department of Education
- National Indigenous Australians Agency
- Indigenous Business Australia
- Department of Employment and Workplace Relations
- Attorney-General's Department.

Conclusion

The evaluation found that Children's Ground is achieving and progressing service and systems reform through First Nations-led design, delivery and leadership. It concluded that the Children's Ground approach provides a strong, evidence-based foundation for achieving long-term, generational change in First Nations communities.