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Empowering Generations of Culturally Strong, Thriving, Aboriginal Children Families & Communities

Yerrabi Yurwang Position Statement: AEDC - July 2026

What is the AEDC?

The Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) is conducted every 3 years from 2009 onwards. The AEDC includes all children entering their first year of full-time school. The children are assessed across five developmental areas.

2024 results for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children in the ACT were released in late 2025.

The 2024 survey included 192 Aboriginal children in the ACT.

Results for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the ACT have worsened significantly in 2024. The alarming increase in developmental vulnerability rates across all domains, both the overall increase since data collection started in 2009 and the specific decline in the 2024 results, needs to be understood across the relevant sectors, in order to better support children and reverse these trends.

AEDC Outcomes for Aboriginal Children in the ACT

- **Overall developmental vulnerability rates are trending up:** More than half (52%) of Aboriginal children in the ACT were recorded as vulnerable across at least one domain (up from 43% in 2021, and from 37% in 2009).

- **Increase in developmental vulnerability is seen across all domains:** For Aboriginal children in the ACT, vulnerability rates for have gone up considerably, across all 5 domains. The biggest step backs were in the physical health and emotional maturity domains. Rate increases across domains are:
    - Physical health - 33% vulnerable (up from 26% in 2021)
    - Emotional maturity - 26% vulnerable(15% in 2021)
    - Communication skills and general knowledge - 18% vulnerable(up from 15%)
    - Social competence - 29% vulnerable (up from 25%)
    - Language and cognitive skills - 24% vulnerable (up from 20%).

- **Developmental on-track rates are trending down:** Less than a quarter (24%) of Aboriginal children in the ACT are developmentally on track across the 5 domains, down from 27% in 2021, and down from 41% in the first AEDC survey in 2009.

  Outcomes for children in the North of Canberra are worse: When comparing results for children in ACT North regions (Belconnen, Gungahlin, North Canberra, Molonglo) with South regions (Tuggeranong, Weston Creek, Woden, South Canberra), we see that outcomes for children in the North trail in each of the five developmental areas compared with the South. This is whole-of-population data as Aboriginal-specific data is only available on Territory level.

What do these outcomes mean for our children?

- The poor developmental outcomes reflect poor access to the appropriate and needed level of services, for Aboriginal children, as well as their parents and families.

- **Poor access to health services in the ACT**: Access to general annual Aboriginal health checks (Medicare 715) in the ACT is consistently lower than the national access rate: 17% in 2024/25 compared with 28% national, rating second lowest of all jurisdictions. Rates of access for the North of Canberra are particularly low.

- **Access for children is even poorer:** only 11% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 0-4 in ACT have accessed a general health check in 2024-25, compared with over 20% nationally.

- **Antenatal services:** There has been a consistent lack in appropriate access to antenatal services for Aboriginal women in the ACT. This is measured across a number of indicators, including time of first antenatal appointment, access to nutrition, social and cultural support.

- **Out of Home Care:** Aboriginal children in the ACT are still removed from home in far greater rates than non-Aboriginal children. In 2024-25 there were 165 Aboriginal children in Out of Home Care in the ACT. Children growing outside of their family and community context are at greater risk of increased developmental vulnerability.

- **Homelessness:** In 2024/25, Special Homeless Services in ACT have supported 798 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients, representing about 6.5% of all Aboriginal people in the ACT. Homelessness and housing insecurity has strong negative impacts on children and families.

- **Lack of Aboriginal-Specific Early Education in the ACT**: The ACT remains the only jurisdiction in Australia without an Aboriginal Community-Controlled Early Childhood Education and Care Centre or Preschool; despite over 100 such services now operate across Australia.

Appropriate Policy Response

- **Wholistic care:** The multi-layered causes and impacts of the poor AEDC outcomes for Aboriginal children in the ACT point to the need for wholistic support for Aboriginal children and families.

- **Aboriginal Community Controlled Services** are best placed to offer wholistic and culturally safe support. This is in line with existing evidence as well as commitments made by ACT and the Commonwealth as part of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

- **Data shows particular need for Aboriginal Early Childhood Education Centres, Health Services, and Ante-Natal Services.** These should be offered as much as possible under one roof/ in an integrated service, to enable the wholistic support required.

- **Long-term services support needed:** Yerrabi Yurwang is concerned that any short-term policy response may not address the root causes of poor developmental outcomes across the board for Aboriginal children in the ACT.

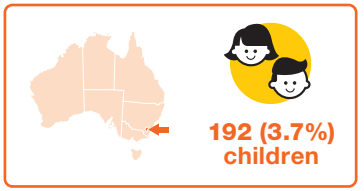
- **Strong need in the North:** The data shows a particular need to support services in Canberra's North. This is not surprising, given the increase in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in the North, which was not matched with an appropriate level of services and infrastructure. Today, most Aboriginal people in the ACT live in Canberra's North.

