

ACIL ALLEN CONSULTING

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# Measuring Progress under the National Framework

Evaluation of progress under the National Framework for  
Protecting Australia's Children

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Thanks are extended to all members of the NFWEG. The project could not have been conducted without their support.

## Glossary of terms

- ABS Australian Bureau Statistics
- ACCP Australian Centre for Child Protection
- ACIL Allen ACIL Allen Consulting
- ACWA Association of Children’s Welfare Agencies
- AEDI Australian Early Development Census
- AFCA Australian Foster Care Association
- AIFS Australian Institute of Family Services
- AIHW Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
- ARACY Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth
- BCBB Building Capacity, Building Bridges
- CAARS Common Approach to Assessment, Referral and Support
- CAFS Children and Families Secretaries
- CALD Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
- CDSMAC Community and Disability Services Ministerial Advisory Council
- CDSMC Community and Disability Services Ministerial Council
- CEO Chief Executive Officer
- COAG Council of Australian Governments
- CPNMDS Child Protection National Minimum Data Set
- CYCSPRWG Children, Youth and Community Services Policy and Research Working Group
- DHS Department of Human Services
- DSS Department of Social Services
- FaHCSIA Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
- First Action Plan National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children: Implementing the First Three-Year Action Plan 2009-2012
- HREOC Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission
- NAPCAN National Association for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect
- National Framework National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children 2009-2020
- NDIS National Disability Insurance Scheme
- NFEP National Framework Evaluation Plan
- NFEWG National Framework Evaluation Working Group
- NFIWG National Framework Implementation Working Group
- NGO Non-government organisations
- NGO Coalition Coalition of Organisations Committed to the Safety and Wellbeing of Australia’s Children
- OCYFS Office for Children, Youth and Family Support
- OoHC Out of Home Care
- RoGS Productivity Commission’s Annual Report on Government Services
- Second Action Plan National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children: Implementing the Second Three-Year Action Plan 2012-2015
- SCCDS Standing Council on Community and Disability Services
- SCCDSAC Standing Council on Community and Disability Services Advisory Council
- SNAICC Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care
- SPRC Social Policy Research Centre

- WWCC Working with Children Check
- 2009-10 Annual Report Protecting Australia's Children – Annual Report to the Council of Australian Governments 2009-10
- 2010-11 Annual Report Protecting Australia's Children – Annual Report to the Council of Australian Governments 2010-11
- 2011-12 Annual Report Protecting Australia's Children – Annual Report to the Council of Australian Governments 2011-12
- 2012-13 Annual Report Protecting Australia's Children – Annual Report to the Council of Australian Governments 2012-13

## Executive summary

This report presents the findings of the evaluation of the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020 (National Framework). The Commonwealth Government Department of Social Services (DSS) commissioned ACIL Allen Consulting (ACIL Allen) to undertake the evaluation. The evaluation commenced in December 2014. Between January and May 2015, ACIL Allen conducted an extensive national consultation program, engaging with over 230 stakeholders from a range of different backgrounds and perspectives through 52 separate consultation sessions.

In April 2015, an interim report was provided to DSS outlining early findings from the consultation program. This report builds on that earlier work to present project findings and conclusions.

## The National Framework

The National Framework is a Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreed, long-term approach, to protecting Australia's children.

The headline outcome for the National Framework is for all children and young people to be safe and well. Evidence of a substantial and sustained reduction in child abuse and neglect over time is the agreed target with which to measure this outcome.

Six supporting outcomes were also agreed to focus strategies and activity towards the headline outcome.

1. Children live in safe and supportive families and communities
2. Children and families access adequate support to promote safety and intervene early
3. Risk factors for child abuse and neglect are addressed
4. Children who have been abused or neglected receive the support and care they need for their safety and wellbeing
5. Indigenous children are supported and safe in their families and communities
6. Child sexual abuse and exploitation is prevented and survivors receive adequate support.

A shared tripartite responsibility across Australian, State and Territory Governments, and the Non-Government Organisation (NGO) and research sectors, for protecting children, underpins the National Framework.

Within this tripartite partnership the NGO sector is represented by the NGO Coalition of Organisations Committed to the Safety and Wellbeing of Australia's Children (NGO Coalition) made up of non-government community organisations, key advocates and researchers in the field of child protection and wellbeing.

The National Framework commenced in 2009 and is a deliberately aspirational document. Its headline target, and its six supporting outcomes span issues across child protection and child wellbeing. The framework is enabled by three year Action Plans that outline the implementation and governance arrangements designed to drive activity across the priority areas. To date, there have been two Action Plans. *Protecting children is everyone's business – National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children: Implementing the First Three-Year Action Plan* (First Action Plan) covered the period from establishment in 2009 to 2012 and outlined a series of national priorities and major reforms, as well jurisdictional specific and community driven actions. The Commonwealth Government made available \$63 million in funding to support the First Action Plan.

*Protecting children is everyone's business – National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children: Second Three-Year Action Plan* (Second Action Plan) covers 2012-15.

At the time of this project's conduct, a Third Action Plan was under development.

## The evaluation method

This evaluation used narrative inquiry to examine implementation and progress of the National Framework. The project had four key focus areas.

- Exploring the barriers, strengths and opportunities arising from the National Framework's tripartite approach to implementation and governance
- Determining whether the National Framework has added value to processes and / or systems aimed at protecting children
- Determining whether – through the National Framework – government efforts across jurisdictions have shifted focus from the statutory system to prevention initiatives and early intervention approaches
- Establishing a baseline for subsequent evaluations, which will enable judgements about the National Framework and the extent to which it is achieving its high level outcomes over the long term.

There were four major data inputs into the project.

- National consultation program, featuring 52 separate consultation sessions with a total of 231 stakeholders from a range of different backgrounds and perspectives.
- Jurisdictional stocktake survey tool, provided to each jurisdiction to complement the consultation data collected through the National Consultation Program
- Analysis of national Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) Child Protection data (and associated annual reports) and the Productivity Commission's Annual Report on Government Services (RoGS)
- Review and consideration of National Framework policy and program documentation.

A set of research questions were developed in consultation with DSS and the National Framework Evaluation Working Group (NFEWG). The evaluation method sought to answer these research questions by examining how key stakeholders understood and made sense of the National Framework. The focus of this narrative was to explore the experiences, observations and insights of key stakeholders, and to combine this qualitative data with the other data sources to understand where and how the National Framework had contributed to, or influenced, change.

The evaluation was conducted at the same time that work was underway on development of the Third Action Plan. Accordingly, this project also collected and presented consultation data that could contribute to the process of developing the Third Action Plan.

## Key findings

Before outlining key findings as they relate to each of the evaluation's four key focus areas, it is worth reflecting on some background information on the development of the National Framework, and key contextual considerations that need to be factored into the narrative of National Framework progress to date.

## Background and contextual considerations

The COAG endorsed National Framework articulated child abuse and neglect as an issue of national concern, requiring collective action and responsibility among governments, the NGO sector and the broader community. It anticipated that systemic change would take time to effect.

The National Framework exists within a context of interconnected drivers for change that provided the impetus for its development and implementation. This included coordinated advocacy, enhanced

awareness and research support on the need for a national agenda for change underpinned by a shared common goal for systemic change.

There were high expectations at the time of the establishment of the National Framework. Key stakeholders considered it a major development in national child wellbeing and child protection policy, with the potential to drive major system-wide reform.

These expectations were in large part driven by the unique tripartite partnership arrangements that underpinned the governance and implementation of the National Framework. The tripartite partnership structure encompassed the Commonwealth Government, the NGO sector, and each of the State and Territory Governments, and provided a forum, for the first time, for an ongoing, informed and national discussion of child wellbeing and child protection.

Accountability and reporting responsibilities also featured significantly in the National Framework and the First Action Plan, with an agreed set of indicators of change and other performance and output measures to be used in Annual Reports to COAG.

Before exploring further the experience of governance and implementation of the National Framework, it is important to recognise that the National Framework has been impacted by a range of contextual factors. These factors included:

- A federated system of government that has traditionally complicated national efforts and approaches to policy and practice consistency
- Significant change in government administrations over the course of the National Framework and the end of the period typically associated with the latest iteration of 'cooperative federalism' (2007 to 2013)
- Change in key personnel including Ministers, advisors, and senior officials at all levels of government, and the subsequent loss of corporate memory among much (though not all) of the National Framework's tripartite membership, though it is important to note that for the duration of the National Framework, the NGO Coalition membership of the National Framework has remained stable
- Conduct of multiple inquiries and commissions across all levels of government, and the ongoing demand pressures faced by jurisdictions which are operating in increasingly constrained resource environments
- Lack of clarity over the National Framework's governance and implementation arrangements from 2013 to early 2015, which created uncertainty over its status and future viability.

Key findings that relate to each of the project's areas of focus, are provided below.

### **The tripartite approach to implementation and governance**

A unique and distinguishing feature of the National Framework is its tripartite approach to implementation and governance. Among the participants in the national consultation program, the National Framework was universally regarded as an important national policy mechanism and framework with which to improve services, planning, and outcomes for children and young people. Consultations confirmed that the Framework's conceptual underpinnings, its principles and its approach to collaborative partnerships remain sound and appropriate. The incorporation of the NGO sector into a governance, co-design, and implementation role was seen as an innovative and important enabler to building trust, collaboration and partnership across governments and the NGO sector, particularly at a national and jurisdictional level.

The tripartite partnership approach created an environment where different stakeholders could engage and collaborate within a forum that had not existed previously. Co-design of policy and an integrated implementation responsibility had been a focus of the National Framework's Implementation Working Group (NFIWG) and the National Forum (the successor to NFWIG) since 2009. The extent to which the National Framework had begun to embed a more integrated approach

between governments and NGOs, and facilitated an environment that enabled collaboration, was seen as one of the most important benefits of the National Framework.

The early period of implementation and governance, associated with the First Action Plan, was relatively stable, and was consistently identified as the most productive and effective period of the National Framework. That said, there was some concern expressed that even in the early stages, the activities were becoming too bureaucratic in process and reporting.

The period associated with the Second Action Plan saw significant change and fluidity to the tripartite implementation and governance arrangements, primarily driven by structural and personnel changes across governments. It is important to note that during this period of change, the NGO Coalition membership arrangements remained stable and consistent. The national consultation program uncovered considerable frustration and uncertainty across the range of stakeholder perspectives, about the governance and implementation arrangements during the time of the Second Action Plan. Consequently, the development of the Second Action Plan was widely regarded as flawed, and its implementation poor.

The National Framework was designed to focus on ‘protecting Australia’s children.’ In this sense it aspired to address child protection and child wellbeing issues. However, the presence of a predominantly child protection and out of home care (OoHC) agency membership was seen by many (including NGO members of the NFIWG / National Forum) as driving too much of a tertiary focus in the National Framework. There was broad support for revisiting governance membership to ensure more appropriate representation that is fit for purpose.

In exploring the consultation data, a number of other issues that were seen as detracting from the conditions of collaboration and partnership were also identified. These included the effect of government policy and funding decisions that appeared contrary to the principles of the National Framework, time-limiting the funding arrangements of promising initiatives; and the sometimes perceived tokenistic inclusion of NGO sector views and input.

### **Key enablers and barriers to governance and implementation**

A synthesis of the key enablers and barriers to governance and implementation identified by this project, underscored the importance of the following factors to the National Framework’s implementation and governance arrangements:

#### **National commitment and endorsement**

- The role of tripartite arrangements in elevating discussions
- Continuity in key participants and secretariat / communication support
- The impact of inquiries on reform agendas
- Understanding around decision-making processes
- Clarity around the role of the Commonwealth Government and consistency in its actions.

### **Adding value to processes and systems to protect children**

Building collaboration and capability within the child and family welfare sector, and across other service sectors and reform agendas, had been a primary focus of the National Framework. This focus had led to the implementation of various projects, and the development of a number of tools and resources for use by practitioners, policy makers, carers and children and young people.

Early expectations of the National Framework included enabling new approaches to service commissioning, pooled funding and place-based approaches, and building workforce capability and capacity across statutory and secondary service systems. To this end, a variety of initiatives were implemented that affected significant change to the system, including:

- Communities for Children and Child Aware Approaches provided models of effective, place based collaborative initiatives, operating within a nationally endorsed and strategic framework

- Building Capacity, Building Bridges (BCBB) built workforce capability in child-centred practice within adult-focussed service systems
- National Standards for OoHC were developed and implemented
- A National Children's Commissioner was established.

Other specific tools and resources such as Common Approach to Assessment, Referral and Support (CAARS), the information sharing protocol, and Viewpoint were also identified as valuable and contributing to practice change.

However, measuring the extent to which these projects, tools and resources had contributed to wider systemic reform is limited by a number of different factors. These factors included issues of causality and attribution between reform and the National Framework, but also implementation issues associated with time-limited funding, which many stakeholders identified as an impediment to sustained impact, and the trialling of initiatives within discrete sites or locations, which was seen as limiting the extent to which promising evidence and practice was shared across sectors, and which also incorporated issues of scale and transferability. Structural issues like federalism, and cultural and organisational issues such as procurement practices and accountability regimes were seen as significant and ongoing inhibitors to genuine shared reform and innovation.

Notwithstanding these issues, there are also emerging opportunities in areas of national interest – such as domestic/family violence, the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), and the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse – that the National Framework is well positioned to influence and / or leverage change from.

### **Shifting the focus from the statutory system to prevention and early intervention**

The public health model objective of the National Framework is premised upon shifting the focus from the statutory system to prevention and early intervention approaches. Filling the research gaps and enhancing the evidence base were considered central to the overall success of the National Framework and the move towards a more preventive approach to protecting children.

Commissioning and translating research was affirmed during consultation as an important and strategic space for the National Framework to operate in. Three research projects had been progressed through the National Research Agenda, examining: positive child wellbeing and development behaviours and practices in disadvantaged communities; intensive family support services for Indigenous children; and the building of relationships between services and refugee communities. This research was considered high quality and useful work.

However, the value and application of the research was seen as limited in that it was not linked to broader national research agendas and opportunities, and the process associated with the development, implementation and dissemination of the research was considered poor. The \$650,000 attached to the National Research Agenda – was considered too small for what the National Research Agenda purported to achieve.

The development and implementation of the Child Protection National Minimum Dataset (CPNMDS) is a significant achievement of the National Framework. The CPNMDS provides for a nationally consistent administrative dataset detailing child protection activity across jurisdictions. The development of the CPNMDS was seen as contributing to the quality and utility of national child protection data, and in turn substantially improving the potential of the evidence base (noting that it does not collect outcomes data). Notwithstanding this work, nearly a third of the National Framework's indicators of change remain unreportable – mostly associated with the areas of child wellbeing.

In terms of systemic change required to move towards prevention and early intervention, over half of the consultation sessions indicated that the balance of National Framework activity had occurred at the tertiary level, and were reluctant to attribute definitive and systemic shifts to early intervention and prevention to the National Framework.

However, there remained considerable support for the National Framework in drawing continual attention to the pressing need for systemic change. In the data and documentation reviewed during the conduct of this project, it was evident that early intervention and prevention approaches were increasingly part of the policy and practice approaches across jurisdictions, though it is also important to acknowledge stakeholder views on the scale of cultural, structural and organisational change still required to shift the focus from the tertiary end of services, to universal and preventative system responses. Importantly, the National Framework was seen as an important authorising enabler from which at least to begin this process.

### **Key barriers and facilitators to systemic change**

From the data collected during this project, key barriers and facilitators to systemic change include:

- An under-developed understanding and evidence base within the child and family welfare sector of the public health approach
- A membership base that is too heavily skewed to tertiary child protection
- An absence of a shared language around early intervention and prevention.

### **Establishing a baseline for subsequent evaluation**

Accountability and measurement of progress is central to the National Framework. Since its commencement significant work and activity had been undertaken to report on and communicate progress and achievements.

The National Framework's Annual Reports are detailed summaries of the work undertaken each year. An overview of the National Framework's key achievements indicate a large and growing body of national work and initiatives. The Annual Reports also report on the work underway in Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments that is related to the National Framework.

Despite these reporting efforts, when using the latest data available to populate the National Framework's high level indicators of change, it is still not possible to make a compelling judgement on the progress of the National Framework. While there are some promising signs in the available data, it confirms the earlier positions of the Annual Reports – that it is still too early to determine if the National Framework had begun to 'turn the dial' in a meaningful way.

Among stakeholders involved in the National Framework, robust accountability and reporting arrangements were considered fundamental. However, there was considerable comment on the appropriateness of the current indicators of change. The annual reporting process was also criticised, with jurisdictional representatives querying its utility, and commenting that over time it had become compliance focussed and stale. The absence of any true measure of the prevalence of child abuse and neglect in the community was a particularly pressing concern for stakeholders with research perspectives. This absence was considered very limiting for embedding a public health model. There was also interest expressed in the development of outcomes based measurement that would better track outcomes across domains that have a direct impact on child wellbeing – not just child protection.

Despite the articulation in both the First and Second Action Plans, of strategic and regular evaluation, there had not been any evaluation of progress under the National Framework until this project, noting that the scope of this project differs significantly from what was anticipated in the first two Action Plans

## **Key conclusions**

### **The value of a national framework**

The National Framework for Protecting Australia's children is built on solid foundations and is seen universally as an important policy mechanism for advancing the goal of having all of Australia's children and young people safe and well. While there is agreement on the overarching goal there

remained differing views on the effectiveness of the Framework in terms of contributing directly to systemic change at the national and jurisdictional level.

Establishing attribution remains a key challenge for measuring the success of the National Framework. The National Framework aspires to make child safety and wellbeing, 'everyone's responsibility' and change the way governments, NGOs and the broader community, act to protect children. However, assessing how successful it had been in informing or driving this change remains difficult to determine.

### **Governance arrangements and moving towards a public health model**

The National Framework's tripartite governance arrangement is an innovative and effective strategy for driving collaboration at a national, jurisdictional and local level. However, the findings from this research indicate that the focus of the activity of the National Framework to date had been in the tertiary end of the service continuum. Similarly, the membership of the governance group had primarily been made up of those involved in child protection departments and agencies.

The premise of a public health model for protecting children remained relevant with stakeholders – however, if the Framework is to achieve systemic change in moving towards a more preventive model then the governance structure needs to include representation from other areas such as health, education and early childhood. The governance structure should be developed to be fit-for-purpose, established to achieve the agreed priorities and actions, and drawing on the required membership and structure that will best achieve outcomes.

### **Action Plans**

The Action Plans are an important component of the Framework but have had varying levels of success and acceptance. The First Action Plan saw considerable activity and a focus on achievement of signature outcomes. However, the Second Action Plan was developed and agreed in an environment of significant change in personnel and governance structures. This is an important factor, and was widely regarded by stakeholders as contributing to its flawed development. Similarly, implementation of the Second Action Plan occurred during a time when there had been changes in government administrations, and consequently unclear governance arrangements. As a result of these factors, implementation of the Second Action Plan was widely regarded as poor.

The current development of the Third Action Plan provides an opportunity to once again focus the National Framework on its original purpose and to outline discrete and defined actions that, in the absence of a strategic shared national approach, would not otherwise be actioned.

### **A National Framework into the future**

Most stakeholders believe that the National Framework was a useful policy mechanism that assisted them in designing and implementing better systems for protecting children. However, these same stakeholders were also quick to point out that many of the reforms and changes that had occurred in their jurisdictions would have occurred regardless of the existence of a National Framework. That said, stakeholders universally agreed that having an aspirational national framework which provides guidance for evidence based strategies and a national viewpoint was essential and that they were far better off with a National Framework than without it.

## Chapter 1: Introduction and overview to the evaluation

This chapter provides an introduction to the evaluation, outlining the context to the evaluation and detailing project objectives, scope and method.

### Introduction

The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020 (National Framework) is a nationally agreed, long-term approach to protecting Australia's children.

The headline outcome for the National Framework is for all children and young people to be safe and well. Evidence of a substantial and sustained reduction in child abuse and neglect over time is the agreed target with which to measure this outcome.

Six supporting outcomes were also agreed to focus strategies and activity towards the headline outcome.

1. Children live in safe and supportive families and communities
2. Children and families access adequate support to promote safety and intervene early
3. Risk factors for child abuse and neglect are addressed
4. Children who have been abused or neglected receive the support and care they need for their safety and wellbeing
5. Indigenous children are supported and safe in their families and communities
6. Child sexual abuse and exploitation is prevented and survivors receive adequate support.

A shared responsibility across Australian, State and Territory Governments, and the Non-Government and research sectors, for protecting children, underpins the National Framework.

In 2014, The Commonwealth DSS commissioned ACIL Allen Consulting to undertake an evaluation of the National Framework with the aim of measuring progress of activity under the First and Second Three Year Action Plans.

### Evaluation overview

The evaluation commenced in December 2014, and concluded at the end of June 2015.

The evaluation was the first significant review of the National Framework. Its intent was to measure progress under the National Framework. It also afforded the opportunity to provide input into the development and implementation of the Third Action Plan, intended to be released in the second half of 2015.

The expectation of the evaluation was to present a narrative detailing progress across a series of key focus areas, rather than an audit of specific actions under the First and Second Action Plans. In this sense, the evaluation was focussed on matters of process, governance, and implementation. The scope of the evaluation did not encompass an investigation of outcomes or impact.

To support the evaluation, a working-group of the National Framework's tripartite implementation and governance group – the National Forum – was established. This working group – the NFEWG – was convened to provide direction and oversight for the baseline evaluation of the National Framework. Its insights and feedback were sought at key points in the evaluation.

Key areas of focus for the project comprised:

- Exploring the barriers, strengths and opportunities arising from the National Framework's tripartite approach to implementation and governance
- Determining whether the National Framework has added value to processes and / or systems aimed at protecting children

- Determining whether – through the National Framework – government efforts across jurisdictions have shifted focus from the statutory system to prevention initiatives and early intervention approaches
- Establishing a baseline for subsequent evaluations, which will enable judgements about the National Framework and the extent to which it is achieving its high level outcomes over the long term.

The evaluation was conducted at the same time that work was underway on development of the Third Action Plan. Accordingly, this project collected and presented consultation data to contribute to the process of developing the Third Action Plan.

These considerations shaped development of the project's research questions, method and approach.

### **Method**

In design and application the project sought to use narrative inquiry to examine implementation and progress of the National Framework.

This approach necessarily lends itself to the use of qualitative data methods, focussing on how key stakeholders have understood and made sense of the National Framework. This collection of different stories forms the narrative which becomes the focus of the project. Accordingly, the evaluation featured significant stakeholder consultation. The focus of these consultations was to explore the experiences, observations and insights of key stakeholders, and to use this rich qualitative data to understand where and how the National Framework had contributed to, or influenced, change.

However, application of narrative inquiry (and qualitative data collection and analysis more broadly) is not without criticism. Matters of significance, validity and reliability of the consultation data (the narrative) are often raised. These matters underscore the importance of an agreed and credible project approach and the use of other data – where appropriate – to validate the qualitative data analysis.

To address these issues, ACIL Allen sought to engage the NFEWG at the outset of the project to develop and test the project method and approach. Given the range of stakeholders involved in the National Framework, and the multiple and differing perspectives that jurisdictions or sectors may have had, agreement and ownership of the evaluation design across the NFEWG was considered an important enabler to the credibility and acceptance of the evaluation's key findings. The NFEWG was convened in December 2014 to workshop project design considerations and methods. The NFEWG also provided comment and feedback on the draft evaluation work-plan and framework.

Notwithstanding the project's emphasis on engaging and consulting with key stakeholders, there was also quantitative data collection and analysis of national child protection data and activity to triangulate, validate and support the qualitative data analysis.

The agreed work-plan and framework was endorsed in January 2015. The work-plan and framework outlined the research questions, data collection tools, and approach to the conduct of the project.

An overview of the key areas of focus for the project and the corresponding research questions is provided below.

### **Areas of focus and research questions**

Tripartite approach to implementation and governance:

- How effective are the tripartite partnership arrangements?
- Have tripartite partnership arrangements contributed to more integrated approaches between Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments?
- How effective has the collaborative approach been in sharing information across governments and non-government organisations?

- What are the key enablers and barriers to the governance and implementation of the National Framework?

Added value to processes / systems aimed at protecting children:

- How has the National Framework built collaboration and capability across different sectors?
- How has the National Framework informed / driven reform and innovation?
- What has been the value of resources and tools produced through the National Framework?
- Have the processes and activities under the National Framework interacted with other policy frameworks and programs to add value?

Shifting the focus from statutory systems to prevention initiatives and early intervention approaches:

- Has the National Framework contributed to the building of a clear research and evidence base?
- What evidence is there that the National Framework has enabled a greater focus on prevention initiatives and early intervention approaches?
- What are the barriers to – and facilitating factors for – systems change?

Establishing a baseline for subsequent evaluation:

- What has been achieved through the National Framework?
- How should progress under the National Framework be measured?

An additional focus area was collecting input into development of the Third Action Plan:

- What lessons from implementation should feed into the development of the Third Action Plan?

## Data inputs

Key data inputs into this project are listed below.

**National consultation program** – extensive national consultation with key stakeholders was a central component part of this evaluation. Over the course of the project, 52 separate consultation sessions were conducted. Consultations included one-on-one interviews, through to larger focus groups and workshops with multiple participants. 231 individuals from a range of different backgrounds and perspectives were engaged through this process. Stakeholders were identified for consultation by the different members of the NFEWG. The different categories of stakeholders comprised:

- Officials from Australian Government Departments
- Senior jurisdictional officials involved in the National Framework's governance arrangements
- NGO Coalition representatives
- Jurisdictional officers involved in policy and implementation
- Jurisdictional NGOs involved in policy and implementation
- Child Protection and social work practitioner perspectives
- Children's Commissioners and Guardians
- Researchers and academics from various research organisations.

A consolidated consultation guide with different sets of targeted questions was used for each of the consultations. Further detail on the organisation and of the national consultation program, and the stakeholders consulted with, is provided at Appendix A. The consultation guide is attached at Appendix B.

**Jurisdictional stocktake survey tool** – alongside organisation and identification of stakeholders, NFEWG members were also provided with a standardised survey tool to be completed by each of the jurisdictions. The purpose of the stocktake tool was to complement the consultation data collected through the National Consultation Program, providing a consistent set of stocktake data from each jurisdiction to support evaluation analysis and reporting. A copy of the stocktake survey tool is provided at Appendix B.

**Quantitative data** – two principal sources of quantitative data were used to support the narrative approach. This included national AIHW Child Protection data (and associated annual reports) and the Productivity Commission’s Annual Report on Government Services which provides data on expenditure for publicly funded services, as well commenting on the equity, effectiveness and efficiency of those services over time.

**National Framework policy and program documentation** – this included policy documents, Annual Reports, research pieces and various resources that have been produced to support implementation of the National Framework and related activity.

The qualitative data collected during this project was imported into NVivo 10 (a Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software program) and subjected to attributional, first and second cycle coding. This involved attribute coding to assist in the organisation and categorisation of data; structural and descriptive coding to enable identification of high-level findings (first cycle coding), before being subject to more focussed coding to rigorously explore and identify critical findings (second cycle coding).

An interim report outlining early findings was submitted in April 2015. The final project report was submitted in June 2015. The NFEWG reviewed and provided comment on both these project deliverables. The National Forum was also engaged in June 2015 for comment and validation of the project findings.

The complete evaluation work-plan and framework providing further details on each of these matters is provided at Appendix D

## Challenges and limitations

The evaluation has provided considerable insight into child wellbeing and child protection practice across Australia. This has been drawn from extensive consultation and analysis of aggregated nationally collected child protection data.

However, it is important to highlight limitations in project scope and method that need to be considered alongside the project’s findings. These principally relate to

- Attribution of activity to outcome
- Data comparability
- Program or activity specific analysis.

Each of these key challenges and limitations is discussed below.

## Attribution

The evaluation has drawn on a significant national consultation program, and the use of aggregated nationally collected child protection data. These data sources have yielded considerable insight on the National Framework, and on the challenges and opportunities associated with children’s policy and service delivery more broadly.

As highlighted in the findings detailed later in this report, the National Framework is widely recognised as an important and valued national policy document.

However, the size and scale of the issues and domains covered by the National Framework is considerable, and there are varying layers of government and different stakeholders involved,

jurisdiction-specific priorities, and other important contextual matters, that influence and shape activity in this space, and in turn complicate any judgements on National Framework related work.

This project has been primarily focussed on process, governance, and implementation matters associated with the National Framework. While the explicit focus of the project has not been on impact and outcomes, these matters invariably featured in the consultations. Similarly, the evidence and findings regarding process afford some insight into potential impact and outcomes. In this sense, this project remains a useful point in time for review of progress to date.

However, the issue of attribution is a complex one, and presents as an ongoing challenge to discussion of the National Framework and achievement of high level outcomes. It is the view of this project that it is too early for definitive assessment of these outcomes. Rather, a summative assessment of the National Framework would be more appropriately timed closer to 2020, at the end of the National Framework timeframe.

### **Data limitations**

There are a number of quality and comparability issues associated with the AIHW national child protection data used during this project, that need to be flagged at this point of the report.

While there has been significant work undertaken to improve data collection of client activity and costs across jurisdictions (as part of the National Framework), there are significant data limitations related to data consistency and comparability – particularly in any data cited before the commencement of unit record level data from 2012-13 – that need to be factored into any analysis of national child protection data. This includes the likelihood of multiple counts of children and young people across different types of activities and for children and young people who move across jurisdictions, and different methods and approaches to counting Indigenous clients.

It is also important to acknowledge that child protection policy and practice is not uniform across jurisdictions. Accordingly, there remain important differences between jurisdictions that can impact on how data is collected and counted.

Given these important considerations, this report will draw attention to data limitations whenever national data is cited.

### **Program or activity specific analysis**

The focus of the evaluation has been on the National Framework in its totality. The evaluation did not seek to undertake detailed assessment of the effectiveness of specific programs or initiatives that have been referenced through the National Framework's activity over the course of the first two Action Plans.

Throughout the course of the project, there was of course stakeholder discussion and evidence on discrete aspects and initiatives of the National Framework. These data inputs were crucial inputs into the project, and form the basis of the narrative underpinning progress of the National Framework. However, the evaluation does not focus on particular activities or approaches, nor seek to judge initiatives as being the more effective than others - to do so would require deeper evaluation of program-specific outcomes, which is beyond the scope of this project.

### **This report**

The remainder of this report uses the following structure.

- Chapter 2: Establishment of the National Framework. This chapter provides the context to the establishment of the National Framework.
- Chapter 3: The tripartite approach to implementation and governance.
- Chapter 4: Adding value to processes and systems to protect children
- Chapter 5: Shifting the focus from the statutory system to prevention and early intervention

- Chapter 6: Establishing a baseline for subsequent evaluation.

## Chapter 2: Establishment of the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children

This chapter provides the context to the establishment of the National Framework.

### Key points

The COAG endorsed National Framework articulated child abuse and neglect as an issue of national concern. It envisaged a shared responsibility among governments, the NGO sector and the broader community. It anticipated that systemic change would take time to effect.

The National Framework should be seen in the context of interconnected drivers for change that provided impetus for its development and implementation. This included: an increasingly coordinated NGO sector advocating for national change; a growing body of research and evidence on the need to redesign existing child protection systems due to concerns about the sustainability of the traditional approaches, and the merits of population based public health approaches; and growth in the OoHC population and the persistently poor outcomes experienced by children and young people placed in OoHC.

The National Framework is a deliberately aspirational document. Its headline target and six supporting outcomes span issues associated with child protection and child wellbeing. The First Action Plan covering 2009 to 2012 outlined a series of national priorities and major reforms, as well jurisdictional specific and community driven actions. The Commonwealth Government made available \$63 million in funding to support the First Action Plan.

Partnership arrangements for the oversight, governance and implementation of the National Framework were significant, and featured a tripartite structure, encompassing the Commonwealth Government, the NGO sector, and each of the State and Territory Governments. The intent was also to engage children and young people and the broader community through various mechanisms.

Accountability and reporting responsibilities featured significantly in the National Framework and the First Action Plan, with an agreed set of indicators of change and other performance and output measures to be used in Annual Reports to COAG. There were also expectations of reporting up through NFIWG to Community and Disability Services Ministerial Advisory Council (CDSMAC) and Community and Disability Services Ministerial Council (CDSMC) on specific national priorities, major reforms and other National Framework activity underway. An evaluation at the end of the First Action Plan was also announced.

There were high expectations at the time of the establishment of the National Framework. Key stakeholders considered it a major development in national child wellbeing and child protection policy, with the potential to drive major system wide reform.

However, there are a range of contextual and structural factors that have impacted on implementation since 2009 and that need to be considered in any analysis of implementation of the National Framework. These factors include:

- A federated system of government that complicates national efforts and approaches to consistency
- Significant change in government administrations over the course of the National Framework and the ending of 'cooperative federalism'
- Change in key personnel including Ministers, advisors, and senior officials at all levels of government

- Conduct of multiple inquiries and commissions across all levels of government and operating in a resource constrained environment.
- The lack of clarity over the National Framework's governance and implementation arrangements over 2014 and early 2015 created some uncertainty over its status and future viability

## Overview

The National Framework was endorsed by COAG in April 2009. The foreword to the National Framework articulates its rationale, the 'wicked' problem to be addressed through the National Framework, and the expected roles and responsibilities associated with its implementation.

*Our children must be able to grow up nourished and supported in loving and caring environments. They must have time to be children with all the wonder, happiness and innocence that childhood should bring.*

*Over recent years the reported levels of child neglect and abuse in Australia have increased at an alarming rate. Child abuse and neglect has become an issue of national concern. Meanwhile, statutory child protection systems are struggling under the load.*

*Protecting children is everyone's responsibility. Parents, communities, governments and business all have a role to play.*

*Australia needs a shared agenda for change, with national leadership and a common goal*

*All Australian governments have endorsed the first National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020 and are committed to implementing the initial actions it contains. It is a long-term, national approach to help protect all Australian children.*

*The National Framework represents an unprecedented level of collaboration between Australian, State and Territory Governments and non-government organisations to protect children. Placing children's interests firmly at the centre of everything we do.*

*Reducing child abuse and neglect is not an easy task and it will take time. The National Framework provides the foundation for national reform.*

*Source: National Framework foreword, COAG (2009) *Protecting Children is Everyone's Business: National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020**

Drawing on stakeholder perspectives and key National Framework documentation, this chapter explores these issues in detail. It does this by examining:

- The advocacy and other drivers for change that shaped the development of the National Framework
- Establishment of the National Framework, including the expectations associated with its implementation
- Partnership and governance arrangements underpinning the National Framework when it was first established
- The context and challenges to implementation and governance.

These themes are explored in detail below.

## Drivers for change

The National Framework should be seen in the context of a number of interconnected drivers for change that provided the impetus for its development and implementation.

*...the development of the National Framework has had a long gestation. It didn't just come out of nowhere in 2009...*

*Children's Commissioners and Guardians perspective*

These drivers have been categorised under the following themes:

- A history of advocacy from the non-government sector that increasingly grew in momentum in the years leading up to 2009
- A growing body of research and evidence on the need to redesign and reform approaches to protecting children
- The inexorable growth in the numbers of children and young people in OoHC, and the poor outcomes associated with OoHC.

Each of these themes is explored in further detail below.

### Advocacy from the NGO sector

Historically, the non-government sector in Australia has provided a significant role in supporting vulnerable children and their families. Over the past two decades, this role has grown in both scope and scale.

Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) across Australian jurisdictions provide support across the spectrum of service system responses, from universal and family support services, through to the case management and placement of children and young people who have been removed from their families by statutory child protection services.

Advocacy has also been a key feature of the child and family welfare non-government sector. However, in discussions with NGO representatives, it was also evident that historically, this advocacy had not been consistently coordinated. However, in the years leading up to the National Framework, it was reported that this began to change, and that a more strategic and coordinated approach emerged. In his work on the origins of the National Framework, Babington (2011) identifies a number of signature NGO efforts that laid the foundations for the National Framework. These efforts are detailed below.

The Child and Family Welfare Association of Australia 2002 report, *A Time to Invest in Australia's Most Disadvantaged Children, Young People and Their Families*, which advocated for joined up approach to drive consistency and minimum standards in child protection activity across jurisdictions.

Establishment of Families Australia in 2001, providing for a national, independent, peak body to advocate and promote national policy as it relates to the needs and interests of families. The subsequent 2003 Families Australia campaign, *Our Children: Our Concern, Our Responsibility*, encouraged the Commonwealth Government to play a leadership role in the prevention of child abuse and neglect.

These developments corresponded with four major national inquiries conducted between 1997 and 2005 that focused national attention on policies that related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and on the practice of child protection and OoHC more broadly. These included:

- The 1997 Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) report – *Bringing Them Home: National Inquiry Into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children From Their Families*
- The 2001 Senate Community Affairs References Committee report – *Lost Innocents: Righting the Record*
- The 2005 Senate Community Affairs References Committee report – *Forgotten Australians: A Report on Australians Who Experienced Institutional or Out-of-Home Care as Children*
- The 2005 Senate Community Affairs References Committee report – *Protecting Vulnerable Children: A National Challenge*.

At the same time, various state and territory inquiries were also being conducted. The nature of most of these inquiries was one where they had been initiated primarily in response to critical failings in the statutory system.

Within this context of an increasingly nationally focussed NGO sector, and growing public awareness of child protection systems, Families Australia convened a National Child Protection Forum in 2006, that brought together Government and NGO representatives and academics, who developed a national strategy titled *Towards a National Child Protection Strategy for Australia*. This work also led to the 2007 establishment of the Coalition of Organisations Committed to the Safety and Wellbeing of Australia's Children which took carriage for continuing advocacy for a national approach for protecting children and promoting children's wellbeing.

In 2007 the Australian Government adopted the Families Australia position and committed to the development of the National Framework. The NGO Coalition played an important role in the shaping of this work throughout 2007 to 2009 when the National Framework was first established. This partnership arrangement is cited as an exemplar of public policy collaboration, made possible by the 'unity of purpose developed within the NGO and academic sectors about the desired aims and objectives of the National Framework' (Babington 2011).

### **Research and evidence**

The advocacy of the NGO sector aligned with an increasing body of research and evidence about the merits of a public health model, and the benefits of differential responses to vulnerability and disadvantage.

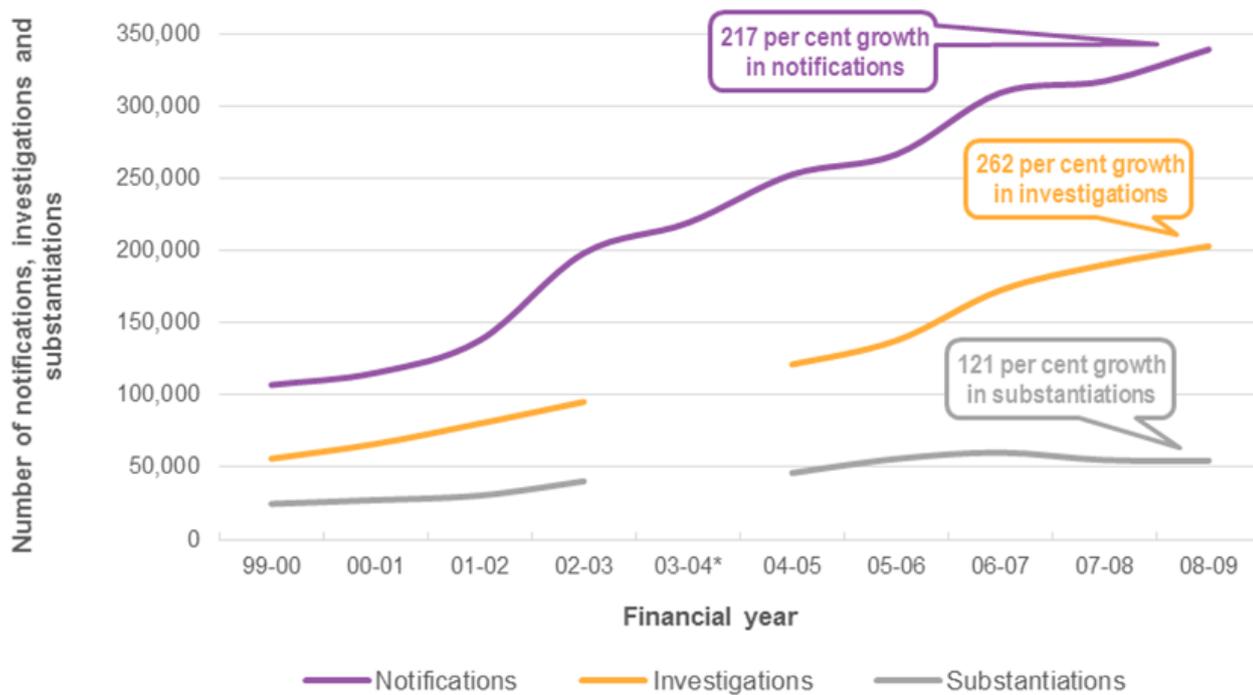
A public health model approach for child protection gained traction in the early 2000s, primarily driven by concerns among experts and officials over the sustainability and appropriateness of approaches to child protection which were increasingly focussed on statutory practice.

*Australia is seeing an unprecedented increase in the rate of child protection notifications and children being taken into care. The burden of such high levels of notifications and removals impact not only the children and families but also the system which is trying to resource them. The concern is that these increases are unsustainable and overloaded child protection systems can be dangerous for the vulnerable families and children they are trying to protect and support.*

O'Donnell M, Scott D & Stanley F 2008, 'Child abuse and neglect – is it time for a public health approach?'

To illustrate these concerns, Figure 1 charts the growth in child protection reports, investigations and substantiations in the decade leading up to establishment of the National Framework.

**Figure 1 National rates of child protection notifications, investigations and substantiations 1999-00 to 2008-09**



Note: \* National data on investigation and substantiation data not available for 2003-04

AIHW child protection data before the development of unit record data in 2012-13 should be viewed with some caution. Given data collection methods and varying child protection policy and practice between jurisdictions, there are limitations to the use of national statistical aggregations of child protection data.

Source: AIHW 2001:2014. Child Protection Australia Reports

Across the three functions of statutory child protection activity – assessment of notifications of child abuse or neglect; investigation of child abuse or neglect; and substantiation of child abuse or neglect – growth trajectories continued to climb above population growth rates. While there remain significant limitations in the use of these data, they did contribute to increasing concern about the future sustainability of existing practice, and growing public awareness of the need for systemic change, and the importance of differential responses to addressing disadvantage and vulnerability.

These matters were explored in an important report commissioned by the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) in 2008, *Inverting the Pyramid - Enhancing Systems for Protecting Children*. This report advocated for systems-based reform to child protection across Australia and took as its goal a public health model that utilised integrated primary, secondary and tertiary prevention approaches to address child abuse and neglect.

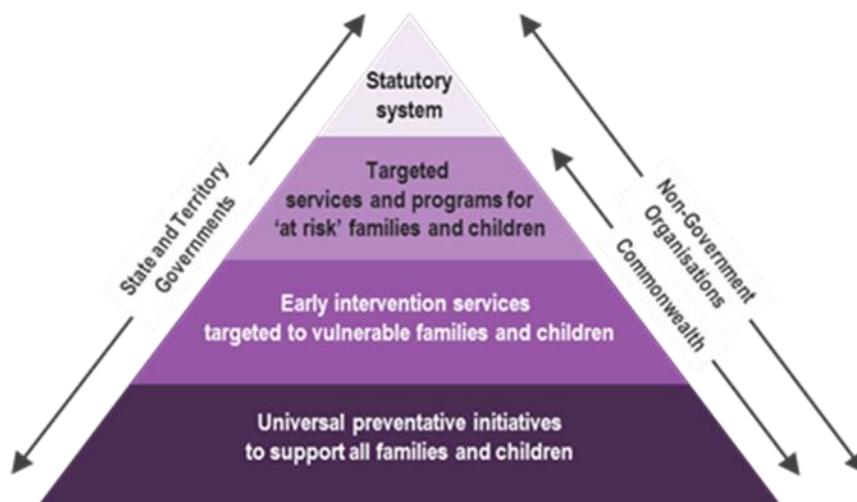
- Primary interventions were defined as strategies that target whole communities in order to build public resources and attend to the social factors that contribute to child maltreatment
- Secondary or targeted interventions were defined as approaches targeted at vulnerable families or children and young people who are ‘at risk’ for child maltreatment
- Tertiary interventions were defined as approaches targeted at families in which child maltreatment had already occurred. They include statutory care and protection services.

Significantly the report also outlined the rationale for a collaborative approach to systems change, emphasising the importance of: building and articulating a shared vision that encompasses common

language, collaboration and shared responsibility and accountability; developing and maintaining supportive and adaptive cultures that are not risk-averse; and integrated governance arrangements that best leverage the skills and resources across agencies, institutions and different tiers of government.

In the 2009 National Framework document, the ARACY public health model was adapted to include a fourth tier within the triangle, effectively breaking the secondary service system tier into early intervention and prevention programs to address vulnerability, and targeted services and programs where risk is greater. The National Framework's public health model is provided at Figure 2. It also outlines areas of responsibility across different tiers of government and NGO sector.

**Figure 2 The National Framework's public health approach**



Source: COAG 2009, The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020

Significantly, the public health model approach – with its greater emphasis on population approaches and focus on prevention and early intervention – continues to be re-affirmed in more recent jurisdictional inquiries, including the 2013 inquiries, *Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry* and the *Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry*.

### **Growth in OoHC and the continuing of poor outcomes**

Alongside the growth in child protection activity, the growing number of children and young people removed from their families and placed into OoHC, and the evidence of persistently poor outcomes associated with this experience was another key driver to the National Framework.

The Stolen Generations and Forgotten Australian reports provide stark evidence of the historically poor outcomes associated with institutional OoHC. While the forms of OoHC at the beginning of this century no longer resemble those associated with the first seventy years of the twentieth century, growth in the numbers of children and young people in OoHC remains an increasingly problematic issue.

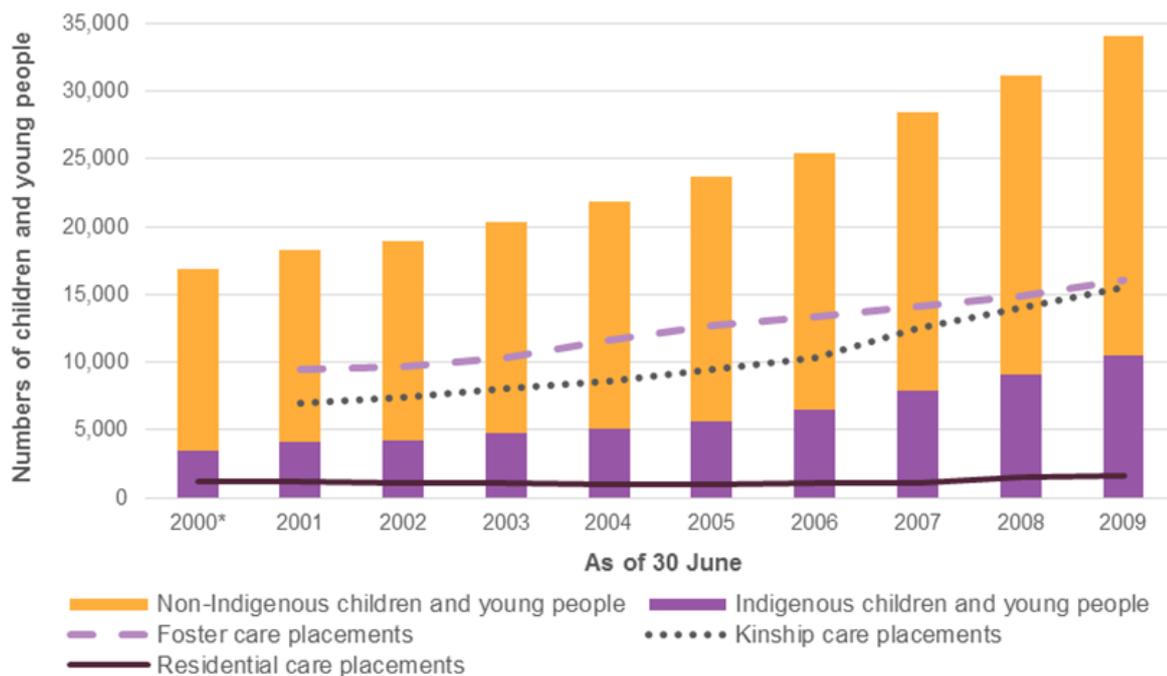
Children and young people in OoHC have typically experienced significant abuse, trauma and / or neglect. They are vulnerable, have complex needs, and continue to experience poor life outcomes across multiple domains. From a snapshot of relevant literature, these outcomes can include:

- Poor educational outcomes – children in care are less likely than other children to engage with education and schooling. They are typically absent or excluded, and experience poor educational attainment (Osborn & Bromfield 2007)
- Poor health outcomes – children in care typically experience poor health and suffer complex psychological and behavioural issues (RACP 2006)

- Poor social outcomes – children in care have experienced significant trauma and abuse. This fuels social and behavioural issues that can compound disadvantage, such as placement instability and inability to form healthy relationships with peers and adults (Osborn and Bromfield 2007).

The 2009 National Framework document cited AIHW figures when it highlighted the significance of the OoHC population doubling over the decade leading up to 2009. Figure 3 charts the growth in the OoHC population, including the breakdown by Indigenous status. It also tracks placement types.

**Figure 3 National OoHC population 2000 To 2009 (As Of 30 June Each Year)**



Note: (\*) National data on the breakdown of home based care not available for 2000

AIHW child protection data before the development of unit record data in 2012-13 should be viewed with some caution. Given data collection methods and varying child protection policy and practice between jurisdictions, there are limitations to the use of national statistical aggregations of child protection data.

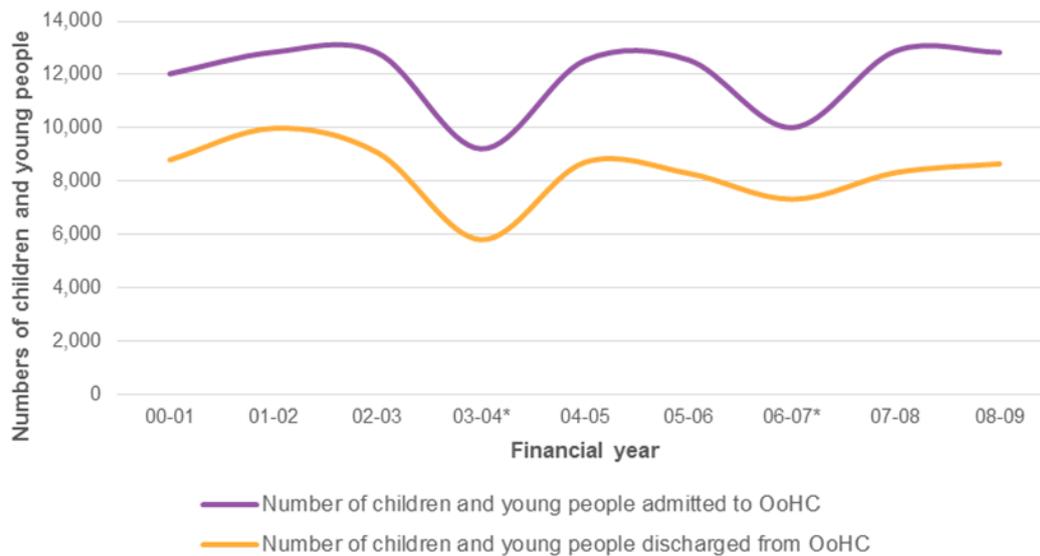
Source: AIHW 2001:2014. Child Protection Australia Reports

Key points from these data is the growing share of Indigenous children within OoHC, rising from approximately a quarter of the overall OoHC population in the early 2000s, to a third of the overall population in 2009, and the declining share of foster care placements, and corresponding growth in kinship care placements within the OoHC service system (both trends have continued beyond 2009).

In other work on the experience of both foster and kinship carers, key factors identified as contributing to carer satisfaction include: the financial and opportunity cost and disruption to family and professional circumstances; dissatisfaction with bureaucratic processes associated with assessment and quality of care; poor peer support, networking and advocacy options, and increasing client complexity and subsequent carer exhaustion (ACIL Allen 2013; McHugh & Valentin 2011).

Client complexity was often cited in stakeholder discussion as a key driver of growth in the OoHC system. Indicators can also be inferred from the AIHW data. Figure 4 charts OoHC admissions and discharges in the decade leading up to establishment of the National Framework.