Key References

AEDC National Report 2024. Available from: https://www.aedc.gov.au/docs/default-source/default-document-library/aedc_national-report-2024_da7-409a37b9d-95ce-43e7-af00-51aa604cf0b3.pdf?sfvrsn=b56015ba_1

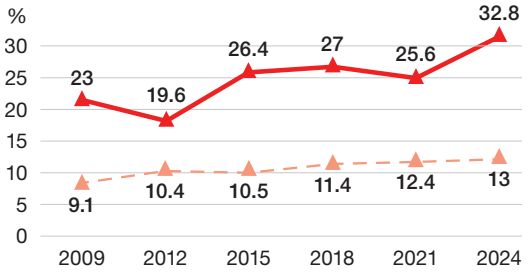
2024 Australian Early Development Census Results for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children - Australian Capital Territory. Available from: https://www.act.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/2965471/AEDC-2024-Results-for-Aboriginal-and-Torres-Strait-Islander-children-ACT.pdf

2024 Australian Early Development Census Results for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children - Australian Capital Territory

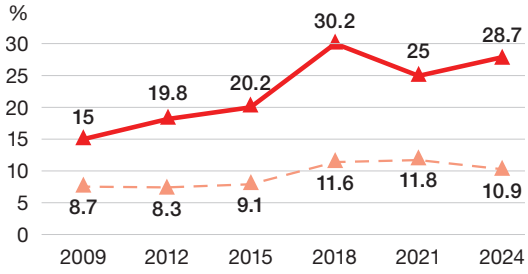


Note: These results should be interpreted with caution due to the small population of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the ACT which mean the data is more prone to fluctuation between cycles.

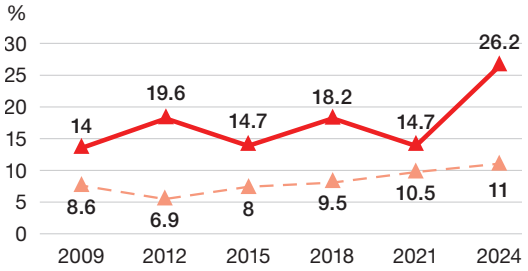
Developmental vulnerability - Physical health and wellbeing



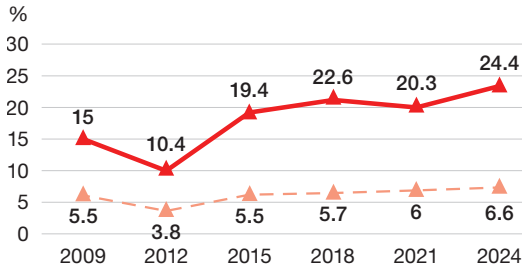
Developmental vulnerability - Social competence



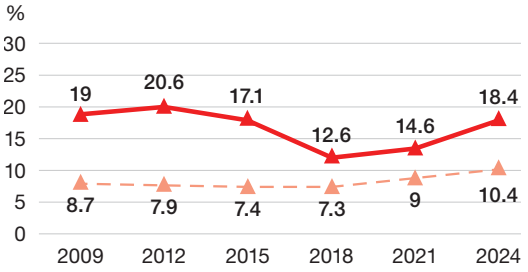
Developmental vulnerability - Emotional maturity

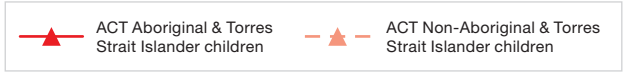


Developmental vulnerability - Language and cognitive skills (school-based)



Developmental vulnerability - Communication skills and general knowledge

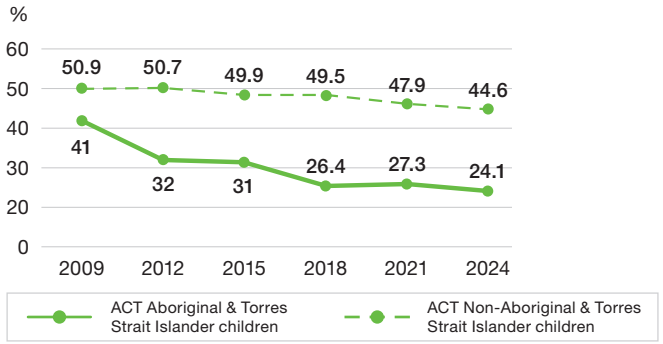




Since 2002, the Australian Government has worked in partnership with eminent child health research institutes, the Centre for Community Child Health at The Royal Children's Hospital and the Murdoch Children's Research Institute, and The Kids Research Institute Australia to deliver the Australian Early Development Census program to communities nationwide. The Australian Government continues to work with its partners and with state and territory governments to implement the AEDC.

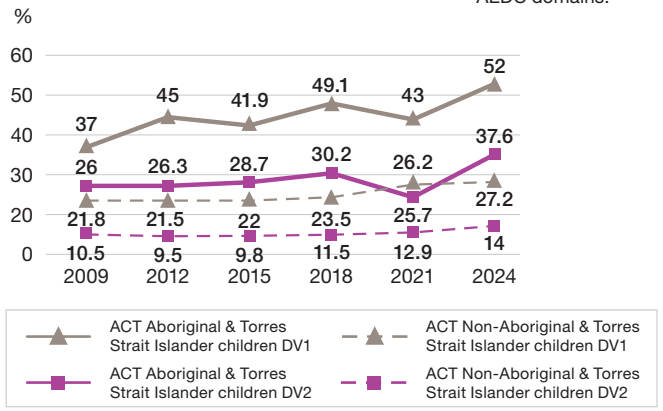
Summary indicators

OT5 The percentage of children who are developmentally on track on five AEDC domains.



DV1 The percentage of children who are developmentally vulnerable on one or more AEDC domains.

DV2 The percentage of children who are developmentally vulnerable on two or more AEDC domains.



Australian Early Development Census
An Australian Government Initiative

ACT Government