**Figure 4 OoHC admissions and discharges 2000-01 to 2008-09**



Note: (\*) National data incomplete: 2003-04 data excludes NSW and Tasmanian data; 2006-07 data excludes QLD data

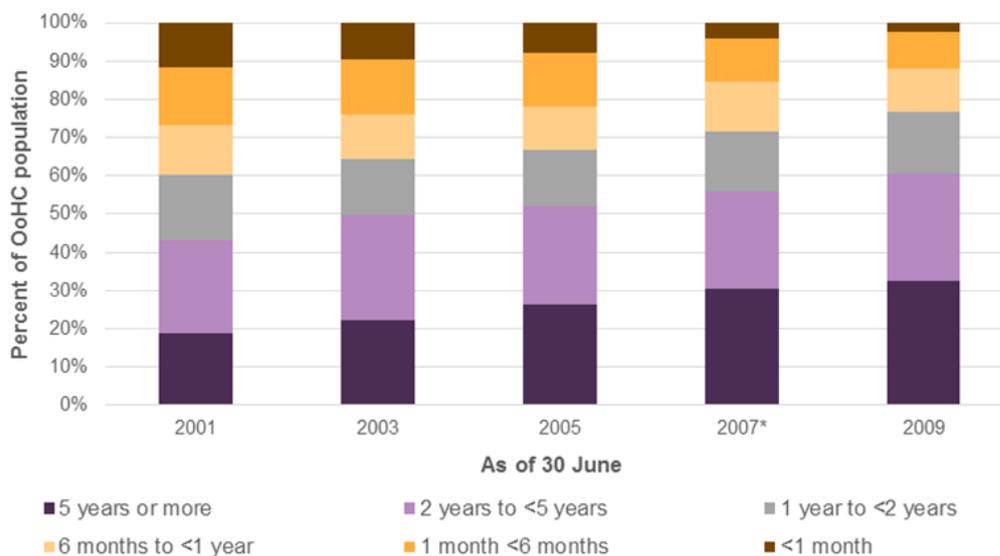
AIHW child protection data before the development of unit record data in 2012-13 should be viewed with some caution. Given data collection methods and varying child protection policy and practice between jurisdictions, there are limitations to the use of national statistical aggregations of child protection data.

Source: AIHW 2001:2014. Child Protection Australia Reports

Discharge rates have consistently been below entry rates to OoHC, with children and young people entering earlier and staying longer, which in turn has the potential to lead to experiences of greater placement instability while in OoHC.

This is best demonstrated in the shift in lengths of time that children and young people have spent in OoHC during the decade leading up to 2009, as described in Figure 5.

**Figure 5 Length of time in OoHC 2001 to 2009**



Note: \* 2007 data does not include QLD data as it is not available

AIHW child protection data before the development of unit record data in 2012-13 should be viewed with some caution. Given data collection methods and varying child protection policy and practice between jurisdictions, there are limitations to the use of national statistical aggregations of child protection data.

Source: AIHW 2001:2014. Child Protection Australia Reports

From 2001 to 2009 the proportion of children and young people who have been in continuous placement in OoHC for at least two years or more had grown from 40 per cent in 2001 to 60 per cent of the overall OoHC population in 2009 (this trend continues in years beyond 2009).

## Establishment of the National Framework

Following the significant formative and developmental work on the National Framework that began in 2007, the agreed National Framework was endorsed by COAG on 30 April 2009.

The National Framework was built upon a child's rights framework. Its principles are modelled on rights outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. As discussed in Chapter 1, the headline outcome for the National Framework was for all children and young people to be safe and well. Evidence of a substantial and sustained reduction in child abuse and neglect over time was the agreed target with which to measure this outcome.

Six supporting outcomes were also agreed to focus strategies and activity towards the headline outcome.

1. Children live in safe and supportive families and communities
2. Children and families access adequate support to promote safety and intervene early
3. Risk factors for child abuse and neglect are addressed
4. Children who have been abused or neglected receive the support and care they need for their safety and wellbeing
5. Indigenous children are supported and safe in their families and communities
6. Child sexual abuse and exploitation is prevented and survivors receive adequate support

In October 2009, the First Action Plan was released. It identified four types of actions for the first three year period:

- National priorities – covering areas of need and the foundation for future work
- Major reforms – related to broader social reform agendas
- Ongoing initiatives for children and families – actions already under way in different jurisdictions
- Community initiatives – actions undertaken independent of government.

A total of 75 specific actions were cited in the First Action Plan.

Commonwealth Government funding of \$63 million was also made available for actions over the first three years.

## Expectations

In discussions with stakeholders, it is evident that expectations of the National Framework were high. From stakeholders involved in its establishment in 2009, the National Framework was considered:

*...ground breaking because NGOs and Governments had never before come together to work in that space. The states were not used to sitting at the table and having a conversation with the NGOs...*

*Commonwealth Government official perspectives*

*... a genuine attempt to put the protection of children on the national agenda.*

*Jurisdictional executive perspective*

Bringing the Commonwealth Government into the debate in a national leadership role, driving consistency in practice and approaches, and ensuring higher standards of accountability were all key themes in the consultation data.

*The intent was to seek a national policy instrument to triangulate COAG, the Commonwealth Government, NGOs, and the States and Territories, and push the States and Territories ... to provoke a paradigm shift in how we care for children*

*NGO Coalition perspective*

*It was trying to set national standards and consistency, to raise the public value of vulnerable children, and implement something that was accountable and comparable.*

*Jurisdictional executive perspective*

The National Framework was considered a deliberately and strategically aspirational document by key stakeholders and one that would, over time, enable system-wide changes.

## Partnership arrangements

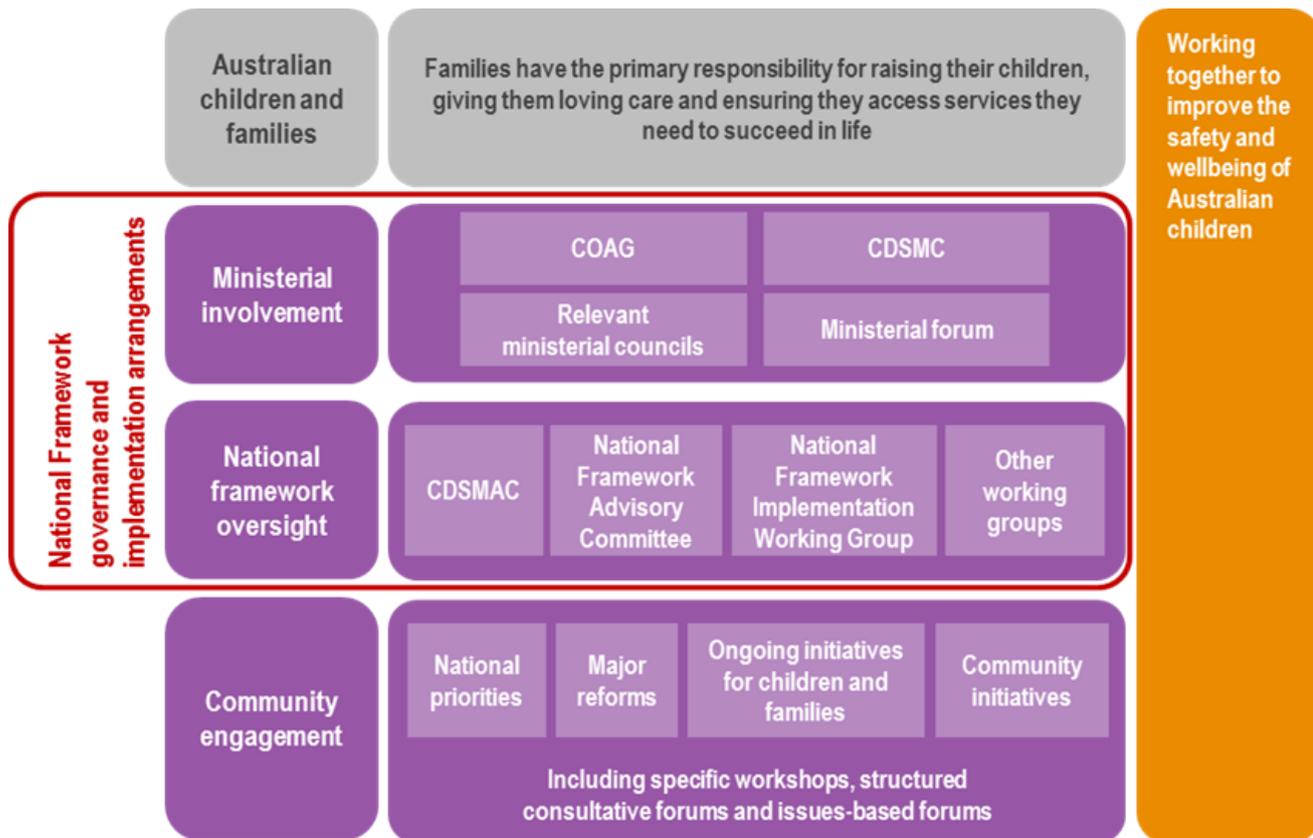
The National Framework is premised upon a 'shared agenda for change, with national leadership and a common goal' (COAG 2009). It features a tripartite partnership approach working towards a shared goal, while also recognising existing responsibilities across different levels of government and sectors.

The First Action Plan mapped the anticipated partnership arrangements for the National Framework. These arrangements are outlined in Figure 2.6, and reflect the tripartite arrangements between the Commonwealth Government, the NGO sector, and the different State and Territory Governments, that underpin the National Framework.

A brief overview of the different groups involved in the 2009 partnership arrangements is provided below.

- COAG – Council of Australian Governments, with oversight and monitoring of National Framework progress
- CDSMC – Community and Disability Services Ministerial Council, with overall responsibility for the National Framework
- Other Ministerial Councils covering other areas of national focus and priority including health, education and early childhood
- The Ministerial Forum which was intended to be annual forum of Government Ministers, NGOs, and children and families from the community to discuss major reforms
- CDSMAC – Community and Disability Services Ministerial Advisory Council comprising senior officials from all jurisdictions supporting CDSMC with overall implementation and monitoring
- National Framework Advisory Committee which was intended to be a forum for CDSMAC officials, NGOs and children and young people to review progress and explore issues central to the National Framework
- NFIWG – National Framework Implementation Working Group, comprising officials from all jurisdictions and the NGO sector, with a hands on role in implementation
- Other working groups, drawn from government and the NGO sector to progress specific National Framework priorities.

**Figure 6 2009 Partnership arrangements for the National Framework**



Source: Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) 2009, Implementing the First Three-Year Action Plan - The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020

Discussion on the experience of the governance and implementation arrangements for the National Framework is detailed in the following chapter.

### Accountability arrangements

Accountability and reporting responsibilities featured significantly in the National Framework and the First Action Plan.

The National Framework outlined indicators of change to measure the extent to which governments and the NGO sector were achieving each of the six identified supporting outcomes.

While the First Action Plan reiterated that the National Framework was a long term initiative and that it was unlikely that there would be any change in its high level target for 'many years to come', there were several reporting mechanisms outlined. These included annual reporting to COAG, to allow for yearly public snapshots of progress; as well regular reporting through NFIWG to the CDSMAC and CDSMC on the national priorities, major reforms and other National Framework activity undertaken.

At the conclusion of the first three year period it was also anticipated that an evaluation of the National Framework would be undertaken, collecting and analysing data against outputs and performance indicators identified in the First Action Plan.

### Context and challenges to implementation

Before examining the experience of implementation and governance in the next chapter, it is worth considering key contextual factors and challenges.

The National Framework exists within a complex national environment comprising Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments with different spheres of responsibility, varying legislative frameworks, policy and practice, and an NGO sector that is increasingly contracted to provide services that span jurisdictions and funding from both the Commonwealth and the State and Territory Governments.

These are important contextual challenges that complicate a reform agenda seeking to drive national systemic change. They need to be considered in any discussion about National Framework implementation.

A synthesis of these challenges, drawn from the project data sources is provided below.

### **A federated system**

The National Framework spans different levels of government. Despite common objectives and policy parameters, the eight jurisdictions that comprise the Australian Commonwealth have different legislative frameworks approaches to child protection practice. This overlaid by a national government with different domains of responsibility, and associated policy and funding levers. To further complicate matters, the National Framework also aspires to inform and influence other policy domains, like education, health and justice, which have unique jurisdictional components to them.

States and territories have retained responsibility for the administration of child protection services. Given the variously sized systems and approaches, comparability across jurisdictions is problematic. There was also significant comment from the non-eastern seaboard states about the tendency of larger eastern states to dominate national discourses, and the applicability of these discussions to the circumstances they operate in.

*Some of the National Framework is eastern state centric. Service provision in remote areas is a real challenge that is not faced to the same extent in the eastern states*

*Jurisdictional policy perspective*

There is also considerable variability in the level of capacity and capability across jurisdictions. Smaller states can sometimes look to the larger jurisdictions for learnings, looking to leverage initiatives that already established and being practiced.

The Commonwealth Government responsibilities in the sector relate to a range of universal services through to more targeted welfare and payment supports. The Commonwealth DSS provides programs, services, benefits and payments to support families and children. Decisions made at a Commonwealth level can significantly affect the material circumstances of vulnerable families and children. Similarly the federal social security system in effect captures young people transitioning from OoHC into adulthood.

*The states and territories look after these areas. But poor outcomes have an enduring follow-on effect for the Commonwealth's social services. Many of the grant programs we fund NGOs for are for vulnerable families and children. We struggle with the simple question of 'how does all this work together?'*

*Commonwealth Government perspective*

The quality of that experience of care in the jurisdictional OoHC system can have major impacts on the trajectory of that young person's social and economic wellbeing outcomes.

The NGO sector is not a homogenous one. While the NGO Coalition has brought a level of national coordination, the sector still encompasses a multitude of organisations with different sizes, mission statements, locations and capability. Additionally, the sector engages separately with both state and territory, and Commonwealth levels of government. Coordination of viewpoints and strategy is understandably limited in such a diversified landscape.

*While we are working in a competitive funding environment we are also meant to be talking about collaborate approaches – this approach is counterproductive*

*Jurisdictional NGO perspective*

Collaboration is further complicated by the increasingly competitive government funding environment in which NGOs operate for contracts.

## Change in government administrations

Since the establishment of the National Framework in 2009 there has been a change in government at the Commonwealth level, and across six of the eight jurisdictions (with two jurisdictions experiencing multiple changes in administration).

It is the practice of all new administrations, upon entering office, to review existing policy and priorities and determine where they align (or not) with the policy platform they were elected upon. This can take some time of review and analysis, and it is to be expected that it will challenge any national reform agenda, particularly those with relatively fluid governance structures.

Initially, the National Framework was introduced during a period of 'cooperative federalism' typically associated with the period of 2007 to 2013. This period saw an increasing range of intergovernmental agreements entered into by the Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments in a range of social policy domains. However, the dynamic associated with this period had already begun to change by 2008, with a change in a State Government Administration, which was followed by changes in nearly all other jurisdictions. The streamlining of COAG, undertaken in 2013 early in the life of the current Commonwealth Government, and the subsequent Reform of Federation process which has now commenced, has further changed the dynamic of Commonwealth and State Government relations.

## Change among key representatives

Changes of government obviously result in changes among Ministers and their staff. They can often lead to Machinery of Government changes and departmental reorganisations as well. The extent of change among Ministers, their staff, senior officials, and implementation staff associated with the National Framework, and the consequent impact on corporate memory within departments, the maintain of momentum, were consistent features of consultation.

*In the last 18 months, we have had changes in key DSS staff and loss of corporate knowledge and influence within the whole of DSS*

*NGO Coalition representative*

*There is a progressive deskilling of State Government departments occurring. We are increasingly dealing with contract managers rather than innovators, and doers.*

*NGO Coalition representative*

The ongoing loss of corporate knowledge at a Commonwealth and State and Territory level was seen as a continual challenge to the implementation of the National Framework.

## Inquiries and commissions in an environment of increasing demand and constrained resources

Since 2009 there have been at least 25 Ombudsman inquiries, Auditor-General inquiries, commissions of inquiry, judicial reviews, parliamentary inquiries and Royal Commissions into various aspects of child protection practice and policy across the eight jurisdictions, and including the current Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

These reviews, inquires and commissions result in recommendations that drive jurisdictional policy and programming. During consultations, state and territory executive and policy officers emphasised that the strategic direction of their work was – appropriately – guided by these jurisdictional priorities. Additionally, a sizable amount of work is required by departments to engage in these reviews, inquires and commissions. Government officers noted the value of these events, however, highlighted how they could quickly draw financial and human resources away from longer term reform trajectories.

*The reputation of a Child Protection system is only as good as the last incident.*

*Commonwealth Government perspective*

The significant number of reviews, inquiries and commissions highlights the tentative and emotive nature of the child protection sector. Consultations revealed the often challenging and complex nature of providing services to children as well as educating the population regarding the importance of investing in universal services.

Jurisdictions are also experiencing ongoing service demand pressures on their child protection and child and family welfare service systems. While all jurisdictions recognise the importance of the public health model and have initiated family support and early intervention reform strategies (to varying degrees) pressure to react in the event of another crisis in the statutory system can derail policy innovation.

Funding pressures are also accordingly felt in the NGO sector, with recent jurisdictional and Commonwealth DSS funding decisions having an impact on NGOs tailor their services, and limit the extent to which they can innovate.

### **Changes to the governance and implementation arrangements**

Since 2009 there have been changes to the governance arrangements underpinning the National Framework, and to COAG structures more broadly.

Over the course of the First Action Plan, there were minor changes such as the ceasing of forums like the National Framework Advisory Committee. However, the most significant changes to governance and implementation occurred in 2012 with Machinery of Government changes, and again in 2013 as part of streamlining COAG reforms which removed any clear line of sight between COAG and the National Framework.

*Since December 2013, we have lacked any sense of national governance.*

*NGO Coalition representative*

While the foundation of a tripartite approach to governance and implementation has remained, to many stakeholders, the impact of the most recent changes had made the National Framework's status and future viability less clear (noting that the recent Third Action Plan development work had removed much of this uncertainty).

These issues are significant and are examined in detail in the next chapter. However, they are worth framing here as governance and implementation arrangements are necessarily fundamental to a framework that various levels of government and the NGO sector have signed up to. Governance and implementation matters also proved the key focus of the national consultation program.

### **Conclusions**

The development and establishment of the National Framework was the result of a number of interconnected factors. These principally included an increasingly coordinated and strategic advocacy from the NGO and academic sector, combined with a growing sense that existing child protection approaches were not sustainable and nor were they providing the right responses for vulnerable and at risk children.

Despite the scale and complexity of the policy problem to be addressed, the adoption of the public health model to underpin national policy and approaches, and the innovative use of tripartite partnership and governance arrangements, created high expectations among the related stakeholders about what the National Framework could achieve.

The Commonwealth Government's significant role in the National Framework, the allocation of federal funding in 2009, and the considerable accountability mechanisms all contributed to these expectations. However, there are significant contextual and structural factors that have challenged implementation of the National Framework since its establishment in 2009, and that need to be considered in any analysis of its impact and effect.

The experience of implementation of the National Framework from 2009 onwards will be the focus of the next four chapters.

## Chapter 3: The tripartite approach to implementation and governance

This chapter explores the barriers, strengths and opportunities arising from the National Framework's tripartite approach to implementation and governance.

### Key points

A distinguishing feature of the National Framework is its tripartite approach to implementation and governance. Among the participants in the national consultation program, the National Framework was universally regarded as an important national policy framework and mechanism with which to improve services, planning, and outcomes for children and young people.

The National Framework's conceptual underpinnings, its principles, and its approach to collaborative and tripartite partnerships were all considered innovative, sound and appropriate. The incorporation of the NGO sector into a governance, co-design, and implementation role was an important enabler to building trust, collaboration and partnership across governments and the NGO sector, particularly at a national and jurisdictional level.

The early period of implementation and governance, associated with the First Action Plan, was relatively stable, and identified as the most productive and effective period of the National Framework, though there was some concern over it becoming too bureaucratic in process and reporting.

The period associated with the Second Action Plan saw considerable change and fluidity to the tripartite implementation and governance arrangements. There was considerable frustration and uncertainty about the governance and implementation arrangements of the National Framework. The development of the Second Action Plan was widely regarded as flawed, and its implementation poor.

The presence of a predominantly child protection and OoHC agency membership was seen by many (including NGO members of NFIWG / National Forum NGO) as driving too much of a tertiary focus in the National Framework. There was support for revisiting governance membership to ensure more appropriate representation that is fit for purpose.

The tripartite partnership approach had created an environment where different stakeholders could engage and collaborate within a forum that had not existed previously. Co-design of policy and an integrated implementation responsibility had been a focus of NFIWG and the National Forum since 2009. The extent to which the National Framework had begun to embed a more integrated approach between governments and NGOs, and facilitated an environment that enabled collaboration, was seen as one of the most important benefits of the National Framework.

Notwithstanding these important developments, there remained concern over a number of issues that were seen as detracting from the conditions of collaboration and partnership. These included the effect of government policy and funding decisions that appeared contrary to the principles of the National Framework, time-limiting the funding arrangements of promising initiatives; and sometimes perceived tokenistic inclusion of NGO sector views and input.

Key enablers and barriers to governance and implementation included: the importance of national commitment and endorsement; the role of tripartite arrangements in elevating discussions; continuity in key participants and secretariat / communication support; the impact of inquiries on reform agendas; understanding around decision-making processes; and clarity around the role of the Commonwealth Government and consistency in its actions.

## Overview

The tripartite partnership arrangements are central to the National Framework.

The tripartite approach comprises collaboration between the Commonwealth Government, State and Territory Governments and the NGO sector, principally represented by the NGO Coalition. The 2009 National Framework document clearly articulates the responsibilities of different levels of government and the NGO sector, and how the collective leveraging of the particular resources, policy levers and skills from each of the tripartite participants will depend on integrated governance and implementation approaches.

*Recognising that the safety and wellbeing of children is the responsibility of all levels of government, the Australian Government has led the development of the National Framework, working closely with States and Territories.*

*State and Territory Governments are currently implementing reforms to their statutory child protection systems - all focused on early intervention. But for these reforms to be truly effective, they need to be coordinated with Australian Government programs, policies and payments – a large part of the early intervention response.*

*The National Framework will deliver a more integrated response but does not change the responsibilities of governments.*

*A National Framework provides an opportunity to drive improvements across all systems and all jurisdictions. National leadership will provide the momentum for key national projects – such as data, research, information sharing and national consistency in critical areas. A National Framework also provides a mechanism for engaging the non-government sector and the broader community on a national level.*

*COAG 2009, National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children*

Drawing on stakeholder perspectives, jurisdictional information and key National Framework documentation, this chapter explores the strengths, barriers and opportunities arising from the experience of the National Framework's tripartite approach to implementation and governance. It does this by:

- Examining the effectiveness of the tripartite partnership arrangements
- Measuring the extent to which tripartite partnership arrangements have contributed to more integrated approaches between Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments, and how effective collaborative approaches have been to the sharing of information across governments and non-government organisations
- Presenting the key enablers and barriers to governance and implementation of the National Framework.

Each of these issues is explored in detail below.

### **Effectiveness of the tripartite partnership arrangements**

A distinguishing feature of the National Framework is its tripartite approach to implementation and governance. From conception to implementation the National Framework had recognised the need for an integrated approach to achieve systemic change.

*A focus on broader early intervention and prevention across a range of areas which impact on the safety and wellbeing of children requires a move away from the traditional 'single agency' approach for the ongoing management and monitoring of the National Framework. The National Framework will require integrated governance arrangements that cut across government boundaries and include the non-government sector in order to plan and implement actions.*

*COAG 2009, National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children*

This section presents an overview of the implementation and governance arrangements that have been in place since 2009, before providing a narrative on how they have been experienced by participants or observed by others.

### **Implementation and governance arrangements**

Prior to exploring the effectiveness of the partnership arrangements of the National Framework, it is worth detailing the implementation and governance arrangements over the course of the first two implementation periods.

#### **The First Action Plan 2009-12**

The First Action Plan laid out how governments and the NGO sector would implement and monitor a range of actions that would contribute to the National Framework's headline and supporting outcomes.

The First Action Plan categorised National Framework actions under four broad groupings.

- National priorities mapped to supporting outcomes, and covering areas of identified need, and the foundation of future work
- Major reforms related to broader national social policy reform agendas
- Ongoing initiatives related to children and families already underway within jurisdictions
- Community initiatives which are implemented independently of government.

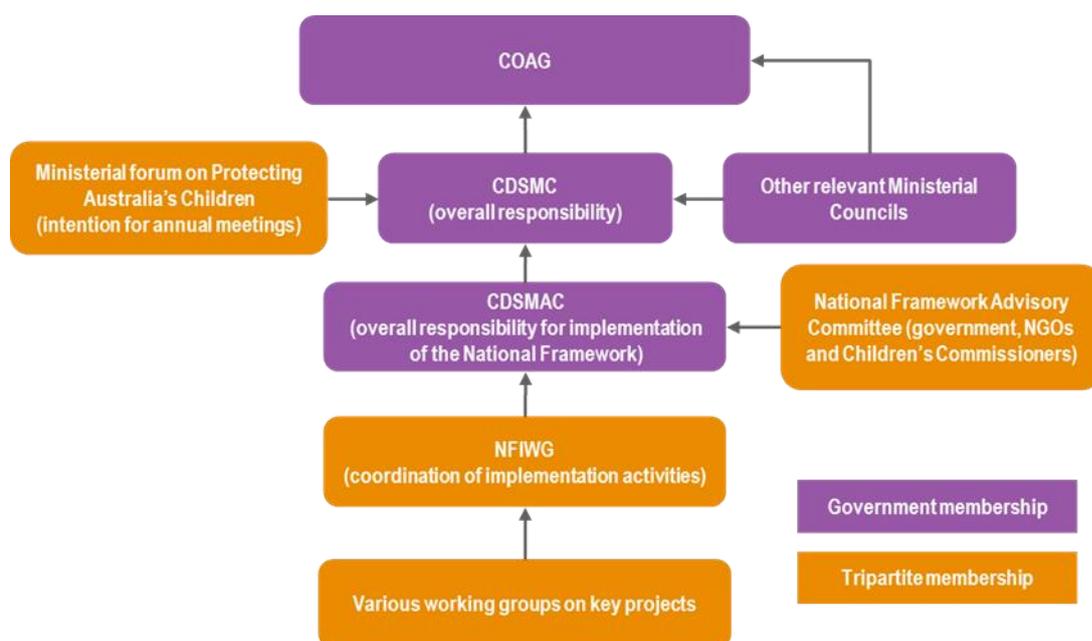
An overview of the national priorities mapped to associated actions in the First Action Plan is outlined below. It is important to note that each action could be the composite of a number of smaller discrete activities.

- **Joining up service delivery:**
  - Implement a joined up approach to service design, planning and delivery by leveraging the services and support from all Governments
  - Jurisdictions to continue reforms around family support
- **Closing the gap:**
  - Support Indigenous community-building activities in areas of culture and connectedness, and strengthening families and communities in targeted areas
- **Seeing early warning signs and taking early action:**
  - Develop a common approach to assessment, referral and support in universal and secondary prevention services, with appropriate information sharing
- **Improving support for carers:**
  - Explore options for improving financial and non-financial support to grandparent, kinship and foster carers
- **Developing national standards for OoHC:**

- Develop national standards for OoHC that will improve outcomes and experience of children and young people in OoHC. To include research and improved data collection and reporting mechanisms
- Building capacity and expertise
  - Support the education, professional development and retention of child protection and welfare workforce, including a focus on the Indigenous workforce.
  - The Commonwealth Government to take a broader human services definition of workforce and look at ways other professionals can contribute to the protection of children
- Enhancing the evidence base:
  - Review of data collection relating to child protection, homelessness and juvenile justice to improve national reporting
- Filling the research gaps:
  - Develop a national research agenda
- Transitioning to Independence:
  - Increase support through the NGO sector, and jurisdictional agencies for young people leaving care
- Responding to sexual abuse:
  - Undertake research to present a national picture of therapeutic services to identify promising practice, gaps in service provisions and challenges across the sector
- Advocating nationally for children and young people:
  - Explore potential role for a National Commissioner for Children and Young People
- Sharing information:
  - Expand the information sharing protocol between Centrelink and jurisdictional child protection agencies to include Medicare Australia and the Child Support Agency.

To drive and monitor the implementation of these actions, a governance structure was established in 2009, which remained relatively unchanged until mid-2012. Figure 3.1 charts the governance structure at commencement of the National Framework in 2009.

**Figure 7 Governance structure at commencement of the First Three Year Action Plan (2009-12)**



Source: ACIL ALLEN Consulting 2015, adaptation of DSS internal documentation

While not represented on this organisation chart, Families Australia effectively took on a secretariat role for the National Framework, providing a communication and project support role supporting the NGO sector. This role continues.

### Second Action Plan 2012-15

The theme of the Second Action Plan was 'Working together to improve the safety and wellbeing of Australia's children through strengthening families, early intervention, prevention and collaboration through joining up service delivery with mental health, domestic and family violence, drug and alcohol, education, health and other services'.

The Second Action Plan built off the work and achievements of the First Action Plan. The number of national priorities was expanded to twenty, comprising the embedding of work undertaken during the first three years, delivering on new actions during this three year period, as well as the exploring of new national priorities.

An overview of the national priorities mapped to associated actions in the Second Action Plan is outlined below.

#### *Embedding national priorities*

- Advocating nationally for children and young people
  - Establishment of the National Children's Commissioner
  - Continuing to support education and awareness initiatives of children's rights
- Sharing information
  - Continuing to explore information sharing protocols across all levels of government
- Building capacity and expertise
  - Exploring options to broaden child and family sensitive practice
  - Developing proposed work to support statutory child protection workforce
- Working with Children Checks

- Continuing to improve the effectiveness of Working With Children Checks (WWCC) across jurisdictions
- Enhancing the evidence base
  - Improving the evidence base about Indigenous children, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) children and children with disability
  - Improving consistency and quality of national data through implementation of CPNMDS and the national standards for OoHC data reporting
- Filling research gaps
  - Implementing the National Research Agenda
  - Sharing best practices
- Seeing early warning signs and taking early action
  - Testing of the Common Approach to Assessment and Reporting tool (CAARS)
  - Exploring further options to embed the tool

### *Delivering national priorities*

- National Standards for OoHC
  - Enhance application and reporting of the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle
  - Develop minimum quality benchmarks and report on standards in 2015
  - Conduct first survey of children and young people in OoHC
  - Improve stability of placements in OoHC
  - Scope options to manage transfer of children and young people across state borders
- Transitioning to independence
  - Integrate support for young people leaving care , tailored to individual needs, and including the Transition to Independent Living Allowance and existing jurisdictional leaving care packages for care leavers
  - Improve engagement with education, employment and training
  - Ensure appropriate housing options and supports for young people leaving care
  - Identify and disseminate information on best practice housing models for young people leaving care
  - Explore options for community mentoring and engagement for children and young people transitioning from OoHC
- Joining up service delivery
  - Trial and cost locally based strategies for working with households with complex needs
  - Develop local initiatives based on person-centred approaches through localised pilots of pooled funds
  - Develop local place-based initiatives to support safety and wellbeing of children in Indigenous communities in the NT
  - Develop approaches and support responses through collaboration with other service systems in a way that focuses on eliminating violence and retaining a vulnerable child at-risk within a strengthened family unit
  - Identify and share best practice in Child Aware Approaches to promote a better understanding of the relationship between the risk factors for child abuse and neglect
  - Coordinate service supports between the Commonwealth Department of Human Services (DHS) and statutory child protection agencies
- Closing the gap
  - Explore collaborative approaches to child safety and wellbeing where children and families move between jurisdictions, particularly in WA, SA and the NT

- Build the capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations through partnerships with mainstream providers
- Work towards building a community development approach to child protection in remote Indigenous communities
- Share strategies to encourage Indigenous people to work in child protection and family support
- Also prioritise activity under each of the national priorities as it relates to Indigenous children.
- Improving support for carers
  - Investigate the barriers and opportunities for developing models of professional carers
  - Improve opportunities and remove barriers to enable working families to become carers
  - Develop a national carer survey to better understand carer demographics and their support needs
  - Expand training and support for grandparent and kinship carers, including Indigenous and CALD kinship carers.
- Responding to sexual abuse
  - Develop and trial programs to prevent sexual abuse and keep children safe, including specific programs for remote Indigenous communities, such as the cyber smart outreach program
  - Review and support strategies to assist children, young people and adults who have experienced complex trauma to engage with the service system
  - Share best practice in therapeutic and trauma-informed care across jurisdictions.
  - Explore ways to respond nationally to the sexualisation of children

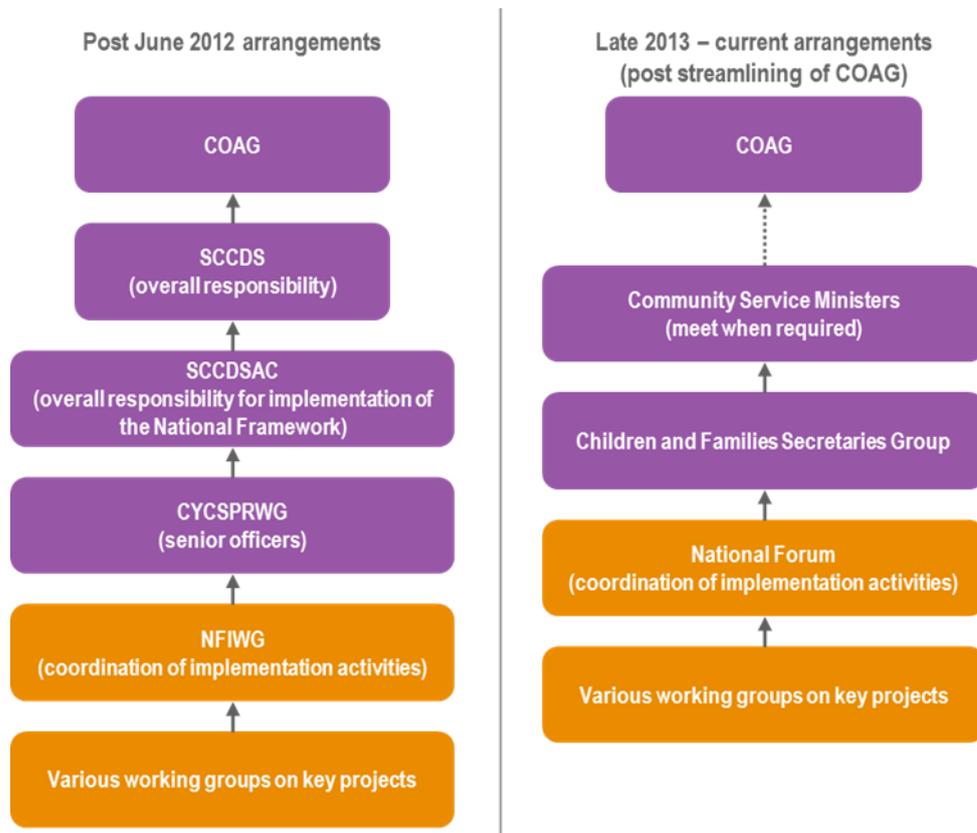
#### *Exploring new national priorities*

- Early childhood
  - Identify communities where children are at-risk through available data (including the Australian Early Development Index)
  - Review supports that encourage hard-to-reach families to engage in early childhood, including place-based approaches
- Education
  - Improve student performance, attendance and post-school outcomes for children and young people in care, including through exploring alternatives to suspension
  - Explore options for strengthening the role education plays in early identification and support of children at-risk
- Domestic and family violence
  - Identify priority areas to be progressed under the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their children
  - Work towards the development of a National Centre for Excellence to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children to coordinate and share research, data, analysis and review
- Health and mental health
  - Review options for ensuring ongoing and substantive health assessments and interventions for children and young people in OoHC, including mechanisms to track health histories
  - Track outcomes for children in care using available data sets and explore the potential links with the work of the National Mental Health Commission

- Implement the expanded Medicare Healthy Kids Check Explore options to better meet the mental health needs of children and young people in out of home care
- Disability
  - Explore the interface between disability, child protection, and primary service systems, including through NDIS sites
  - Review the service response for children with disability in the OoHC system
  - Explore evidence-based models of working with families where disability of the child or adult is impacting on the safety and wellbeing of children, including working with adult service providers
- Sector development
  - Explore the development of a para-professional workforce
  - Explore competency frameworks and professional representation for workers
  - Explore options to strengthen vocational and training pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers
  - Explore options for building professional and cultural expertise in remote service provision
  - Research mandatory reporting schemes in each jurisdiction to identify elements that enhance their success
  - Establish a collaborative approach to industry development and identify capabilities of high performing NGOs
  - Explore options for building the capacity of non-government organisations that provide out of home care
  - Share information about what works for statutory child protection workers and the family support workforce.
- Community and business
  - Work with the NGO sector to strengthen community engagement and development of enduring social supports for families, children and young people in, or at risk of entry into, OoHC
  - Explore options for developing stronger engagement of CALD communities and in particular, newly arrived cultural groups, to enhance their understanding of child wellbeing and available support systems
  - Increase community awareness of, and engagement with, issues affecting the safety and wellbeing of children, to help ensure that the wider community understands the importance of their role in reducing child abuse and neglect
  - Work with the media to foster appropriate reporting of child abuse and neglect in order to protect the interests of the child
  - Highlight outstanding work in the field of child protection, early intervention and targeted services
  - Engage community leaders, including leaders from Indigenous and CALD communities, to build support for protecting children and young people
  - Explore options for engaging business in the protection and wellbeing of children

Figure 3.2 charts the governance structures that were used over the course of the Second Action Plan to drive and monitor implementation. The governance structures were subject to considerable change over the course of the Second Action Plan.

**Figure 8 Governance structures over the life of the Second Three Year Action Plan (2012 – CURRENT)**



Source: ACIL ALLEN Consulting 2015, adaptation of DSS internal documentation

The post 2012 arrangements reflect a more streamlined governance process, with both the annual Ministerial Forum and the National Framework Advisory Committee no longer part of the governance structure. As part of larger COAG reforms the names of various forums were also changed. CDSMC became the Standing Council on Community and Disability Services (SCCDS), CDSMAC became the Standing Council on Community and Disability Services Advisory Council (SCCDSAC). The establishment of the Children, Youth and Community Services Policy and Research Working Group (CYCSPRWG) as part of these COAG reforms led to that forum of senior government officials also being incorporated into the governance arrangements for the National Framework (noting that its brief was also to examine issues beyond those of implementation of the National Framework).

In late 2013 there was another major change to the governance arrangements, when a significant streamlining and refocussing of COAG led to the replacing of 22 Standing Councils – including SCCDS, and its associated advisory councils – with eight new COAG Councils. The premise of the 2013 COAG streamlining reforms was to provide for clearer delineations of Commonwealth and State and Territory responsibilities.

The effect of these changes was the ceasing of regular meetings of between Ministers, of the senior officials groups, and NFIWG (which in turn was renamed the National Forum). Since the COAG changes the National Forum had convened a handful of times (noting that the development of the Third Action Plan had seen the considerable discussion and meeting across participants of the National Forum).

The next section examines the effectiveness of the different governance and implementation arrangements, as they were experienced by key participants and other observers.

### **The experience of governance and implementation**

Governance arrangements and the implementation of the National Framework were key features of discussion during the course of the national consultation program.

These issues were deliberately explored in consultation among the participants of the various advisory councils and NFIWG, and later the National Forum. But even among stakeholders who were engaged to explore other issues, the discussion invariably moved to one regarding the governance arrangements of the National Framework.

Significantly, the National Framework was universally regarded across all of the national consultation program participants, as an important national policy framework, and mechanism with which to improve services, planning, and outcomes for children and young people. The National Framework's conceptual underpinnings, its principles, and its approach to collaborative and tripartite partnerships were all considered innovative, sound and appropriate.

*A high water mark was getting the COAG Ministers to sign up to the Framework. It was the first time the NGO sector had spoken to COAG, and all of the states could see benefit of engaging the Commonwealth.*

*NGO Coalition perspective*

There was an identified value in having the NGO sector engaged in a governance, co-design, and implementation capacity. This was considered unique in a public policy making environment, and an important enabler to building trust, collaboration and partnership across governments and the NGO sector, particularly at a national and jurisdictional level.

*One of the really important achievements of the National Framework, has been the building of expectations and relationships, which are really important. We were very disjointed and muddled before the National Framework. To bring cohesion and a united voice to this space has been very beneficial.*

*NGO Coalition perspective*

*One of the real benefits of the National Framework is just improving the relationship between jurisdictions. Knowing who you can talk to in each jurisdiction quickly is so important*

*Jurisdictional executive perspective*

However, how this benefit and value translated from a national level, between members of the NFIWG or National Forum, to more localised levels, depended on the existence of other jurisdictional governance structures that aligned with NFIWG or the National Forum. Corresponding jurisdictional bodies were an early expectation of the National Framework, though not all jurisdictions established them. In jurisdictions where they were established they were considered useful clearing houses for the communication of National Framework activity. Where they were not established there was reduced visibility and understanding about what was occurring at a national level. These jurisdictional arrangements also took their lead from the activity and focus of NFIWG or National Forum. With the National Forum meeting far less regularly over the past eighteen months, the rationale for these state based groups became less clear.

On this point, it is important to examine how the changes in governance structures have impacted on the experience of participants. Governance and implementation structures for the National Framework have not been rigidly fixed. As outlined earlier, there was a period of stability during most of the First Action Plan, but there had been significant changes since then. During the first three to four years, there had been quarterly meetings of CDSMC, CDSMAC, and NFIWG, and considerable policy and implementation work in between. This was driven by a number of factors, including the significant work-plan outlined, and a high degree of Commonwealth Government focus, activity and momentum, at Ministerial and senior official levels. The frequency of meeting was also an important enabler to the bringing together of a relatively disparate group of stakeholders and the building of trust and partnership. Without this frequency of meetings and high-level engagement, it is unlikely that much of the work completed during the First Action Plan would have occurred. Continuity and momentum were considered especially important at the commencement of the National Framework.

These structures were radically altered following the 2013 COAG streamlining which saw the regular meetings of CDSMC and the associated advisory councils replaced by far more informal structures, with Ministers, Children and Families Secretaries (CAFS) representatives, and the NFIWG meeting infrequently. The period between the end of 2013 and the beginning of work on the Third Action Plan (roughly 18 months) was the source of some frustration and confusion about the status of the National Framework among most stakeholders.

Reflecting on the data collected during the national consultation program, an interesting dynamic emerges. The early part of the National Framework is associated with most of its significant achievements. However, there was also considerable comment over the sustainability of the early approaches to governance and implementation, and how the formalised structure and frequency of activity had, over time, begun to move more into a reporting and stakeholder management function, at the expense of bringing new perspectives, innovation, and enabling change.

However, the fluidity associated with the governance and implementation of the past two years was also a source of concern and frustration, and considered an inhibitor to progressing actions under the National Framework.

*In the absence of a formalised governance structure you are essentially trading on good will – which is great because the National Framework is a good thing to do – but you will only ever get a certain level of buy-in because of that. Governance structures are critical. Without a clear line of sight to Ministers, authority is diminished. CAFS is largely being driven in an ad hoc way. And competing priorities always blow away informal arrangements*

*Jurisdictional executive*

This dynamic is reinforced by views on the processes involved in the development, endorsement, oversight and implementation of the First and Second Action Plans.

*The First Action Plan was good – it was clear about what it wanted to do and achieve, and we knew how we were going to get there. The second action plan? It lost all sense of strategy – it was led by ideals and morals. It reflected an unsophisticated way of thinking. And there was no sense of what we wanted to achieve, and what the clever ways were, to get there*

*Jurisdictional NGO perspective*

Development of the Second Action Plan was seen by a majority of stakeholders as flawed. It is important to acknowledge that considerable effort went into its development. However, there was confusion from various stakeholder perspectives over why, at the time of its endorsement and

release, so many actions had been built into it. Upon release, the Second Action Plan was considered to represent more of an advocacy document than an implementation plan with concrete actions and responsibilities.

*Why did it end up as such a shopping list? There was a fair bit of lobbying going on, and there were a number of elections going on at the time.*

*Jurisdictional executive perspective*

*The Second Action Plan tried to do too much. It didn't prioritise, it was a scatter-gun approach*  
*NGO Coalition perspective*

Implementation of the Second Action Plan actions was also considered poor. It was seen as having too many actions that were too poorly targeted, and not properly supported or resourced.

*The first plan was simple. The second plan was incredibly complicated. That actually impacted on how it was used. But we were constrained by resources. There was no real funding attached it.*

*NGO Coalition perspective*

These issues were compounded by the uncertainty around governance and implementation arrangements experienced over much of the Second Action Plan. This was identified as a particularly difficult point in time for the National Framework, with changes in government personnel and membership, compounded by the reality of a number of jurisdictions having competing priorities.

It is important to note that during this period (and indeed again in the period from late 2013 onwards) the NGO Coalition representation remained stable and consistent. Among NGO Coalition stakeholders there was a view that they had retained much of the corporate memory of the National Framework, and carried much of the responsibility for maintaining the National Framework. This view was also confirmed by Commonwealth and some jurisdictional perspectives.

Membership of the governance and implementation arrangements also emerged as a key consultation theme. The presence of a predominantly child protection or OoHC agency membership (across government and non-government agencies) was seen by many (including NGO members of NFIWG / National Forum participants) as driving too much of a tertiary focus in the National Framework. There was support for revisiting governance membership to ensure more appropriate representation that is fit for purpose, and to avoid a 'bureaucratic creep' that had begun to be felt in 2012 and 2013.

*Representation on the forum should be crafted depending on the focus of each Action Plan. Then there would be governance driven by agenda, rather than the other way around*

*NGO Coalition perspective*

*Membership is important – if it is going to be broad and deal with issues of child wellbeing then it needs a membership to reflect that. But membership should also be driven by performance. Not by virtue. What we need is a performance based board approach.*

*Child protection is very insular and negative. So the National Framework needs a broader base of membership to guard against those tendencies. We should be talking about wellbeing. And safety is a subset of wellbeing. Let's not be driven by a child protection mindset.*

*Jurisdictional NGO representative*

Notwithstanding the building of partnerships and relationships across the membership the various governance arrangements, there also remained concerns among NGOs over how their input and contribution was viewed and valued by government representatives, and truly integrated into decision-making. This issue is explored further in the next section.

### **Integrated approaches and sharing of information**

In intent and design, the National Framework's tripartite approaches to governance and implementation are built around cross-government and cross-sector integrated approaches, and the sharing of relevant information among the different sectors. The tripartite partnership approach had created an environment where different stakeholders engage and collaborate within a forum that had not existed previously. Co-design of policy and an integrated implementation responsibility have been a focus of NFIWG and the National Forum since 2009.

*Co-design is important .It is always better to have others in the room. You always get better policy making when you have other perspectives in the room. On governance, process is not the substance of the issue, what is important is getting the membership and focus right.*

*NGO Coalition perspective*

Over the course of the National Framework, NGO input had been significant. The NGO Coalition had provided a leadership and coordination role for the NGO sector, and been significantly involved across the range of National Framework activities, including its most significant achievements. This included contributing to the development of the National Standards for OoHC, establishment of the National Children's Commissioner, and input into the National Research Agenda. NGO and academic representation was incorporated onto various working groups, and they also provided an advisory role on other specific projects like the Common Approach to Assessment, Referral and Support (CAARS) and Building Capacity, Building Bridges (BCBB) projects. Families Australia also performed a secretariat function, informing the broader NGO sector of relevant National Framework activities and information.

Among the NGO stakeholders engaged through the national consultation program, the extent to which the National Framework had begun to embed a more integrated approach between governments and NGOs, and facilitated an environment that enabled collaboration, was seen as one of the most important benefits of the National Framework. Though it was most times an observation made alongside an acknowledgement of the ongoing governance implementation challenges associated with the National Framework.

*While there hasn't been an observable reduction in child abuse and neglect, the tripartite arrangements have definitely changed the sector.*

*NGO Coalition perspective*

*I think there has been a major improvement in the way that governments collaborate with the NGO sector. But there is still a lack of collaboration in key areas like family law ... that's where the constraints of federalism really have an impact.*

*Research perspective*

Across the smaller jurisdictions, there was also comment on how they had been able to benefit from the sharing of information and good practices emerging from the larger jurisdictions.

The box below uses the development and implementation of the National Standards for OoHC as a case study into the effect of the National Framework on integrated approaches and information sharing.

### **Case study of integrated approaches and information sharing – development and implementation of the National Standards for OoHC**

The National Standards for OoHC aim to improve the outcomes and experiences of children and young people who are unable to live with their families.

Typically, OoHC practice and oversight varied by jurisdiction, and data was not reported on consistently. This inconsistency made cross jurisdictional data collection and comparison difficult, and limited the identification of service delivery gaps and best practice. The standards were designed to deliver national minimum standards in the quality of care provided to children and young people.

The development of the National Standards for OoHC was committed to as one of 12 priority projects in the First Action Plan. State and Territory Governments and NGOs collaborated through a specific working group to progress development of the National Standards.

The effort and collaboration across the tripartite membership was considered by key participants as the critical enabler to development and implementation of the National Standards. The tripartite approach facilitated an environment for achieving national consistency across jurisdictions and different service delivery settings. Commonwealth Government leadership, at a Ministerial and senior officer level, NGO involvement and the work of AIHW, were all regarded as critical enablers. The clarity and focus of the governance arrangements provided the forum to drive development and implementation.

*Development of OoHC Strategy was the best example of collaboration*

*ACT Government representative*

While there was disquiet among some stakeholders over why so much focus of National Framework activity had been on the tertiary OoHC service platform, this was counterbalanced by views that the National Standards would prove a foundational piece of work that future National Framework activity could focus on.

*Picking the OoHC Standards was a very deliberate and strategic choice. Going for a flagship project very early in the national Framework implementation process and delivering it, proved that the National Framework could work*

*NGO Coalition perspective*

The National Standards commenced in July 2011. Thirteen national standards were developed focusing on better outcomes for children and young people living in OoHC.

Implementation of the National Standards had led to the national surveying of children and young people in OoHC, to gauge children and young people's views on the quality of care they are receiving.

To collect this data, the survey instrument Viewpoint was agreed upon, though there remains some concern among the NGO Coalition over the adequacy of Viewpoint as a survey tool for children and young people in OoHC. Its implementation has required some change at a practitioner level.

Notwithstanding these issues, there was acknowledgement over the significance of the survey, which is allowing children and young people across the country, for the first time, to provide their views about the quality of care they are receiving. This data will provide the first national, systems wide

evidence on the quality of care, from the perspective of children and young people. This will be an important input into future improvements of OoHC.

*The national use of Viewpoint would not have occurred without the National Framework. We need to respect difference among jurisdictions but we also need to find those points or issues that are transferable or adaptable across jurisdictions.*

*Jurisdictional executive perspective*

Development of reporting and measurement mechanisms for the national standards is continuing with additional measures being introduced progressively. It is anticipated there will be 22 measures describing progress against the full set of national standards. Monitoring will assist to refine and improve the national standards, and service systems, over the long term.

Source: An Outline Of National Standards For Out Of Home-Care July 2011, Protecting Australia's Children – Annual Report To The Council Of Australian Governments 2011-12, National Framework For Protecting Australia's Children: Implementing The First Action Plan 2009-2012, National Framework Baseline Evaluation Consultations 2015

Notwithstanding the considerable comment on the benefits of improved collaboration and integration collected during the national consultation program, there were a number of other issues raised, that detracted from the conditions of collaboration and partnership. Three critical issues included:

- The effect of federal and jurisdictional policy and funding decisions that were sometimes seen by NGOs to run contrary to the principles of the National Framework

*The National Framework should influence all aspects of government. But recent DSS and state government funding announcements demonstrate that it clearly isn't. To what extent is the National Framework influencing budget allocations?*

*Jurisdictional NGO perspective*

The national consultation program was conducted soon after the most recent DSS funding round. There was considerable concern among NGO stakeholders about the rationale and transparency of some of these decisions, though there were also similar concerns raised about other Commonwealth Government budget decisions made by both this and the former Commonwealth Government administration. Stakeholders could not make the connection between such decisions and the principles of the National Framework.

- Limitations put on promising initiatives through pilot or time-limited funding arrangements

*Building Bridges had a lot of merit – but I still think there is a lot more work that needs to be done with adult-focussed services. I think it was a successful project but we have not built on the successes of the National Framework. We invest in projects but they don't necessarily endure. They remain reliant on funding from the Commonwealth. We do a lot of trials, but then where do we take them? How do we make the incremental changes over a longer period of time?*

*Commonwealth Government perspective*

Time-limiting the funding of National Framework initiatives was another source of frustration. These decisions were seen to limit the effectiveness of the initiatives and the National Framework more broadly. This was particularly the case for initiatives where evaluation had shown considerable promise.

- The sometimes perceived tokenistic inclusion of the NGO sector views and input.

*Co-design - has the tripartite arrangement resulted in this? To an extent, but not enough. It has been pushed hard, but ideas tend to be put up to the forum, and then get filtered up and reorganised and reprioritised by government. Needs to be co-design as well as co-decision.*

*The tripartite arrangements need to be backed up by truly tripartite design and decision-making process underneath.*

*NGO Coalition perspective*

While all stakeholders acknowledged the importance of integration of NGO views and input into governance and implementation arrangements, there remained considerable concern over how NGO views and input were considered in the final decision-making processes in senior officer and Ministerial forums, which the NGO sector had not been formally integrated into.

All three of these issues surfaced during the national consultation as a counterpoint to the earlier views on improved collaboration, and were often made in conjunction by the same stakeholders.

### **Key enablers and barriers**

Key enablers and barriers to National Framework implementation and governance were explored through the national consultation program.

It was evident through the analysis of consultation data that particular issues and themes could be framed as both enablers and barriers. In a sense, these issues were dynamic, and proved to be – at different times over the course of the first six years of the National Framework – both enablers and barriers.

Accordingly the synthesis of key enablers and barriers is grouped by theme below.

#### **National commitment**

There is widespread and ongoing commitment and support to a national policy framework on protecting children, from across the spectrum of stakeholders engaged during this project.

In 2009, the National Framework successfully harnessed commitment as the only national document of its kind. Notwithstanding the issues and frustrations of stakeholders that are canvassed in this report, the national commitment to a paradigm shift in how the country protects children, remains a key enabler.

*Without it we don't have a national agenda. And we need one. It is good to have as an advocacy tool. I think it is universally important not just at a jurisdictional level*

*Jurisdictional policy officer*

National commitment by the Commonwealth, and all State and Territory Governments and the NGO sector is an enabler to consideration of national consistency and cross jurisdictional challenges. Cross sectoral reforms across the country were seen as having the potential to be best considered, when all governments were committed. This builds relationships across sectors, agencies and jurisdictions, and is an important enabler for transitioning to public health approaches to protecting children.

A clearly articulated national commitment also empowers policy and implementation officers in their ongoing work. It was clear from consultations with some government policy officers in sectors outside

of child protection, that the National Framework had been used to advocate for change in other policy areas.

NGO and Commonwealth Government representatives also emphasised how the national tripartite arrangements had elevated jurisdictional accountability by increasing visibility and national reporting requirements, which would in turn enable national comparison.

### **Tripartite approach**

Tripartite aspects to the National Framework have brought NGO perspectives into a forum that had traditionally been the domain of government officials. It had built levels of trust and collaboration that have largely endured the changes in government representatives and senior officials that have occurred over the life of the National Framework.

The tripartite approach allows for a national forum to discuss policy and practice that otherwise would not occur, lifting the focus of senior policy makers above day-to-day operational activity. Coupled with the enabler of national commitment, it had also facilitated some increased accountability in the delivery of child protection services.

Conversely the tripartite approach had led to a situation with a large number of interested parties and owners of the National Framework, and contributed to the commonly held view that the National Framework had tried to be 'all things to all people', limiting its effectiveness as a result, and leading to the poor design processes associated with Second Action Plan.

The tripartite approach was also perceived, at times, as a convenient mechanism with which to manage stakeholder relationships. As referenced earlier, both NGO Coalition and government representatives reported stages of NGO engagement in the framework as 'tokenistic'

*While the tripartite arrangements work well, the NGO sector feels like it is seen like the small third wheel. Never given serious consideration, and has never been given a co-chair role.*

*NGO Coalition representative*

Additionally, NGO engagement had not filtered down within all jurisdictions, resulting in a lack of awareness and understanding of the National Framework at a service delivery level. Many jurisdictional NGOs reported during consultations having not received information about the Framework from their national representatives or associates, or jurisdictional governments.

Organisations that were not members of Families Australia noted they had limited visibility of Framework activities. Among stakeholders not involved in NFIWG or the National Forum, National Framework governance and decision-making processes appeared opaque.

### **Continuity and secretariat support**

Continuity in key members across the governance arrangements, and the secretariat support to the NGO Coalition provided by Families Australia were cited by government and NGO government representatives as critical to sustaining the National Framework.

Given the significant changes across government officials at Commonwealth and State and Territory levels of government, there was a considerable view among stakeholders that corporate knowledge and memory of the National Framework was now effectively held by Families Australia.

*Stable membership of NGOs has also helped. We are the holders of the corporate memory of the National Framework*

*NGO Coalition representative*

The role of Families Australia also received significant comment during the national consultation program. Among government and NGO representatives there was acknowledgement of the significant communication and secretariat work undertaken by Families Australia, delivered on a limited budget.

Notwithstanding the important role of Families Australia in holding onto this knowledge and sustaining the National Framework, the absence of a public champion for the National Framework was cited as a barrier to sustained implementation.

*We do need to get governance right – work out who owns the National Framework, both nationally and locally. Collaboration is not natural. We don't yet have a crucible for the National Framework, a champion, ownership, and political clout*

*Jurisdictional NGO perspective*

In consultation with government and NGO Coalition representatives, the loss of momentum of engagement with the National Framework during the Second Action Plan was typically attributed to the loss of continuity of among key government officials and representatives, particularly at the Commonwealth level.

*With the National Framework, it is always one step forward, two steps back because of new Ministers and staff in Departments. Families Australia are the font of all wisdom*

*NGO Coalition perspective*

### **Inquiries and reviews**

Inquiries and reviews into the child protection sector are a regular experience for jurisdictions. Inquiries can bring much needed resources and focus to the sector. Additionally, alignment of the National Framework with recommendations resulting from inquiries in some states, such as in NSW (*Keep them Safe: A Shared Approach to Child Wellbeing 2009 – 2014*) and Queensland (*Taking Responsibility: A Roadmap for Queensland Child Protection* was delivered to the Queensland Government), mutually reinforces reform objectives.

However, inquiries and reviews can act as barriers to implementation as they reinforce the focus on the statutory end of the system, impact on existing reform trajectories, and occupy the limited capacity of jurisdictions.

*If they could just stop doing reviews and delivering shocks to the system. It takes years out of the system. It makes all the jurisdictions want to put up the shutters because they are expecting people to come after them.*

*Commonwealth Government perspective*

The current Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse was another example of how a particular focus on statutory services can have a significant impact upon work priorities for governments and NGOs. The Royal Commission is considered an important development by all stakeholders that is likely to lead to even greater emphasis on national minimum standards. However, there was also some concern that it would continue to hold attention to the statutory end of the system and inhibit work needed at the prevention and early intervention levels.

Inquiries and reviews were also identified as contributing to 'reform fatigue' due to their continual nature. One jurisdiction indicated it had been subject to twelve major inquiries and reviews since the

initiation of the National Framework, limiting its capacity for engagement and innovation in the National Framework.

### **Understanding and clarity around decision-making**

The governance arrangements associated with the First Action Plan were generally understood by stakeholders, and provided some clarity around roles, responsibilities and accountability. The frequency of meetings of governance groups, including CYCSPRWG and NFIWG meant that both forums were able to drive achievements, such as the National Standards for OoHC.

*Because we had the COAG arrangements we had Ministers in the room making decisions so there was a high level interest and authority in regards to the National Framework*

*Commonwealth Government perspective*

However, frequency of meetings also caused fatigue and frustration amongst members and supporting staff.

The significant change in governance arrangements associated with the streamlining of COAG had led to a far more fluid governance arrangement for the National Framework. It was evident that these new arrangements were not well understood among the large group of stakeholders engaged in this project, with many government and non-government stakeholders (including members of the National Forum) not able to describe the current governance arrangements.

Up until development of the Third Action Plan, there had been limited engagement and convening of the National Forum membership. The lack of clarity around the status of the governance arrangements had contributed to considerable confusion about the role and function of the National Framework.

### **Role of the Commonwealth Government**

Among stakeholders there was not a consistent view on what the role of the Commonwealth Government should be.

The role of the Commonwealth Government is directly shaped by constitutional arrangements and responsibilities. But in practice, over the course of the National Framework, the Commonwealth Government had performed a range of different functions, from forcefully leading particular aspects of work, through to playing more of a facilitator role. There was a view among many stakeholders that Commonwealth Government interest and leadership in the National Framework had fluctuated.

*We have ups and downs regarding people thinking if we are doing enough. We do have a role in bringing uniformity.*

*Commonwealth Government perspective*

The lack of a clear Commonwealth Government role in implementing the National Framework had fed into issues around ownership of the National Framework and associated accountability. This was further exacerbated by frustrations within the NGO sector over decisions made by DSS and other Commonwealth Government agencies that were considered to be contrary to aspects of the National Framework.

*There isn't an echo of the National Framework in how the Commonwealth Government funds some of its programs. There is often good work and then the funding stops and we have no idea why*

*Jurisdictional policy perspective*

Both the NGO sector and the jurisdictions considered clarification over the role of the Commonwealth Government, and consistency in its actions, as significant enablers to future National Framework implementation.

## Conclusions

The National Framework is universally regarded as an important national policy framework and mechanism with which to improve services, planning, and outcomes for children and young people. The tripartite partnership approaches have engaged the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments and the NGO in new form of integrated governance, co-design, and implementation function and capacity.

However, there are some other important conclusions to make regarding the tripartite partnership arrangements.

The period of the First Action Plan saw considerable activity and the achievement of signature outcomes. But by 2012, there was a sense of the National Framework stalling, and becoming more of a retrospective reporting framework, rather than one of driving change. The experience of the Second Action Plan was mixed. It was also marked by significant change, and a period of time where it was not clear what the future partnership arrangements would be.

Currently the governance and implementation arrangements are fluid and relatively undefined. Aligned with the imminent release of the Third Action Plan, these conditions present as an opportunity to revisit and refashion the governance and implementation arrangements. Early governance and implementation arrangements were in many respects, an outcome of a set of certain circumstances at a certain point-in-time. While they were associated with many of the achievements of the National Framework structure, it is unlikely they will be revisited. But there are important lessons from the past six years of governance and implementation that can be used to refine and adapt the current approach.

These lessons principally relate to:

- Re-affirming the National Framework as an enabling and authorising framework to drive systemic change, focussing on the strategic areas of national interest which would most benefit from the collective resources and interest of Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments and the NGO sector and other leaders and experts
- Reviewing the membership arrangements of the National Forum and other forums associated with the National Framework, including both government and NGO representation
- The identification of National Framework actions that are discrete and defined, and that, in the absence of a strategic shared national approach, would not otherwise be actioned
- Development of a governance structure that is fit-for-purpose, established to achieve the agreed priorities and actions and drawing on the required membership and structure that will best achieve outcomes.

## Chapter 4: Adding value to processes and systems to protect children

This chapter determines whether the National Framework has added value to processes and / or systems aimed at protecting children.

### Key points

Building collaboration and capability within the child and family welfare sector, and across other service sectors and reform agendas, has been a primary focus of the National Framework. This focus had led to the implementation of various projects, and the development of a number of tools and resources for use by practitioners, policy makers, carers and children and young people.

Early expectations of the National Framework included enabling new approaches to service commissioning, pooled funding and place-based approaches, and building workforce capability and capacity across statutory and secondary service systems.

Communities for Children and Child Aware Approaches had provided models of effective, place based collaborative initiatives, operating within a nationally endorsed and strategic framework. BCBB had built workforce capability in child-centred practice within adult-focussed service systems.

Key projects such as the National Standards for OoHC and establishment of the National Children's Commissioner were achievements of the National Framework that had effected significant change.

Other specific tools and resources such as CAARs, the information sharing protocol, and Viewpoint were identified as valuable and contributing to practice change.

However, measuring the extent to which these projects, tools and resources had contributed to wider systemic reform is limited by a number of different factors.

These factors included issues of causality and attribution between reform and the National Framework, but also implementation issues associated with time-limited funding, which many stakeholders identified as an impediment to sustained impact.

The trialling of initiatives within discrete sites or locations, while sometimes necessary, was seen as limiting the extent to which promising evidence and practice could be shared across sectors. It was also impacted by issues of scale and transferability.

Structural issues like federalism, and cultural and organisational issues such as procurement practices and accountability regimes were seen as significant and ongoing inhibitors to genuine shared reform and innovation.

Notwithstanding these issues, there are also emerging opportunities in areas of national interest – such as domestic violence, the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), and the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse – that the National Framework is well positioned to influence and / or leverage change from.

### Overview

Over the course of the National Framework, significant effort had been expended on national priorities and their various actions. A number of tools and resources have been produced. The National Framework had also sought to engage with and influence and / or leverage other policy frameworks and programs.

Drawing on stakeholder perspectives, jurisdictional information and key National Framework documentation, this chapter attempts to determine whether these National Framework efforts have added value to the processes and / or systems aimed at protecting children. It does this by:

- Exploring how the National Framework has built collaboration and capability across different sectors
- Determining whether the National Framework has informed and / or driven reform and innovation
- Examining the value of resources and tools produced through the National Framework
- Understanding how the processes and activities under the National Framework have interacted with other policy frameworks and programs to add value.

Each of these issues is explored in detail below.

### **Collaboration and capability**

A primary focus of the National Framework has been the building of collaboration and capability across different sectors. As identified in earlier chapters the National Framework had driven collaboration and partnership across governments and the NGO sector at a strategic level.

*The fact that we're all talking is good.*

*NGO Coalition representative*

*The National Framework has given credibility to discussions and debates around child protection, homelessness, and housing. It's enabled those discussions to be more child-focused.*

*Jurisdictional policy perspective*

As outlined earlier, the National Framework was considered a powerful educative tool that could be used to inform discussions on the need to move the system towards a public health model. It provided the foundations of a common language with which to progress collaboration, partnership and improved capability.

This section examines the extent to which the building of collaboration and capability had been achieved at a systems and local level.

National Framework documentation articulated a potential role for the National Framework in enabling new approaches to service commissioning, pooled funding and place-based approaches. Building the workforce capability and capacity across statutory and secondary service systems was also an early expectation.

These early aspirations were very ambitious. New approaches to service commissioning and pooled funding are challenged by the various structural barriers outlined in the previous chapter. Nevertheless there were examples cited in the national consultation program that at began to grapple with these issues. They principally involved the Communities for Children initiative and the Child Aware projects.

Communities for Children was cited by a number of stakeholders as a model of effective local, place-based planning and decision-making that encompassed multiple service systems.

*The Communities for Children Program has worked very well in our state – it's a universal service system funded by government, but run by community organisations. It's an open door system for families that want to access the service*

*Jurisdictional executive perspective*

*The Communities for Children initiative is the model that could work... But the single biggest obstacle to change is centralised control and bureaucracy.*

*NGO Coalition perspective*

The more recent initiative, Child Aware Approaches, was also cited as a potential example of nationally endorsed but locally driven approaches to child wellbeing and development.

*This initiative is getting NGOs to develop strategies that work locally, and then overlaying what is common between them... It's a local place based initiative that allows for local solutions overlaid with a national grid. It guards against the cookie cutter one size fits all approach that national initiatives can often fall into.*

*NGO Coalition perspective*

Throughout the consultation process, discussion on collaboration was often framed in the context of local collaboration between services and practitioners at a place-based level. These discussions on local collaboration and service design provide important lessons on future governance and implementation for the National Framework, namely how a national policy document can create the necessary authorising environment to enable local and place-based collaboration and service innovation.

Building workforce capability and capacity was an early expectation of the National Framework. NGO and Commonwealth Government stakeholders considered variable workforce practices and recruitment and retention issues as an ongoing inhibitor to reform. The concept of minimum standards in child protection and family support practice had some currency in the early days of the National Framework.

However, beyond the commissioning of research into workforce trends and the work undertaken through the BCBB project, there had been limited activity in this space.

*Whenever we wanted to talk about workforce we were shut down. Workforce is a major issue and hasn't been addressed. They need to look at a broader context. Workforce is bigger than child protection services.*

*NGO Coalition perspective*

The BCBB project was the most significant workforce orientated action progressed through the National Framework, and is subject to a more detailed examination in the box below.

### **Case study in improved capability – development and piloting of Building Capacity, Building Bridges**

BCBB was a three-year initiative (2010-14) that aimed to build the capacity and capability of practitioners in adult-focused services to work with their clients who had children in a more child-focused way, and develop strategies that strengthen collaboration between adult-focused and child-focused services.

The initiative was designed to bridge gaps in practitioner skills around parenting and enhance their knowledge and relationships in this area. It sought to drive strategic links between different service systems involved with children, build the capacity of local communities, drive service-wide change, and embed sustainable approaches.

BCBB was a key action under the national priority 'building capacity and expertise'. It was led by the Australian Centre for Child Protection (ACCP) and funded by then Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). Funding of \$2.24 million over three years was allocated for the development and rollout of BCBB. Funding for the initiative ended in June 2014.

The initiative targeted 12 Communities for Children sites with high-levels of disadvantage. Local solutions were developed according to the context of each community. More than 2,000 practitioners from over 250 organisations attended workshops enhancing knowledge development supporting child and family sensitive and collaborative practice in adult-focused services. More than 40 trainers were trained and two e-learning resources were developed.

The BCBB project had an impact at both a strategic and local level. The BCBB was overseen by a strategic cross sector group that encompassed representatives from multiple service systems and sectors. It featured local community capacity building initiatives tailored to each of the 12 sites. Skills in child and family sensitive practice were developed through local workshops and a train the trainer model. The e-learning resources were produced to embed practice and skills after the project concluded in 2014.

Stakeholders from government and NGO perspectives considered BCBB an important project that had built capability across a service system that had had little previous exposure to child centred practice.

*...we are seeing changes in practice in adult-focussed services, of being more child centric, and it's a spill-over effect too, a lever for driving change and more work to be done with adult clients.*

*Jurisdictional executive perspective*

The time limited nature of the BCBB project drew considerable attention. Given the successes of the initiative, there was some disappointment that it was no longer being funded in any meaningful capacity.

Source: National Framework For Protecting Australia's Children: Implementing The First Three-Year Action Plan 2009-2012, Australian Centre For Child Protection Website <http://www.unisa.edu.au/research/australian-centre-for-child-protection/training-and-coaching/protecting-and-nurturing-children-building-capacity-building-bridges/>, Stories Of Impact: Protecting And Nurturing Children: Building Capacity Building Bridges (BCBB) Initiative, Protecting Australia's Children - Annual Report To The Council Of Australian Governments 2010-11, Protecting Australia's Children - Annual Report To The Council Of Australian Governments 2009-10, Protecting Australia's Children - Annual Report To The Council Of Australian Governments 2012-13, National Framework Baseline Evaluation Consultations 2015.

## Reform and innovation

The National Framework is premised upon building a shared agenda for systemic change, a 'paradigm shift in how we care for children'. While, Chapter 6 provides an analysis of national data against high-level indicators, and a synthesis of achievements drawn from the COAG Annual Reports, this section focuses on the experience of National Framework driven reform and innovation, as recorded through the national consultation program.

As with much of the quantitative and qualitative data collected during this project, extracting a definitive answer on the extent to which the National Framework had driven reform and innovation is difficult.

*The attributional question to the National Framework is always really hard. I can't see what it has done*

*NGO Coalition representative*

There were a range of views spanning the different stakeholder perspectives on this issue, including: the citing of discrete initiatives and actions that had been contributed to innovative practice and broader overall reform directions; contributions to cultural change and reform through the shared forums, discussions and reporting and communication activities occasioned through the National Framework governance and implementation arrangements; to more bleak observations that saw little impact from the National Framework on systemic change and reform.

Attribution of activities to the National Framework was a vexing issue for nearly all stakeholders. There was considerable reluctance to describe the National Framework as a key driver of reform across the child and family welfare sector.

*It is hard to attribute changes to the National Framework. For example, research and evidence and other activities were influenced by other initiatives going on.*

*Jurisdictional policy perspective*

Notwithstanding this reluctance on the part of stakeholders, there were specific instances of developing practice, and new initiatives that were cited as contributing to the broader reform agenda.

The development National Standards for OoHC was the most commonly cited change initiative associated with the National Framework. The standards were seen as having led to national 'soft law', and provided the foundation for improved standards of care and more nationally consistent approaches.

The establishment of the National Children's Commissioner was also regularly cited as an important development.

However, even among this regular identification of these reforms, there was still some caution around impact and attribution cited by stakeholders. While the National Standards were leading to practice change, there were some jurisdictions that regarded them as merely aligning with existing practice and standards. There was also considerable comment from a range of different stakeholder perspective that establishment of the National Children's Commissioner would have occurred 'with or without the National Framework'.

Other individual projects that were seen as having potential for contributing to reform and change that were cited during the national consultation program included the CAARS tool, Child Aware Approaches, and BCBB. However, their particular impact and value was seen as occurring in discrete sectors or pilot sites, rather than informing broader systemic change.

Across jurisdictional executive and NGO perspectives there was also considerable discussion over the extent to which systemic reform and innovation is possible through a national policy framework. Structural issues like federalism, as well as cultural and organisational issues such as procurement practices and accountability regimes were seen as significant and ongoing inhibitors to genuine shared reform and innovation and collective impact approaches that were anticipated in the 2009 National Framework documentation. Notwithstanding this discussion, the National Framework continued to be cited as an important leveraging and advocacy tool for legitimising ongoing reforms in child wellbeing and policy areas.

*At least this is the mechanism that brings all the relevant parties together. It is the best we have got. It is the only national mechanism that looks at how we can protect children*

*Jurisdictional NGO perspective*

## Resources and tools

A range of resources and tools to help practitioners, policy makers, carers and children and young people have been produced through or associated with the National Framework.

The COAG Annual Reports provide a useful yearly update on the status of development and implementation of National Framework resources and tools, which have been catalogued here. Analysis of the commentary on the experience of these resources and tools has been provided where relevant.

**CAARS.** The CAARS tool was designed to provide practitioners from universal and secondary services a common approach to identification of early indicators of at-risk children and their families. Given the extent of consultation data collected about the CAARS tool, a more detailed case study has been developed and is presented in the box below.

### Case study into the development and implementation of new tools and resources – The Common Approach to Assessment, Referral And Support (CAARS)

The CAARS project aimed to improve identification of early indicators of the needs of at-risk children and their families. This was to be achieved through a common approach to assessment, referral and support in universal and secondary prevention services. The tool was designed to increase the capacity of practitioners that did not previously have a common method to identify and address strengths and needs of children and families before problems escalate.

Funded by the Commonwealth Government, CAARS was developed to address the national priority, seeing early warning signs and taking early action. A CAARS Taskforce consisting of Commonwealth, State and Territory Government and non-government sector representative was established in 2009 to work with the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) who had overall responsibility for delivering the CAARS project.

A needs identification mechanism supported by a CAARS Resource Kit was developed to provide universal service providers a way to identify and respond to early indications of need for children and families. As part of the Second Action Plan, testing of the CAARS tool's applicability was tested in a variety of different service settings. The CAARS tool was officially trialled in a four locations. It was subsequently adapted for further trialling in thirteen sites Family Mental Health Support Service.

Views on the CAARS tool were mixed. Stakeholders from some jurisdictions found it a useful and pragmatic tool that had assisted other professionals in their day-to-day work with children and young people. It was also seen as contributing to collaboration across different service settings.

*We extended training to our NGOs so we were all starting to talk the same language. It has helped build relationships between agencies and NGOs*

*Jurisdictional executive perspective*

However, many stakeholders in other jurisdictions had little exposure and awareness of the CAARS tool. There was little sense that it had been a direct outcome of the National Framework.

*Most people don't link CAARS to the National Framework. It has been an extremely helpful tool that draws together different services, but it was an unfunded initiative and its use has been very local. It fitted a need for some agencies, but is unknown to others*

*Jurisdictional policy perspective*

An early evaluation completed by the Social Policy Research Centre (SPRC) of the four initial trial sites found variable implementation results. CAARS was found to be a useful tool for practitioners,

particularly for secondary service systems, which were already working with vulnerable children. There was little evidence found that it had yet had any impact on collaboration and on improving the capacity of universal service system providers. The evaluation found that a deeper impact across the universal service system could be achieved if a commitment to a longer and broader rollout targeting universal services was implemented.

Source National Framework For Protecting Australia's Children: Implementing The First Three-Year Action Plan 2009-2012, National Framework For Protecting Australia's Children: Implementing The Second Three-Year Action Plan 2012-2015, Action Plans, Protecting Australia's Children - Annual Report To The Council Of Australian Governments 2010-11, Protecting Australia's Children - Annual Report To The Council Of Australian Governments 2009-10, Protecting Australia's Children - Annual Report To The Council Of Australian Governments 2012-13, National Framework Baseline Evaluation Consultations 2015, ARACY Website <https://www.aracy.org.au/projects/the-common-approach#Common>, Preventing Child Abuse And Neglect Through A Common Approach To Assessment, Referral And Support: Evaluating The Trial (Stage 2).

**Information Sharing Protocol.** The information sharing protocol was established in 2009, and enabled Commonwealth Government agencies (Centrelink, Medicare and the Child Support Agency) to share information with all state and territory child protection agencies to improve services to children. Both Commonwealth and State Government policy officers emphasised the value of the Protocol, which had helped to alleviate some practice issues confronting practitioners working with cross-border clients.

*The early breakthroughs were with the information sharing protocol, which was and continues to be invaluable.*

*Jurisdictional policy perspective*

Notwithstanding the value of the protocol, issues in the sharing information across jurisdictions was identified by practitioners as a continuing problem.

**National Research Audit online register.** The online register was designed to provide up-to-date information on projects identified through the National Research Audit to identify gaps, duplication and areas for development and priorities for future research and data collection. The online register was developed by the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS). It was not commented on during the national consultation program.

**Online resource for out of home carers.** The online resource for foster, kinship, grandparent and informal carers provides carers across the nation with better access to information about government and non-government support and services available to carers. The resource was meant to be made available to all carers, however, despite references to the resource on the DSS website, it is no longer available on the Internet. The resource was not commented on during the national consultation program.

**Transitioning from out of home care to Independence:** A Nationally Consistent Approach to Planning – online resource. This online resource is designed to provide a nationally consistent approach to planning and supporting children transitioning out of OoHC care to independence. The evidence-based tool was developed by with input from governments and the NGO sector. Stakeholders with jurisdictional NGO and policy perspectives, noted that despite adoption in a number of jurisdictions, the resource had limited impact.

**CREATE Go Your Own Way kits.** This kit was produced by CREATE, and distributed through the jurisdictions to young people leaving care. CREATE consulted widely with young people to develop a nationally consistent 'leaving care' resource. It included information and planning resources to help young people and their caseworkers plan for transition out of care, to independence. The resource drew some comment from jurisdictions, with practitioners viewing it as another tool on which to draw

on. There was also some comment on the difficulties in funding the roll out of the kit to the jurisdictions.

**Child Aware Approaches resources.** New practices and resources, such as The Good Practice Guide to Child Aware Approaches: Keeping Children Safe and Well, have been presented at the past three Child Aware Approaches' conferences. The conferences and the resources made available were considered useful to practitioners and policy makers, though there was also comment on the effectiveness of the initiative to engage key stakeholders outside the child protection and child and family welfare sectors.

*The first Child Aware conference was very useful. This was a good initiative, but again the line of sight to the National Framework was limited.*

*NGO Coalition representative*

**Responding to concerning sexual behaviours in children and young people kit.** This learning resource to aid carers and residential service staff on how to respond to children and young people with concerning sexual behaviours. Jurisdictional stakeholders from some other states considered it a valuable and useful resource, though there was some concern from the NGO Coalition that it had not been made available to the wider NGO sector.

**Viewpoint.** Viewpoint is a computer assisted self-interview tool. It had been piloted at jurisdictional level and was adapted for use to collect data as part of the National Standards for OoHC to gauge the perspectives of young people in OoHC. It was being progressively implemented across the rest of the jurisdictions at the time of this project. The tool was seen as an important development that was changing practice at a practitioner level, and collecting important new national data on the quality of care for children and young people in OoHC.

*The roll-out of Viewpoint has been very influential throughout the sector.*

*Jurisdictional executive perspective*

Notwithstanding the value that stakeholders saw in the collection of this new data, there remained some concern from the NGO Coalition about the adequacy of Viewpoint. It was considered more a case management tool and not necessarily based on research on the best methods to engage with children and young people.

**Clinical Practice Guidelines.** The Clinical Practice Guidelines were developed to assist in policy-making and practice regarding the use of health assessments and monitoring for children and young people in OoHC. The guidelines were cited in a number of states as assisting in the development of jurisdictional approaches to health management for OoHC clients.

In reviewing the utility of various tools and resources, it was clear that use and application varied across jurisdictions. In some instances particular tools and resources were identified as fitting discrete needs, but in other jurisdictions they were considered either superfluous. Other factors also contributed to the take up and use of tools and resources, principally around the communication and promotion of tools and resources, and evidence and evaluation.

### **Adding value to other policy frameworks and priorities**

Engaging with other national policy frameworks and cross portfolio priorities such as the Closing the Gap, National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010 – 2022, have been a focus of both the First and Second Action Plans.

As a national approach, and with significant Commonwealth Government leadership and focus over the course of the first two Action Plans, the National Framework is well placed to engage with other nationally endorsed priority areas and various National Partnerships. Given the scale of the issue the National Framework seeks to address, the effectiveness of these links was considered critical to the overall success of the National Framework.

*The education and health platforms are critical. They are the platforms that can drive cultural and systemic change.*

*Commissioner perspective*

This issue was explored in the national consultation program. Like other aspects of the National Framework, the evidence on how it had added value to other policy frameworks and priorities was mixed.

There were a number of specific National Partnerships and national priority areas where stakeholders felt there had been effective engagement and linkage between the National Framework and other national priorities areas. This included Closing the Gap, homelessness, and domestic violence.

*We got movement in other National Partnerships such as the Homelessness National Partnership - for children leaving out of home care. We were influencing other reform agendas. The National Framework is an enabler.*

*Commonwealth Government perspective*

But overall there was a consistent view that the links to other nationally endorsed priorities was not as advanced as they needed to be.

*Early years has been largely left out. The National Framework was seen as a child protection document from the start. And it is still a child protection framework. If we want to talk about Family Violence or health or early years, then we have to go to the other departments. And they don't own or connect to the National Framework.*

*NGO Coalition perspective*

*The linkages have not been made strongly enough. There are large national initiatives that are not joined up well enough yet. A loss of corporate memory in DSS makes it hard for them to drive the links that we know should all be made.*

*NGO Coalition perspective*

Where there had been successes it was largely attributed to the efforts of individuals and the strengths of relationships between senior officials. While this person-dependent approach had had some successes it was hostage to the presence of individuals remaining in particular roles. It was not considered a sustainable approach.

*There were strong links to the National Plan for Prevention of Violence against Women and their Children. But was this more because of the individuals involved. The links weren't really established, though, between departments or portfolios. Where links were established, it was by default rather than by design. Links would have been useful, but we have lacked the inter-ministerial structures with areas like housing, health, justice, homelessness.*

*Jurisdictional executive perspective*

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, the NDIS, and the National Plan for Prevention of Violence against Women and their Children were the three emerging priorities where stakeholders felt the most opportunity for the National Framework to link with, lay.

In particular, the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse was seen as a developing space where likely recommendations could have the most impact on future implementation of the National Framework.

*The big factor is the Royal Commission. How are States going to respond? What is the future Commonwealth role in what they recommend?*

*Commonwealth Government perspective*

*The whole child safe focus coming out of the Royal Commission is also very important. This development will represent a major change to our community. But it will also be a key part of any early intervention and prevention strategy in the future*

*Children's Commissioner perspective*

*The Royal Commission really is an opportunity for national consistency around a range of issues that are currently stateless. The National Framework and Royal Commission are opportunities for contemporary solutions. The National Framework needs to relate to the Royal Commission – it needs to be a living partnership document that is flexible and can address issues as they arise.*

*NGO Coalition perspective*

At a jurisdictional level the evidence of how the National Framework had added to state and territory policy frameworks and priorities is mixed.

Review of the jurisdictional data provided through the stocktake tool indicates that explicit reference to the National Framework in legislation and policy documentation is limited. However, review of activity undertaken at a jurisdictional level demonstrates a considerable body of work occurring through reforms in family support and other prevention approaches. In consultation with the jurisdictions, government stakeholders emphasised that their work was first and foremost driven by jurisdictional priorities. But, examination of recent reports of inquiries such as the Victorian and Queensland reviews of 2012 and 2013 respectively references the National Framework and endorses the public health model principles and approaches outlined in the National Framework from 2009.

While the issue of attribution and causality again complicates analysis, it is evident that the National Framework had effectively set the scene and provided a starting point for subsequent public health, prevention and early intervention approaches being progressively refined and implemented across jurisdictions.

## **Conclusions**

Early expectations of the National Framework around new approaches to service commissioning, pooled funding and place-based approaches, and improved workforce capability and capacity, were high.

In reviewing the work program of the National Framework, and the experience of implementation it is evident that particular initiatives, resources and tools had led to a degree of improved collaboration and capability across sectors. However, in most instances, the impact of these various initiatives, tools and resources had been limited by a number of structural and implementation issues that were significant and ongoing inhibitors to genuine shared reform and innovation.

Engagement with other policy frameworks and programs had been mixed, though there are emerging opportunities in areas of national interest – such as domestic violence, NDIS, and the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse – that stakeholders believe the National Framework is well positioned to engage with, and maximise change for children and young people. Clear and effective links to these areas should feature significantly in future National Framework implementation and governance arrangements.

## Chapter 5: Shifting the focus from the statutory system to prevention and early intervention

This chapter determines whether – through the National Framework – government efforts across jurisdictions have shifted focus from the statutory system to prevention initiatives and early intervention approaches.

### Key points

The public health model objective of the National Framework is premised upon shifting the focus from the statutory system to prevention and early intervention approaches. Filling the research gaps and enhancing the evidence base were considered central to the overall success of the National Framework.

Three research projects had been progressed through the National Research Agenda, examining: positive child wellbeing and development behaviours and practices in disadvantaged communities; intensive family support services for Indigenous children; and the building of relationships between services and refugee communities.

Commissioning and translating research was affirmed as an important and strategic space for the National Framework to operate in. Specific research commissioned through the National Research Agenda was considered high quality and useful work. However, the value and application of the research had been limited by not being linked to broader national research agendas and opportunities. The process associated with the development, implementation and dissemination of research was considered poor. The \$650,000 attached to the National Research Agenda – was considered too small for what the National Research Agenda purported to achieve. Other research activities associated with the National Framework were also seen as being impacted by poor promotion and dissemination practices.

The development and implementation of the Child Protection National Minimum Dataset (CPNMDS) is a significant achievement of the National Framework. Limitations in previous data collection methods had compromised the previous use and reporting of national child protection data. The development of the CPNMDS was seen as contributing to the quality and utility of national child protection data, and in turn substantially improving the potential of the evidence base, though it is important to note that the CPNMDS is an administrative dataset.

In terms of systemic change, over half of the consultation sessions indicated that the balance of National Framework activity had occurred at the tertiary level, and were reluctant to attribute definitive and systemic shifts to early intervention and prevention the National Framework. However, from data and documentation reviewed during the conduct of this project, it was evident that early intervention and prevention approaches were increasingly part of the policy and practice approaches across jurisdictions, though it is important to acknowledge stakeholder views on the scale of cultural, structural and organisational change still required to shift the focus from the tertiary end to universal and preventative system responses. The National Framework was seen as an important authorising enabler from which at least to begin this process.

From the data collected during this project, key barriers and facilitators to systemic change include: an undeveloped understanding and evidence base within the child and family welfare sector of the public health approach; a membership base that is too heavily skewed to tertiary child protection; and an absence of a shared language around early intervention and prevention.

## Overview

The National Framework's public health model is premised upon achieving a greater focus on prevention initiatives and early intervention approaches.

*Australia needs to move from seeing 'protecting children' merely as a response to abuse and neglect to one of promoting the safety and wellbeing of children... Under a public health model, priority is placed on having universal supports available for all families (for example, health and education). More intensive (secondary) prevention interventions are provided to those families that need additional assistance with a focus on early intervention. Tertiary child protection services are a last resort, and the least desirable option for families and governments.*

*Just as a health system is more than hospitals so a system for the protection of children is more than a statutory child protection service.*

*COAG 2009, National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020*

This chapter explores the extent to which the National Framework has informed a shift in efforts from the statutory system, to prevention initiatives and early intervention approaches. It focuses on the National Framework's role as it relates to the following areas.

- The extent to which the National Framework has contributed to the building of a clear research and evidence base that better informs future policy making and service delivery.
- Examining available evidence to determine whether the National Framework has enabled a greater focus on prevention initiatives and early intervention approaches.
- Documenting the barriers to and facilitating factors for systems change.

These areas are explored in further detail below.

### The research and evidence base

Filling the research gaps and enhancing the evidence base were national priorities first identified in the First Action Plan. They were subsequently re-affirmed in Second Action Plan. Significantly, delivering on these national priorities was seen as contributing to all of the National Framework supporting outcomes.

The importance of research and evidence was a consistent theme raised during the national consultation program. There was also acknowledgement across the stakeholders consulted that traditionally, the child and family welfare sector's approach to, and use of, evidence informed approaches was not consistent.

*The sector hasn't always relied on the evidence and research. But there are so many possibilities in this space.*

*Research perspective*

Research and evidence was seen as an area where the National Framework could add real value, providing for the development and translation of good practices and evidence based innovations across jurisdictions and different service sectors, which in the absence of a National Framework, would be unlikely to occur otherwise.

This section examines the experience of implementation across the two national priorities – filling the research gaps, and enhancing the evidence base – focussing first on the National Research Agenda (as well as other research work associated with the National Framework) and then data and evidence.

### **National Research Agenda**

The development of the National Research was the key action associated with the national priority, filling the research gaps

The First Action Plan envisaged the development of a National Research Agenda by early 2010. Following a research workshop in 2009, and as part of the National Framework governance arrangements, a Filling the Research Gap Working Group, with membership comprising government officials, key academics and NGO representatives was established to drive activity in this space.

The endorsed National Research Agenda was agreed by CDSMC, and published in 2011, accompanied by an audit of existing research undertaken by researchers at the Australian Institute for Family Studies and the Social Policy Centre.

The research audit was designed to identify, describe and disseminate information about Australian research undertaken between 1995–2010 on topics relating to the protection of children, and to identify priorities and areas of development that should be further examined. The National Research Agenda was designed to build on this work, and identify research opportunities and build the evidence around issues relevant to protecting children from abuse and neglect. It identified priority gaps in policy and practice around: prevention; early intervention; therapeutic responses; OoHC; and system responses. The National Research Agenda also stressed the importance of clear dissemination plans to maximise how the research is taken up by other researchers, policy makers and practitioners.

A 2011 allocation of \$650,000 was also made available for the National Research Agenda. An Expression of Interest process commenced in 2012. In 2013, three research projects were commissioned through this process, with the expectation they would be completed by 2015.

*Thriving in adversity: a positive deviance study of safe communities for children*, undertaken by researchers at the SPRC. This study applied a positive deviance framework to select disadvantaged areas across Australia to identify the individual, family and community factors that support positive child wellbeing and development. The research report was published in 2014.

*Moving to Prevention research report: Intensive family support services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children*, undertaken by the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) and Griffith University. Part one of the project, the research element, was published in early 2015 and documented findings about the conditions and factors that contribute to family support services achieving positive outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in contact with the statutory child protection system. The development of an accompanying practice and training guide is expected in 2015.

*Refugee Communities Intercultural Dialogue: Building relationships, building communities*, being undertaken by researchers at the Australian Catholic University is due for completion in 2015.

The National Research Agenda attracted significant comment through the national consultation program.

The commissioning and translating of research was affirmed as an important and strategic space for the National Framework to operate in. The establishment of the National Framework was lauded for having created a forum through which to identify and commission research that otherwise would not have occurred. Specific research commissioned through the National Research Agenda was considered high quality and useful work.

However, it was evident that the value and application of the research had been limited by a number of factors. This included missed opportunities to link the National Research Agenda with broader research agendas and funding opportunities through the National Health and Medical Research Council and the Australian Research Council. There was also concern over a perceived lack of coordination of National Framework research with other research activities commissioned by the Commonwealth Government.

*The work that has been commissioned was very good work, but it hasn't been able to change practice. They are point-in-time studies. And there are so many possibilities. The research agenda should be aligned to the National Research Directions to enable serious resources for research.*

*Research perspective*

The process associated with the development and implementation of the National Research Agenda was considered to have been slow, and its utility impacted by being poorly promoted, translated and disseminated.

*It started and stopped. And it was too piecemeal and remained that way. It got signed off late, well into the Second Action Plan. It got caught up in the COAG restructures which just resulted in everything ceasing.*

*Jurisdictional executive perspective*

*The research agenda has been slow and poorly articulated and communicated ... the translation of research and evidence is critical too, but it isn't happening. Currently its slow and ineffective ... Give governments a say in it but set up a board with appropriate secretariat functions to run it and to commission research and to provide oversight.*

*Research perspective*

The quantum of funding attached to the National Research Agenda – \$650,000 over three years – was also singled out for comment. The amount was considered too small for what the National Research Agenda purported to achieve.

*I would have liked to see a more significant bucket of money for the research agenda – \$600,000 over 3 years is pathetic compared to \$11 million for homelessness research*

*Research perspective*

The National Research Agenda document also contained a commitment to the review of the National Research Agenda upon its completion (at the time of its publication the expected completion was 2014). It is not clear what the status of that commitment is.

There are a number of other research activities that while not commissioned through the National Research Agenda, were still connected to the National Framework. These included research on workforce trends in child protection, examination of mandatory reporting arrangements, reviews and evaluations of specific National Framework actions like the BCBB project, and the information sharing protocol. Various exploratory studies into issues like professionalised carers were also

commissioned. However, the utility of this research and work, namely how it was promoted and disseminated, and how various recommendations were acted upon, also attracted mixed comment. There was some confusion over the status of various reports, and whether findings or recommendations were being worked upon. Though, particular pieces of work such as the recent research into mandatory reporting was considered particularly useful by some jurisdictions, and an important input into their current policy making processes.

### **Data and evidence**

Data and evidence has been a key focus of activity over the life of the National Framework, and was one of the twelve national priorities identified in the First and Second Action Plans.

At the commencement of the National Framework, a Performance and Data Working Group was established to review data collection and monitoring methods, refine key indicators, and scope data availability and consistency issues for both the National Framework and the National Standards for OoHC. The membership of the working group comprised AIHW, jurisdictional officers, and NGO representatives.

The early intention was to trial new ways of reporting child protection data by early 2011. Funding of \$1.3 million was made available for AIHW to lead development of a unit record data collection system that would replace the existing method of collecting national data. Given the scale of the issues to be addressed the timeline for expected implementation and national reporting did not commence until 2013. There had also been significant work on developmental work for the data collection methods associated with the National Framework and the National Standards for OoHC.

The development and implementation of the CPNMDS was considered a significant achievement of the National Framework, particularly by stakeholders from a research perspective, and federal and jurisdictional perspectives. Previously, the collection of child protection data was done in an aggregate form by individual jurisdictions. Different counting methods, and an inability to link data across activities and jurisdictions compromised the use and reporting of national data. The development of the CPNMDS was seen as contributing to the quality and utility of national child protection data, and in turn substantially improving the potential of the evidence base, nationally, but also at a local level.

*The CPNMDS is absolutely fundamental. You can't even begin to compare and contrast until you have an established and consistent data set. There is real potential in that space, if we continue to build on it.*

*Children's Commissioner perspective*

However, it had not been a simple task, and there was some frustration expressed by many of the stakeholders involved in its development, and with the processes and time needed to implement it.

*Unit record collection was a long time coming. We are very focused on the data side of things, which to others seem a small slice of the National Framework pie... and states are struggling with this, principally because of the resources required. So, we often have to remind people that it is really cross-cutting and you need good data to do anything.*

*Research perspective*

There was also concern that efforts to improve data had been dominated by activity to improve the collection of child protection business activity. While it was acknowledged that nationally consistent

administrative and output data was important, the lack of progress in exploring and developing data and evidence as it related to child and youth wellbeing was also noted.

Despite the inherent challenges in developing and reporting on client outcome measures, the continuing absence of any form of national outcome data remained a source of frustration (explored in detail in the next chapter).

## Prevention initiatives and early intervention approaches

Underpinning the National Framework's public health model is the recognition that greater emphasis on early intervention and prevention will reduce the occurrence of child abuse and neglect and enable more appropriate responses to vulnerability and disadvantage.

*In reality, Australia's child welfare service systems more closely resemble an hourglass than a pyramid. As demands on child protection services have grown, the size of child protection services have grown to meet that demand. Child protection services cannot provide a response to all vulnerable children and their families.*

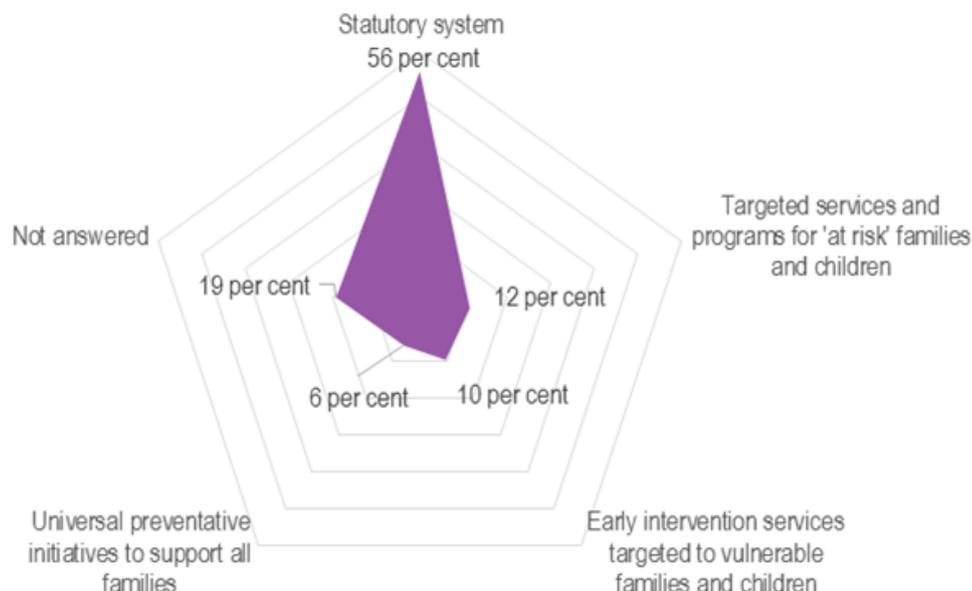
*A public health model offers a different approach with a greater emphasis on assisting families early enough to prevent abuse and neglect occurring.*

COAG 2009 National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020

The extent to which the National Framework had informed or contributed to a greater emphasis on prevention initiatives and early intervention approaches – giving effect to systemic change – was tested during the national consultation program, and through examination of the jurisdictional data tools.

During the national consultation program, most stakeholders were asked their views on where they considered the balance of National Framework attention and activity to date, had occurred. Figure 9 visualises the consultation data collected from stakeholders regarding their perspectives on which of the service system tiers within the public health model had benefitted the most from National Framework focus and activity over the course of the first and second action plans.

**Figure 9 Stakeholder views on which service system tier had benefitted the most from National Framework focus and activity to date**



Note: Percentages drawn from the sum of the national consultation program (52 separate consultations)

Source: ACIL Allen Consulting, drawn from the national consultation program.

For the benefit of those stakeholders who did not provide a clear answer, or the small number who were not asked, a fifth response – not answered was included. Even allowing for this caveat, the view of over half of the consultation sessions was that the balance of National Framework focus and activity had been on the statutory service system tier.

*Very clearly the statutory system, because of the membership, the external pressures, and what people can actually get done in the context of states' own pressures*

*NGO Coalition perspective*

*The focus remains at the statutory end. This may be partly because this is the states' remit, whereas other parts of the system – like education – are Commonwealth responsibilities. Also perhaps because DSS is running the framework, with no jurisdiction over education, health or justice.*

*NGO Coalition perspective*

*Has the National Framework informed change – not yet. It's been too focused on tertiary activity.*

*NGO Coalition perspective*

Universal and early intervention services were the service systems least identified during the national consultation program. On balance, most stakeholders were reluctant to attribute definitive and systemic shifts to early intervention and prevention to the National Framework.

*There has been some progress, but not at the speed nor depth to match the aspirations of the framework. And where there may have been some movement, there's nothing linking it back to the framework. The first five years were focused on the tertiary end.*

*Jurisdictional executive stakeholder*

However, detailed analysis of the jurisdictional data tools does not entirely confirm the consultation data, with a more even spread of activity reported by jurisdictions against the different supporting outcomes of the National Framework. Under each of the six supporting outcomes, a synthesis of activity as reported by the jurisdictions is included below.

### **Children live in safe and supportive families and communities.**

- A broad mixture of initiatives and activity are cited under this first supporting outcome, including improved access to early childhood services, health and education, parenting services, other secondary and family support services, and more responsive OoHC services.

### **Children and families access adequate support to promote safety and intervene early.**

- Each of the jurisdictions report significant reform agendas underway to improve their family support and other secondary services for vulnerable and at risk children and young people and their families.

### **Risk factors for child abuse and neglect are addressed**

- The majority of work reported under this supporting outcome details how jurisdictions are responding to domestic violence. Other risk factors like drug and alcohol dependency and mental health are also referenced.

### **Children who have been abused or neglected receive the support and care they need for their safety and wellbeing**

- Significant reform of OoHC is cited by each of the jurisdictions under this supporting outcome. Jurisdictions are working on improving trauma informed approaches, better responses to sexual exploitation of children and young people in OoHC, addressing health and education outcomes, and commission new OoHC service models.

### **Indigenous children are supported and safe in their families and communities**

- The scope of work cited under this supporting outcome span the different service system tiers, from universal services to tertiary, including access to health and education services, to family conferencing models, to building capacity of Aboriginal Controlled Community Organisations in anticipation of transfer of Guardianship orders.

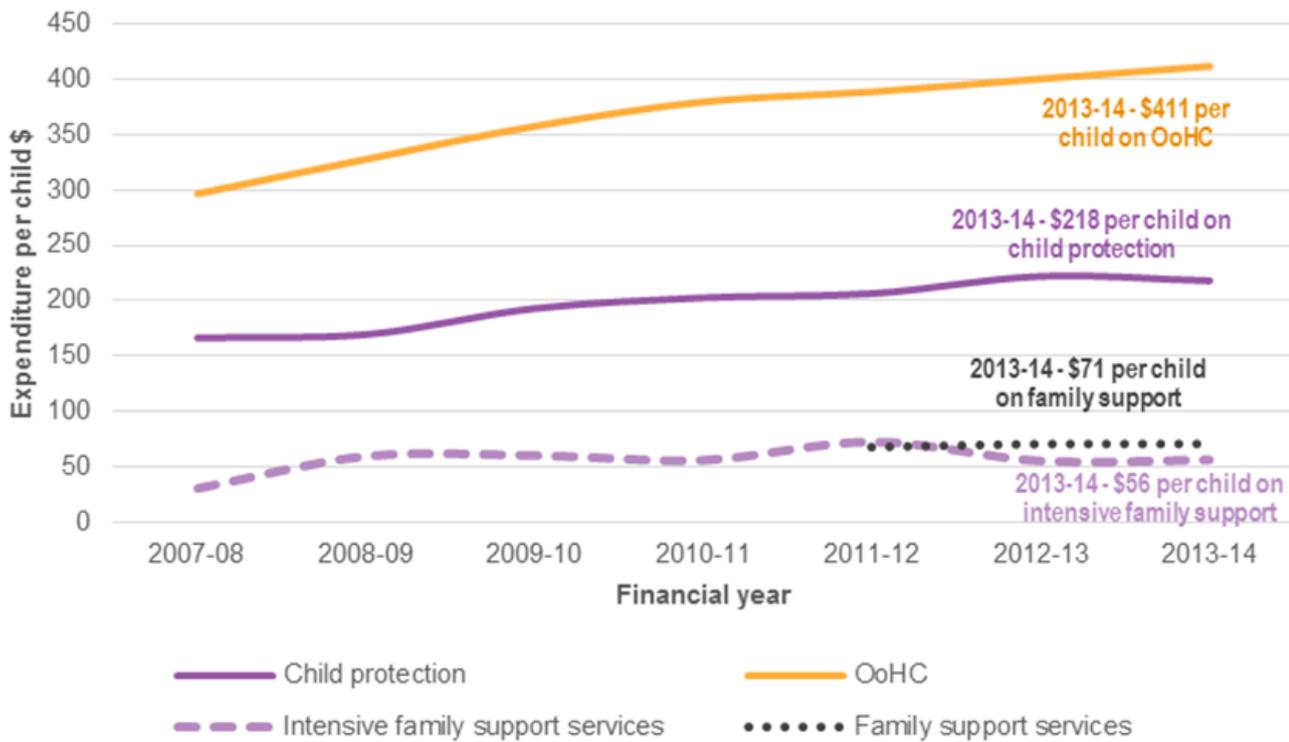
### **Child sexual abuse and exploitation is prevented and survivors receive adequate support**

- There is wide range of work and activity cited under this supporting outcome, including improvements to WWCC schemes and other child safety initiatives, better responses to sexual exploitation in OoHC, implementation of new criminal offence laws, and supporting work for the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

Notwithstanding the considerable body of work reported under each of the supporting outcomes by states and territories, the jurisdictional data tool also indicates little explicit reference to the National Framework in jurisdictional legislation or policy documentation.

Analysis of data prepared for RoGS was also undertaken to examine any shifts in investment in prevention and early intervention approaches. Figure 5.2 charts real expenditure per child on different child protection and family support activities. For the purposes of this report, the different activities have been mapped to the following categories: family support services (broadly aligned with early intervention services); intensive family support services (broadly aligned with targeted services); and child protection and OoHC services (statutory services).

**Figure 10 State and Territory real expenditure per child, on child protection, OoHC, intensive family support services and family support services**



Note: There are various limitations documented by the SCRGSP report about the quality of data used to describe expenditure on the family support services, intensive family support services, and child protection and OoHC services. Nationally aggregated data needs to be viewed with caution.

Source: SCRGSP 2015, Report on Government Services 2014, Productivity Commission, Canberra, table 15a.1.

It is important to note that this only reports jurisdictional expenditure, and does not include federal funding for a range of universal type services. Jurisdictional expenditure on health and education is also not included. However, even allowing for definitional issues and limitations in the RoGS data, the only real shifts in expenditure are in the tertiary activities, OoHC and child protection, where expenditure per child had been rising.

The evidence collected for this report does not present a clear and authoritative picture on how the National Framework had enabled a greater focus on prevention initiatives and early intervention approaches. In consultation, most stakeholders, from the full range of perspectives identified the balance of National Framework activity as occurring in the tertiary sphere. The jurisdictional data indicates a more balanced picture, though there is little indication in the available funding data of any significant change. Yet, while stakeholders were reluctant to attribute any systemic change to the National Framework, there was also considerable comment on the continuing importance of the National Framework in drawing attention to the pressing need for systemic change.

*The National Framework legitimised our reforms and helped to get additional money to reform the system*

*Jurisdictional policy perspective*

*Having a national framework to call upon helped. Added additional support to the approach. It helped to convince other agencies and Treasury.*

*Jurisdictional executive perspective*

*The solution will not be a program it will be a philosophy. We need to be mindful of that all along. We need people to buy in and we need to keep them engaged.*

*NGO Coalition perspective*

Stakeholders commented on the scale of and size of the challenge, and of the cultural, structural and organisational change required to begin to shift the focus from the tertiary end to universal and preventative system responses. The National Framework was seen as an important authorising enabler from which at least to begin this process.

### **Barriers and facilitators for systems change**

The data and evidence collected during for this project affords insights into the barriers and facilitating factors for achieving systemic change to early intervention and prevention approaches.

Similar to the identification of enablers and barriers to governance and implementation, explored in Chapter 3, the issues identified below are presented as both barriers and facilitators for systems change. If they remain unaddressed, they will continue to inhibit systems change.

#### **Understanding of the public health model**

The public health model of the National Framework depends on a good understanding of causal, structural and contributing factors to child abuse and neglect, as well as being able to draw on established, evidence based interventions that can reduce risk and increase protective factors.

It was evident from the review of program and policy documentation and the national consultation program that the understanding and knowledge base within the child and family welfare system, of the public health approach remains under-developed. This was principally driven by the absence of reliable and comparable data on vulnerable families, and a lack of knowledge about the true rates child abuse and neglect. These issues had been identified by key participants and in various scoping papers prior to this report.

This under-developed knowledge and evidence base will continue to be a key inhibitor until addressed.

#### **Membership matters**

The membership of the National Framework's governance arrangements was identified as another contributing factor to shifting the focus.

Notwithstanding the presence of varied experts and academics involved with the National Framework, the membership of the officials groups and NFIWG and the National Forum remains heavily skewed to the tertiary child protection system, limiting opportunity to connect and engage with other key sectors such as health and education.

#### **A common language**

Language is also a critical enabler to shared and common approaches.

It was evident from the national consultation program that many participants attribute different meaning to the terms prevention and early intervention – ranging from enhanced universal supports to placement prevention activities for children and young people where harm and abuse had already been substantiated. Further embedding a shared language is likely to facilitate shared objective and reform pathway.

### **Conclusions**

The research commissioned through the National Framework, and the significant work undertaken on improving data collection and comparability has contributed to the building of a clearer research and evidence base.

However, the research had not been coordinated with other broader national research agendas, nor well promoted or disseminated. The role of clearing houses in translating the research had also not been optimised. Beyond the DSS website, it is not evident where the natural repository of National Framework research and evidence is.

The development of the CPNMDS is a significant achievement that should not be overlooked. It will continue to contribute to further research and evidence and provide quality national reporting as higher quality data is collected into the future. However achievements with the CPNMDS highlight the lack of progress with other data that could be used to measure wellbeing domains of children and young people.

While this project found most stakeholders considered the balance of activity identified with the National Framework was targeted at the statutory service system, and were reluctant to attribute systemic change to it, the National Framework was still widely considered an important authorising enabler from which to begin this process.

It is the conclusion of this project that this inability to clearly gauge the extent of a shift of focus from the statutory system to early intervention and prevention approaches is the result of National Framework process and governance issues. Without better aligning priorities, discrete actions and activities, and appropriate membership to the public health model, future outcomes regarding systemic change will be continue to be difficult to determine.

Other related issues that will continue to inhibit transition to a public health model include (unless resolved):

- Improved data and knowledge about the public health approach within a child wellbeing context
- Governance and implementation is driven by a more balanced membership
- A shared and common language on early intervention and prevention is embedded.

## Chapter 6: Establishing a baseline for subsequent evaluation

This chapter explores the establishment of a baseline for subsequent evaluations, which will enable judgements about the National Framework and the extent to which it is achieving its high level outcomes over the long term.

### Key points

Accountability and measurement of progress is central to the National Framework.

Since its commencement significant work and activity had been undertaken to report on and communicate progress and achievements of the National Framework. Notwithstanding this work, nearly a third of the National Framework's indicators of change remain unreportable.

The National Framework's Annual Reports are detailed summaries of the work undertaken each year. An overview of the National Framework's key achievements indicate a large and growing body of national work and initiatives. The Annual Reports also report on the work underway in Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments that is related to the National Framework.

Despite these efforts, when using the latest data available to populate the National Framework's high level indicators of change, it is still not possible to make a compelling judgement on the progress of the National Framework.

While there are some promising signs, the data confirms the earlier positions of the Annual Reports – that it is still too early to determine if the National Framework had begun to 'turn the dial' in a meaningful way.

Among stakeholders involved in the National Framework, robust accountability and reporting arrangements are considered fundamental. However, there was considerable comment on the appropriateness of the current indicators of change. The annual reporting process was also criticised with jurisdictional representatives querying its utility, and commenting that over time it had become compliance focussed and stale.

The absence of any true measure of the prevalence of child abuse and neglect in the community was a particularly pressing concern for stakeholders with research perspectives. This absence was considered very limiting for embedding a public health model.

There is interest in the development of outcomes based measurement that would better track outcomes across domains that have a direct impact on child wellbeing.

Despite the articulation in both the First and Second Action Plans, of strategic and regular evaluation, there had not been any evaluation of progress under the National Framework until this project, noting that the scope of this project differs significantly from what was anticipated in the first two Action Plans.

### Overview

Since its inception, accountability mechanisms and reporting on progress have been integral components of the National Framework. The headline target for the National Framework is for a 'substantial and sustained reduction in child abuse and neglect in Australia over time.' A series of indicators of change which could inform this target were first outlined in the 2009 National Framework document.

Drawing on stakeholder perspectives, key National Framework documentation and national datasets, this chapter explores the issues of accountability and reporting in detail. It does this by:

- Documenting the evolving nature of the National Framework’s accountability and reporting mechanisms
- Measuring the progress of the National Framework to date, using its current reporting and accountability framework, as well as incorporating the qualitative experiences of key stakeholders
- Exploring views on how best to measure progress into the future.

Each of these themes is detailed below.

## **Evolving accountability and reporting mechanisms**

The 2009 National Framework document set out key expectations about accountability.

*The Implementation Plan will be a key tool in measuring progress of the National Framework. All jurisdictions and stakeholders will be able to monitor progress against activities and milestones outlined in the Implementation Plan. A set of performance indicators will be developed as part of the Implementation Plan, providing another opportunity to monitor progress and outcomes. Reporting processes for the National Framework will provide an opportunity to streamline existing reporting processes to ensure greater levels of transparency.*

COAG 2009 National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children

The First Action Plan laid the foundation for the accountability and reporting mechanisms for the National Framework. In 2009, anticipated mechanisms comprised:

- Reporting to CDSMC annually on:
  - Delivery of national priorities
  - Progress against 29 identified indicators of change
  - State and Territory Government reforms
  - Community initiatives through the Children’s Commissioners and Guardians and the NGO Coalition
- Presenting a report card to COAG annually which will be publicly released.
- Documenting the stories of families and children in Australia about the everyday improvements in their lives.

The First Action Plan identified the critical need to improve data collection and reporting over time. Significant work occurred in this space and refined reporting and accountability mechanisms were outlined in the Second Action Plan in 2012. They comprised:

- Indicators of change for the National Framework’s six supporting outcomes
- Further development of demographic and administrative data about children in, and at risk of entering, the child protection system
- Research projects based on the National Research Agenda
- Biennial surveys of children and young people in out of home care, supported by Australian Government surveys of specific groups
- Annual Reports to COAG on the progress of the National Framework
- Information from bodies such as the Australian Children’s Commissioners and Guardians

At the time of this project being conducted, not all of the above reporting and accountability mechanisms had been embedded in practice. For example the biennial survey had not been implemented. The indicators of change also evolved over the course of the Second Action Plan. An overview of the indicators change as they were reported in the most recent Annual Report is provided below. Of the 31 indicators of change, 22 are reportable at this stage.

#### *High level outcomes*

##### Child protection substantiations:

- 0.1: Rate of children aged 0–17 years who were the subject of child protection substantiation – Reportable

##### Out of home care:

- 0.2: Rate of children aged 0–17 years who are in out of home care – Reportable

##### Teenage births:

- 0.3: Age-specific birth rate for women aged 15–19 years – Reportable

##### Low birthweight:

- 0.4: Proportion of live born infants of low birthweight – Reportable

##### Child homicide:

- 0.5: Assault (homicide) death rate for children aged 0–17 years – Reportable

##### Early childhood development:

- 0.6: Proportion of children who are developmentally vulnerable on one or more domains of AEDI – Reportable

##### Child social & emotional wellbeing:

- 0.7: Proportion of children aged 8–17 years scoring 'of concern' on the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire – Not reportable

##### Family economic situation:

- 0.8: Proportion of households with children aged 0–14 years where at least 50% of gross household income is from government pensions and allowances – Reportable

#### *Supporting outcome 1: Children live in safe and supportive families and communities*

##### Family functioning:

- 1.1: Proportion of families who report 'good', 'very good' or 'excellent' family cohesion – Reportable

##### Perceived safety:

- 1.2: Proportion of households with children aged 0–14 years where their neighbourhood is perceived as safe – Reportable

*Supporting outcome 2: Children and families access adequate support to promote safety and intervene early*

Family support service use:

- 2.1: Number of children aged 0–17 years seeking assistance through treatment and support services – Reportable with proxy indicator

Early childhood education:

- 2.2: Attendance rate of children aged 4–5 years at preschool programs – Reportable

Antenatal care:

- 2.3: Proportion of women who had at least five antenatal visits during pregnancy – Reportable

*Supporting outcome 3: Risk factors for abuse and neglect are addressed*

Parental substance use:

- 3.1: Proportion of parents with children aged 0–14 years who used any illicit drug within the last 12 months – Reportable
- 3.2: Proportion of parents with children aged 0–14 years who drank alcohol at risky levels – Reportable

Parental mental health:

- 3.3: Proportion of parents with children aged 0–14 years who have a mental health problem – Reportable

Homelessness:

- 3.4: Rate of children aged 0–17 years who receive assistance through homelessness services (accompanied and unaccompanied) – Reportable

Domestic violence:

- 3.5: Proportion of adults who experienced current partner violence and their children saw or heard the violence in the previous 12 months – Not reportable

*Supporting outcome 4:*

Child protection resubstantiations:

- 4.1: Rate of children aged 0–17 years who were the subject of a child protection re-substantiation in a given year – Reportable

Placement stability:

- 4.2: Proportion of children aged 0–17 years exiting out of home care during the year who had 1 or 2 placements – Reportable

Carer retention:

- 4.3: Proportion of out of home carer households that were retained in a given year – Not reportable

Rebuilding resilience of abuse survivors:

- 4.4: Proportion of children aged 15–17 years leaving care and scoring ‘of concern’ on the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire – Not reportable

Literacy and numeracy:

- 4.5: Proportion of children on guardianship and custody orders achieving at or above the national minimum standards for literacy and numeracy – Not reportable

Leaving care plans:

- 4.6: Proportion of children aged 15–17 years who have a leaving care plan – Reportable

Cross-sector clients:

- 4.7: Proportion of child protection clients aged 0–17 years who enter juvenile corrective services or seek assistance from homelessness services – Not reportable

*Supporting outcome 5: Indigenous children are supported and safe in their families and communities*

Placement of Indigenous children:

- 5.1: Indicator to be developed (Indigenous Child Placement Principle compliance indicator) – Not reportable
- 5.2: Proportion of Indigenous children aged 0–17 years in out of home care placed with extended family or other Indigenous caregivers – Reportable
- 5.3: Proportion of Indigenous children aged 0–17 years placed through Indigenous-specific out of home care agencies – Not reportable

Cultural support plans:

- 5.4: Proportion of Indigenous children aged 0–17 years in care who have a cultural support plan – Not reportable

*Supporting outcome 6: Child sexual abuse and exploitation is prevented and survivors receive adequate support*

Sexual abuse substantiations:

- 6.1: Proportion of children aged 0–17 years who were the subject of a child protection substantiation for sexual abuse – Reportable

Child sexual assault:

- 6.2: Rate of children aged 0–14 years who have been the victim of sexual assault – Reportable

## Measuring progress

The Annual Reports are designed to outline progress of the National Framework over the course of each year. They report the data associated with each of the indicators of change, and canvas important developments and achievements across the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments and the NGO sector.

There have been four National Framework Annual Reports produced so far:

- Protecting Australia's Children – Annual Report to the Council of Australian Governments 2009-10 (2009-10 Annual Report) made public in December 2010
- Protecting Australia's Children – Annual Report to the Council of Australian Governments 2010-11 (2010-11 Annual Report) made public in May 2012
- Protecting Australia's Children – Annual Report to the Council of Australian Governments 2011-12 (2011-12 Annual Report) made public in May 2013
- Protecting Australia's Children – Annual Report to the Council of Australian Governments 2012-13 (2012-13 Annual Report) made public in October 2014.

Importantly, each Annual Report prefaces discussion of progress with caveats around the ability to determine progress at this stage of the National Framework.

In the first Annual Report covering 2009-10, there was acknowledgement that while there was detailed reporting on quantitative indicators, it 'will take a considerable time before this data can measure the success, or otherwise, of actions taken' (FaHCSIA 2010). The most recent Annual Report, released in 2014 and covering the financial year 2012-13, conceded that:

*...it is, of course, still early in the life of the National Framework. It is difficult to draw many conclusions about whether or not the Framework is making a difference at this time. Indeed, it may not be possible to judge the impact of the Framework for several years. Nonetheless, it is important to begin gathering data and reporting as early as possible, and to continue measuring the same aspects of children's lives year after year, so that trends can easily be observed.*

DSS 2014, Annual Report to the Council of Australian Governments 2012–13, Protecting Children is Everyone's Business – National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–2020

Notwithstanding this point, the Annual Reports also contain considerable qualitative data on the work undertaken as part of the National Framework, but also related to it. A synthesis of major achievements as recorded in the Annual Reports is outlined below.

*2009-10 Annual Report – summary of key National Framework achievements:*

- Establishment of new Communities for Children Plus sites in particularly disadvantaged areas
- Announcements of 51 sites for the new Indigenous Parenting Support Services, and 36 Child and Family Centre locations
- Development of the CAARS tool to assist service providers identify and support vulnerable children and families
- Research into the supports and services available to formal and informal out of home carers commissioned
- Development into national standards for OoHC commences
- Commencement of the Building Capacity, Building Bridges project, trialled in 12 sites experiencing disadvantage
- AIHW commence review of data collections to develop unit data collection and headline indicators relating to children's social and emotional wellbeing, shelter, and family social networks
- Exploration of a national research agenda commences
- The Transition to Independence Living Allowance increased and work commences reviewing the effectiveness of the transition to independent living arrangements for young people leaving OoHC

- Funding of child sexual abuse awareness raising activities
- Commencement of new information sharing protocols between State and Territory child protection agencies and Commonwealth Government agencies

*2010-11 Annual Report – summary of key National Framework achievements*

- Ongoing implementation of Communities for Children and Communities for Children Plus sites
- Development of the CAARS resource kit and funding allocated for a trial in four sites
- Endorsement of the National Standards for OoHC
- Release of the Transitioning from OoHC to independence discussion paper to inform ongoing efforts into nationally consistent approaches
- Implementation of the Building Capacity, Building Bridges project
- Evaluation and expansion of the information sharing protocols between State and Territory child protection agencies and Commonwealth Government agencies
- Research into the supports available to formal and informal carers released. An online resource tool for carers is also developed and made available
- \$650,000 made available to support the national reform agenda
- Development of a 'Generic Sexual Abuse and Sexualised Behaviour' learning package for carers and staff working in OoHC commences
- Agreement on the need to develop nationally consistent approaches to Working with Children Checks

*2011-12 Annual Report – summary of key National Framework achievements*

- Development, endorsement and implementation of the National Standards for Out of Home Care
- Establishment of the Child Aware Approaches Grant Round, with \$5.7 million allocated across 43 organisations to improve child safe practices and targeting of services
- Legislation to establish a National Children's Commissioner is commenced
- Research priorities for the national research agenda agreed
- Ongoing trialling of the CAARS tool

*2012-13 Annual Report – summary of key National Framework achievements*

- National Research Agenda agreed, and three projects funded, due for completion over the course of the Second Action Plan
- Publication of research into workforce trends in statutory child protection
- Ongoing collaborative work into cross border approaches between WA, SA and NT
- Work commissioned to explore opportunities regarding health supports and monitoring for children and young people in care
- Evaluation of the Building Capacity, Building Bridges Project released indicating the project has been successful in developing child centred practice across different service systems
- Ongoing implementation of Child and Family Centres across Australia
- Appointment of the first National Children's Commissioner
- First showcasing of emerging practice and resources at the inaugural Child Aware Approaches Conference.

To examine the potential impact of these actions, this project has taken the eight high-level indicators that are designed to support the high level target that Australia's children are safe and well and populated them with the most recently available data. A dashboard of these data is provided in Figure 11 (noting that indicator 0.7 is not reportable, and accordingly, is not charted here). The data takes as

a baseline the year before commencement of the National Framework (either the calendar year of 2008 or the financial year of 2009-09 depending on the data source).

**Figure 11 Are Australia’s children and young people safe and well? Measuring progress against the National Framework high level indicators**



Note: AIHW child protection data before the development of unit record data in 2012-13 should be viewed with some caution. Given data collection methods and varying child protection policy and practice between jurisdictions, there are limitation to the use of national statistical aggregations of child protection data.

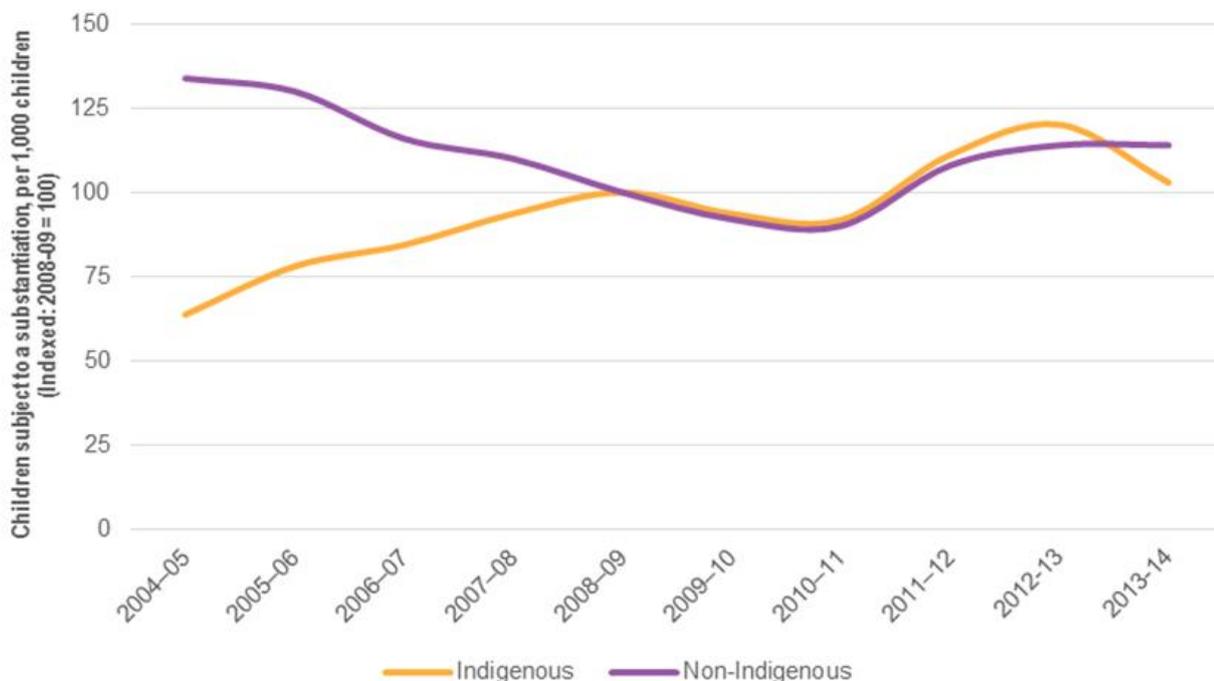
Source: Indicator 1 – AIHW Child Protection Australia; Indicator 2 – AIHW Child Protection Australia; Indicator 3 – AIHW National Perinatal Data Collection And Australian Bureau Statistics (ABS) Census Data; Indicator 4 – AIHW National Perinatal Data Collection; Indicator 5 – AIC National Homicide Monitoring Program; Indicator 6 – Australian Early Development Index; Indicator 8 – ABS Survey Of Income And Housing.

Across the seven indicators there are some promising signs. In the first two indicators the growth rates for Indigenous children and young people dropped in the last year of recorded data (while still remaining high). Similarly the declining rate of young Indigenous mothers continues, although there is small growth in the number of underweight Indigenous babies. Indicator 6 shows small improvements across both domains, and while indicator 8 has come down in the most recent collection, it still remains higher than the baseline.

In summary, the data essentially confirms the earlier positions of the Annual Reports – that it is still too early to determine if the National Framework had begun to ‘turn the dial’ in a meaningful way.

Examining indicator 1 in detail further complicates judgements on the National Framework. Figure 12 charts the substantiation rates of Indigenous and non-Indigenous children and young people over the past decade, indexed to 2008-09 (the baseline year). In the years leading up to the 2010-11 there is a significant decline in the substantiations for non-Indigenous children and young people, matched by a corresponding increase in the rates of substantiation of Indigenous children and young people. In 2011-12 rates increase significantly for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous children and young people alike (though 2013-14 data had a considerable drop in the substantiation rate for Indigenous children and young people).

**Figure 12 Growth in substantiation rates of Indigenous and non-Indigenous children and young people 2004-05 to 2013-14 (Indexed, 2008-09 = 100)**



Note: AIHW child protection data before the development of unit record data in 2012-13 should be viewed with some caution. Given data collection methods and varying child protection policy and practice between jurisdictions, there are limitations to the use of national statistical aggregations of child protection data.

Source: AIHW 2005:2014. Child Protection Australia Reports

The ongoing refinement and implementation of the CPNMDS should begin to provide a clearer picture of this data, being able to link individual clients to postcodes, and ideally other datasets that can yield information about other structural and environmental factors that are impacting on child protection activity.

This project also sought qualitative views on the National Framework's accountability and reporting mechanisms and the extent to which stakeholders felt the National Framework was achieving its outcomes.

Importantly, within this data, the concept of a robust accountability framework was broadly supported. It was seen as a foundation to the National Framework.

*Auditing and reporting does drive behaviour to a certain extent, it makes individuals align their work to an extent to the reporting requirements*

*Jurisdictional executive*

Among many NGO representatives the concept using improved reporting to hold child protection agencies to higher standards of accountability was a fundamental aspect of the National Framework. However, there was a sense that not all the indicators were appropriate, or well targeted.

Many of the jurisdictional executives and senior officers considered the child protection indicators were too process orientated. While indicators related to substantiations and OoHC were important child protection business related measures, there was little sense that they contributed to a broader narrative on child wellbeing and development.

*Reporting substantiations tells Child Protection departments like mine, something about their business. But little else. They are not an outcome. Those indicators don't drive change.*

*Jurisdictional executive perspective*

The absence of broader measures on these domains was also commented on frequently.

*The indicators are broader than just the statutory system. But we don't have the data on the targeted and universal systems. It is going to cost a fortune and take a long time to fill those gaps*

*Research perspective*

The annual reporting process, communicating various jurisdictional activities, and the utility of the Annual Reports themselves, was also a feature of consultation, particularly among jurisdictional officers.

*What it boiled down to was States and Territories listing what we were already doing, and ticking a box by reporting up to the federal government*

*Jurisdictional policy and implementation perspectives*

*States just run around every 12 months looking at what they are currently doing and rebadge it as the National Framework. The first plan, it looked at everyone's backyards a lot more than... The current system is really just a DSS report system now.*

*NGO Coalition perspective*

*Let's have reporting and accountability mechanisms that support change, and that aren't compliance driven*

*Jurisdictional executive*

*The National Framework feels old. It is very uninspiring, it is not technology driven, it is not creative, and there is no dynamism or energy. If it continues in its current format then it will remain another bureaucratic, committee driven exercise. As soon as you get into a 'states reporting to the Commonwealth dynamic' then you're in that old game of everyone trying to look good compared to others. And who does that help?*

*Jurisdictional NGO perspective*

There were concerns over the burden involved in the annual reporting process and not being able to see the strategic benefit in the reporting arrangements. It is important to note that these views were typically associated with the reporting processes associated with the Second Action Plan.

### **How should progress be measured?**

Given the inability at this time to determine the extent to which the National Framework had achieved change, and the nature of concerns and criticism raised throughout the national consultation program, the project also explored possible future measurement approaches.

Among stakeholders with a research perspective, the absence of any true measure of the prevalence of child abuse and neglect in the community was a particularly pressing concern. It also gave rise to observations about how, in the absence of this measure, a public health model approach could ever be advanced and embedded.

*In Australia, we still fundamentally don't understand a public health model*

*Research perspective*

Building on the earlier point, that the selection of indicators drives activity and practice, there was interest among stakeholders for the development of an outcomes measurement framework that would better track outcomes across domains that have a direct impact on child wellbeing, such as the family home, education, poverty, and other parental risk factors.

*... we could look at outcome measures. But to do that we need a strategy. A strategy underpinned by an outcomes framework. That looks at the family home, parental risk factors, structural impediments – poverty, education. These are the things we should be measuring ... but there is little evidence that the Framework and its current strategies and outcomes actually align with a public health model. Six years into a framework and we still haven't meaningfully engaged those other key agencies like health and education*

*Research perspective*

*Better outcome measures are needed too. We have business processes as our performance measures. It is always difficult to measure change for vulnerable and disadvantaged children, but we are not measuring the right things. We should be judging ourselves as a country, and whether as a country we are doing any better. Let's look at health and educational outcomes. Are children and young people happy? Figure out the measures that can tell us what is happening. Establish the evidence base there and then try and effect change*

*Jurisdictional NGO perspective*

In terms of formal evaluation, the National Framework envisaged a series of evaluations across the course of its lifespan. The First Action Plan indicated an evaluation would occur in 2012. The Second Action Plan indicated the development of a strategic evaluation plan, to be developed by the end of 2012. This strategic evaluation plan was anticipated to lead to regular three yearly evaluations that

measured progress towards achieving the high level and supporting outcomes, as well as canvassing:

- Implementation of the public health model approach to 'protecting children'
- Recognition that the best way to protect children is to prevent child abuse and neglect from occurring in the first place
- The need for a shared agenda for change with the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments and the NGO sector
- Underpinning principles of the National Framework, in particular the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child to which Australia is a signatory
- The philosophy that protecting children is everyone's business.

It is the understanding of this project that significant work progressed on the development of the strategic evaluation plan, but that it was never endorsed. The scope and conduct of this evaluation differs significantly from what was anticipated in the first two Action Plans.

## Conclusions

The National Framework accountability and reporting framework is considerable in scope and size. Accountability is a cornerstone of the National Framework, and significant work has gone into the collection, analysis, and reporting of activity and progress.

Notwithstanding this work, it is evident that the current set of indicators of change do not yet provide a compelling demonstration that the National Framework had begun to 'turn the dial' and contribute to a substantial sustained reduction in child abuse substantiations.

This should not be inferred as a direct criticism of the concept of the National Framework, nor of the considerable and valuable work that it had driven. The scale and nature of the problem it seeks to address is significant. Shifting intergenerational and entrenched disadvantage and risk will take time.

However, it does suggest some shortcomings in the current accountability and reporting arrangements.

Certainly, among the stakeholders consulted for this project there was considerable discussion about the adequacy of some of the indicators for change. The absence of any true measure of child abuse prevalence was seen as a particular inhibitor to embedding the public health model approach. There was a very real sense that the annual reporting process had become a burden on jurisdictions, and that over time, reporting on activities had crowded out genuine collaboration and innovation.

There is an appetite among stakeholders for research into the prevalence of child abuse and neglect in the community, and the development of an outcomes measurement framework that would better track outcomes across domains that have a direct impact on child wellbeing, such as the family home, education, poverty, and other parental risk factors.

The role and function of evaluation should also be re-considered. Evaluation, incorporating formative and summative components, should be fundamental to the ongoing implementation of the National Framework, and embedded into future planning for the National Framework.

## Appendix A: Stakeholder consultation

### Stakeholder consultation overview

The central data collection activity for the project was the national consultation program. It engaged key stakeholders with varying perspectives and backgrounds, from across each of the jurisdictions and sectors involved in the National Framework. These qualitative data yielded considerable insight on the National Framework.

The NFEWG provided valuable assistance in guiding, organising and participating in the national consultation program.

The national consultation program commenced in mid-March 2015 ending in mid-May 2015. A total of 231 consultations occurred comprising one-on-one interviews, small group interviews, and large focus group discussions with stakeholders from a variety of government and non-government backgrounds.

### National Framework Evaluation Working Group

The NFEWG was a working-group of the National Forum for Protecting Australia's Children. NFEWG provided direction and oversight of the baseline evaluation of the National Framework.

The NFEWG included representatives from the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments, and the NGO Coalition. The Australian Government, through the DSS, provided coordination and secretariat support to the NFEWG. Membership of NFEWG is outlined in below.

The role of the NFEWG guided the progress of the baseline evaluation through the following activities.

- Providing advice about the scope and methodology of the baseline evaluation ensuring its integrity and utility towards informing future priorities under the National Framework
- Providing essential support to enable stakeholder consultations in their respective jurisdictions for the baseline evaluation
- Reviewing and providing comments with regard to interim and final reports
- Reporting to the National Forum and to CAFS, about the key findings and recommendations regarding the National Framework arising from the baseline evaluation.

The group also has responsibility to provide advice to CAFS to inform decision-making and the future direction of evaluations of the National Framework.

#### *NFEWG membership*

- Stella Conroy, Deputy Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Families Australia – NGO Coalition
- Wendy Foote, Deputy CEO, Association of Children's Welfare Agencies (ACWA) – NGO Coalition
- Bev Orr, National President, Australian Foster Care Association – NGO Coalition
- Melek Byrne, Director, Care Policy and Evidence Section, Birth, Adoption and Care Branch, Families Group, Department of Social Services – Commonwealth Government
- Cathy Hoekzema, Assistant Director, Care Policy and Evidence, Families Group, Department of Social Services – Commonwealth Government
- Nicole Richards, Care Policy and Evidence, Birth, Adoption and Care Branch, Families Group, Department of Social Services – Commonwealth Government

- Nathan Boyle, Senior Manager, Human Services Policy Community Services Directorate – Australian Capital Territory
- Kate Gray, Principal Policy Officer, Children and Youth Policy Projects Team, Department of Family and Community Services – New South Wales
- Caren Bowen, Principal Policy Officer, Divisional Policy & Resource Management, Strategic Reform and Policy, Department of Family and Community Services – New South Wales
- Jane Burton, Director, Intergovernmental Relations, Strategy Branch, Department of Children and Families – Northern Territory
- Kylie Stephen, Director, Child Safety Strategic Policy and Design, Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services – Queensland
- Temi Oladapo, Manager, Child and Family Strategic Policy and Design, Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services – Queensland
- Crisoula Katsambis, Senior Policy and Program Officer, Strategic Care and Protection Policy, Department for Education and Child Development, Families SA – South Australia
- Louise Newberry, Manager Performance and Evaluation, Children and Youth Services, Department of Health and Human Services – Tasmania
- Graeme Brewster, Principal Program Officer, Service Development and Implementation Group, Department of Health and Human Services – Victoria
- John Cheshire, Principal Program Officer, Child Protection, Statutory and Forensic Services Design Branch, Department of Health and Human Services – Victoria
- Julie Dixon, Director Policy - Family Support and Reporting, Department for Child Protection and Family Support – Western Australia.

### **Stakeholder identification**

Stakeholder identification for the national consultation program was done in collaboration with the NFEWG, with each NFEWG member taking responsibility for their respective jurisdiction or sector.

Through each NFEWG member, a series of relevant stakeholders with which to consult was identified and engaged. A stakeholder identification matrix was developed to guide the identification of relevant stakeholders by background and perspective. The range of stakeholder backgrounds and perspectives was designed to provide a varied and extensive view and experience of the National Framework. The different stakeholder perspectives can be categorised as:

- Australian Government officials
- Jurisdictional government executives and senior officials
- NGO Coalition members
- Jurisdictional government policy and implementation officials
- NGO representatives involved in implementation
- Practitioners
- Children's Commissioners and Guardians
- Research organisations.

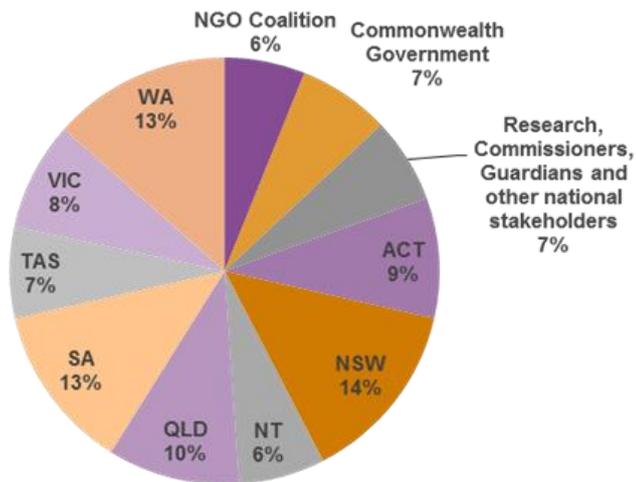
Figure 13 provides the breakdown of stakeholders engaged through the project, by category and by sector / jurisdiction.

The number of stakeholders consulted from each jurisdiction and sector was influenced by the size of consultations, as individual and group consults were both held, and identification and availability of stakeholders.

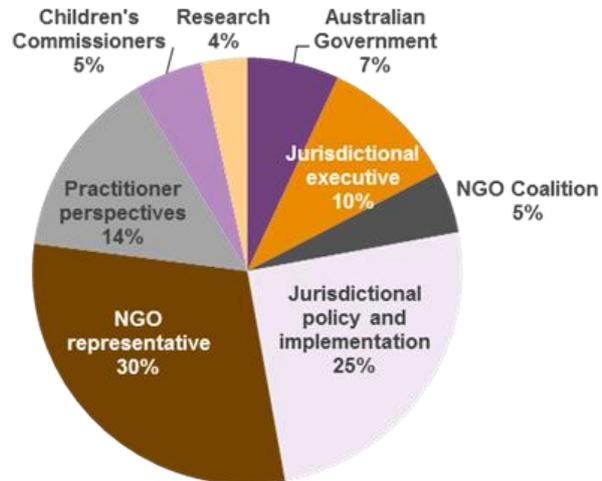
NGOs formed a significant proportion of stakeholders consulted. Thirty per cent of total stakeholders were jurisdictional NGO representatives and five per cent were NGO Coalition representatives. Dialogue with jurisdictional NGO representatives contributes to the number of stakeholders identified by jurisdiction. The NGO Coalition provided a national perspective on the Framework's history.

**Figure 13 Stakeholder characteristics**

*Stakeholders by jurisdiction or sector*



*Stakeholders by category*



Source: ACIL Allen Consulting

### National consultation program

Details on each of the stakeholders engaged through the national consultation program are detailed in below. Stakeholders are grouped in the identified categories.

- NGO Coalition stakeholders
- Commonwealth Government stakeholders
- Research, Commissioners, Guardians, and other national stakeholders
- Australian Capital Territory stakeholders
- New South Wales stakeholders
- Northern Territory stakeholders
- Queensland stakeholders
- South Australian stakeholders
- Tasmanian stakeholders
- Victorian stakeholders
- Western Australian stakeholders.

### NGO Coalition stakeholders

- Frank Hytten, CEO, Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care. 10 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO Coalition representative
- Andrew McCallum, CEO, Association of Children's Welfare Agencies. 11 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO Coalition representative
- Alison Brook, National Executive Officer, Relationships Australia. 19 March 2015, Telephone consultation. NGO Coalition representative
- Brian Babington, CEO, Families Australia. 26 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO Coalition representative

- Bev Orr, President, Australian Foster Care Association (AFCA). 26 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO Coalition representative
- Richard Weston, CEO, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation. 26 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO Coalition representative
- Simon Schrapel, CEO, Uniting Communities SA. 27 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO Coalition representative
- Professor Robert Lonne, Professor of Social Work, School of Public Health and Social Work, Queensland University of Technology. 30 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Research perspective
- Kasy Chambers, Executive Director, Anglicare Australia. 31 March 2015, telephone consultation. NGO Coalition representative
- Noelle Hudson, National Policy and Advocacy Manager, CREATE Foundation. 7 April 2015, telephone consultation. NGO Coalition representative
- Stephanie Gottlib, CEO, Children with Disability Australia. 7 April 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO Coalition representative
- Professor Fiona Arney, Director, Australian Centre for Child Protection, University of South Australia. 7 April 2015, telephone consultation. Research perspective
- Sandie de Wolf, CEO, Berry Street Victoria. 17 April 2015, telephone consultation. NGO Coalition representative
- Morag McArthur, Director, Institute of Child Protection Studies, Australian Catholic University. Written submission. Research perspective

Total number of NGO Coalition stakeholders engaged through the project – 14

#### *Commonwealth Government stakeholders*

- Barbara Bennett, Deputy Secretary, Families and Communities, Department of Social Services. 9 April 2015, face-to-face consultation. Australian Government
- Phil Brown, Acting Group Manager, Families Group, Department of Social Services. 9 April 2015, face-to-face consultation. Australian Government
- Cate McKenzie, Group Manager, Principal Advisor, Family Safety, Department of Social Services. 9 April 2015, face-to-face consultation. Australian Government
- Marianne Madden, Co-Director, Children's Policy Section, Financial Capability and Children's Policy Branch, Department of Social Services. 9 April 2015, face-to-face consultation. Australian Government
- Margaret Fisher, Director, Early Intervention Policy, Families and Children Branch, Families Group, Department of Social Services. 9 April 2015, face-to-face consultation. Australian Government
- Cathy Hoekzema, Executive Support Officer, Families Group, Department of Social Services. 9 April 2015, face-to-face consultation. Australian Government
- Isabelle Burns, Policy Officer, Community Safety Policy, Indigenous Affairs Group. Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. Written submission. Australian Government
- Margaret Thomas, Director, Child Protection Section, Department of Immigration and Border Protection. 10 April 2015, face-to-face consultation. Australian Government
- Kristen Robinson, Policy Officer, Child Protection Section, Department of Immigration and Border Protection. 10 April 2015, face-to-face consultation. Australian Government

- Jean Rollings, Acting Principal Legal Officer, Policy and Legislation Section, Family Law Branch, Attorney-General's Department. 9 April 2015, face-to-face consultation. Australian Government
- Colin McCormack, Senior Legal Officer, Policy and Legislation Section, Family Law Branch, Attorney-General's Department. 9 April 2015, face-to-face consultation. Australian Government
- Elaine Harrison, Legal Officer, Policy and Legislation Section, Family Law Branch, Attorney-General's Department. 9 April 2015, face-to-face consultation. Australian Government
- Dennis Mahoney, General Manager, Family Support and Stakeholder Engagement, Families Division, Department of Human Services. 22 April 2015, telephone interview. Australian Government
- Toni Brown, Director, Family Support and Stakeholder Engagement, Families Division, Department of Human Services. 22 April 2015, telephone interview. Australian Government
- Susan Hudd, Manager of Statewide Protection of Children Coordination. WA representative on the Standing Committee for Child and Youth Health (nominated by the Commonwealth Department of Health). 22 April 2015, telephone interview. Australian Government.

Total number of Commonwealth Government stakeholders engaged through the project – 16.

*Research, Commissioners, Guardians, and other national stakeholders*

- Daryl Higgins, Deputy Director (Research), AIFS. 4 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Research perspective
- Tim Beard, Head, Child Welfare and Prisoner Health Unit, AIHW. 27 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Research perspective
- Nicole Hunter, Child Welfare and Prisoner Health Unit, AIHW. 27 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Research perspective
- Kristy Raithel, Child Welfare and Prisoner Health Unit, AIHW. 27 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Research perspective
- Richard Cooke, Executive Director, National Association for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (NAPCAN). 15 April 2015, telephone consultation, NGO representative
- Rani Kumar, National Manager of Policy and Research, NAPCAN. 15 April 2015, telephone consultation. NGO representative
- Madelene McGrath, National Stakeholder Manager, NAPCAN. 15 April 2015, telephone consultation. NGO representative
- Megan Mitchell, National Children's Commissioner, Australian Human Rights Commission. 11 May 2015, telephone consultation. Children's Commissioners
- Mary Mckinnon, National Executive, Life Without Barriers / Formerly Victorian National Forum / NFIWG representative. 13 May 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO representative
- Pam Simmons, Guardian for Children and Young People, South Australian Office of the Guardian for Children and Young People. 19 May 2015, face-to-face consultation. Children's Commissioners
- Alasdair Roy, Children and Young People Commissioner, Australian Capital Territory Human Rights Commission. 19 May 2015, face-to-face consultation, Children's Commissioners
- Mark Morrissey, Commissioner for Children, Tasmanian Commission for Children. 19 May 2015, face-to-face consultation, Children's Commissioners

- Bernie Geary, Commissioner for Children and Young People, Victorian Commission for Children and Young People. 19 May 2015, face-to-face consultation. Children's Commissioners
- Christine Withers, Manager of Policy, Research & Communications, Victorian Commission for Children and Young People. 19 May 2015, face-to-face consultation. Children's Commissioners
- Trish Heath, Manager of Policy, Western Australian Commission for Children and Young People. 19 May 2015, face-to-face consultation. Children's Commissioners

Total number of Research, Commissioners, Guardians, and other national stakeholders engaged through the project – 15.

#### *Australian Capital Territory stakeholders*

- Natalie Howson, Director-General, Community Services Directorate. 26 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional executive
- Helen Pappas, A/Executive Director, Office for Children, Youth and Family Support (OCYFS), Community Services Directorate. 26 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional executive
- Paul Wyles, Director, Early Intervention and Prevention Services, Community Services Directorate. 26 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional executive
- Austin Kenney, Acting Director, Statutory Services, OCYFS, Community Services Directorate. 26 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional policy and implementation
- Ingrid Cevallos, Senior Manager, Quality Practice and Compliance, Care and Protection Services, Community Services Directorate. 26 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional policy and implementation
- Kate Collins, Manager, Quality Practice and Compliance, Care and Protection Service, Community Services Directorate. 26 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional policy and implementation
- Nathan Boyle, Senior Manager, Human Services Policy, Community Services Directorate. 26 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional policy and implementation
- Lisa Gooley, Senior Data Officer, Data and Evaluation, Community Services Directorate. 26 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional policy and implementation
- Janet Plater, iConnect Business Systems Coordinator, Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate (previously Senior Manager, Business Support, OCYFS). 26 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional policy and implementation
- Chris Stanilewicz, Senior Policy Officer, Women, Youth and Child Health Policy Unity, Health Directorate. 26 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional policy and implementation
- Susan Chen, Senior Officer, Child Health Targeted Support Services, Health Directorate. 26 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional policy and implementation
- Bev Orr, Chair, Children and Youth Services Ministerial Advisory Council (President of AFCA). 26 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO representative
- Narelle Hargraves, Official Visitor (Children and Young People), former Chair of Children and Youth Services Council. 26 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO representative
- Annette Kelly-Egerton, Director, Barnardos Australia. 26 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO representative

- Wilf Rath, CEO, Richmond Fellowship. 26 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO representative
- Hannah Schouten, ACT Area Manager, Premier Youthworks. 26 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO representative
- Gail Winworth, Academic/Researcher, Australian Catholic University. 26 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Research perspective
- Jennifer Griffin, Program Manager, Marymead. 26 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO representative
- Christine Long, Director of Community Health Programs, Youth and Children Community Health Programs. 26 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO representative
- Kim Davidson, CEO, Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation. 26 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO representative
- Amanda Savle, Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation. 26 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO representative

Total number of Australian Capital Territory stakeholders engaged through the project – 21.

#### *New South Wales stakeholders*

- Penny Hood, Director, Office of the Chief Executive. Department of Family and Community Services. 17 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional executive
- Anne Campbell, Executive Director, Strategic Policy, Department of Family and Community Services. 17 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional executive
- Lauren Murray, Director of Operations, NSW and ACT, Life Without Barriers. 17 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO representative
- Katie Acheson, Managing Director, Youth Action. 17 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO representative
- Rani Kumar, National Manager of Policy and Research, NAPCAN. 17 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO representative
- Sue Tregeagle, Senior Manager, Barnardos Australia. 17 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO representative
- Gregor Macfie, Director of Policy and Research. Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People. 17 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Children's Commissioners
- Toni Beauchamp, Principal Policy Officer, Uniting Care Children, Young People and Families. 17 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO representative
- Andrew McCallum, CEO, Association of Children's Welfare Agencies. 17 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO representative
- Melody Stack, Senior Policy and Membership Officer, Association of Children's Welfare Agencies. 17 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO representative
- Kim Nixon, Practitioner Advisory Group – Directors of Practice Standards, Managers Client Services and Caseworker Specialists, Department of Family and Community Services. 17 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Practitioner perspectives
- Liane Flynn, Practitioner Advisory Group – Directors of Practice Standards, Managers Client Services and Caseworker Specialists, Department of Family and Community Services. 17 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Practitioner perspectives
- Angela Tarlington, Practitioner Advisory Group – Directors of Practice Standards, Managers Client Services and Caseworker Specialists, Department of Family and Community Services. 17 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Practitioner perspectives

- Lara Crawford, Practitioner Advisory Group – Directors of Practice Standards, Managers Client Services and Caseworker Specialists, Department of Family and Community Services. 17 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Practitioner perspectives
- Lisa Tesoriero, Practitioner Advisory Group – Directors of Practice Standards, Managers Client Services and Caseworker Specialists, Department of Family and Community Services. 17 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Practitioner perspectives
- Margaret Jones, Practitioner Advisory Group – Directors of Practice Standards, Managers Client Services and Caseworker Specialists, Department of Family and Community Services. 17 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Practitioner perspectives
- Kylie Gilbert, Practitioner Advisory Group – Directors of Practice Standards, Managers Client Services and Caseworker Specialists, Department of Family and Community Services. 17 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Practitioner perspectives
- Sarah Morris, Practitioner Advisory Group – Directors of Practice Standards, Managers Client Services and Caseworker Specialists, Department of Family and Community Services. 17 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Practitioner perspectives
- Tracey New, Practitioner Advisory Group – Directors of Practice Standards, Managers Client Services and Caseworker Specialists, Department of Family and Community Services. 17 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Practitioner perspectives
- Paul Mannion, Practitioner Advisory Group – Directors of Practice Standards, Managers Client Services and Caseworker Specialists, Department of Family and Community Services. 17 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Practitioner perspectives
- Karlie Cole Practitioner Advisory Group – Directors of Practice Standards, Managers Client Services and Caseworker Specialists, Department of Family and Community Services. 17 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Practitioner perspectives
- Christie Dixon, Practitioner Advisory Group – Directors of Practice Standards, Managers Client Services and Caseworker Specialists, Department of Family and Community Services. 17 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Practitioner perspectives
- Betina Huber, Practitioner Advisory Group – Directors of Practice Standards, Managers Client Services and Caseworker Specialists, Department of Family and Community Services. 17 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Practitioner perspectives
- Susan Bateman, Practitioner Advisory Group – Directors of Practice Standards, Managers Client Services and Caseworker Specialists, Department of Family and Community Services. 17 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Practitioner perspectives
- Michelle Thomson Practitioner Advisory Group – Directors of Practice Standards, Managers Client Services and Caseworker Specialists, Department of Family and Community Services. 17 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Practitioner perspectives
- Mary Evans, Practitioner Advisory Group – Directors of Practice Standards, Managers Client Services and Caseworker Specialists, Department of Family and Community Services. 17 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Practitioner perspectives
- Lynette Lawrie, Practitioner Advisory Group – Directors of Practice Standards, Managers Client Services and Caseworker Specialists, Department of Family and Community Services. 17 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Practitioner perspectives
- Paul Coe, Practitioner Advisory Group – Directors of Practice Standards, Managers Client Services and Caseworker Specialists, Department of Family and Community Services. 17 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Practitioner perspectives

- Vanessa McNamara, Practitioner Advisory Group – Directors of Practice Standards, Managers Client Services and Caseworker Specialists, Department of Family and Community Services. 17 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Practitioner perspectives
- Vicky Labiris, Practitioner Advisory Group – Directors of Practice Standards, Managers Client Services and Caseworker Specialists, Department of Family and Community Services. 17 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Practitioner perspectives
- Ed Apon, Practitioner Advisory Group – Directors of Practice Standards, Managers Client Services and Caseworker Specialists, Department of Family and Community Services. 17 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Practitioner perspectives
- Deb Cornale, Practitioner Advisory Group – Directors of Practice Standards, Managers Client Services and Caseworker Specialists, Department of Family and Community Services. 17 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Practitioner perspectives

Total number of New South Wales stakeholders engaged through the project – 32.

#### *Northern Territory stakeholders*

- Jo Townsend, Deputy Secretary, Department of Children and Families. 23 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional executive
- Bronwyn Thompson, A/Executive Director, Policy and Research Division, Department of Children and Families. 23 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional executive
- Luke Twyford, A/Executive Directors, Professional Practice Division, Department of Children and Families. 23 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional executive
- Leonie Warburton, Senior Manager, Quality Analysis and Practice Integrity, Department of Children and Families. 23 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional executive
- Wendy Morton, Executive Director, Northern Territory Council of Social Service. 24 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO representative
- Brionee Noonan, Coordinator, Aboriginal Peak Organisations of the Northern Territory. 24 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO representative
- David Pugh, CEO, Anglicare NT. 24 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO representative
- Ann Owen, Executive Director, Foster Care NT. 24 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO representative
- Randall Cook, General Manager, Child Australia. 24 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO representative
- Darien Duffy, Program Development Officer, Child and Youth Health, Department of Health. 24 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional policy and implementation
- Lucinda Steuart, Director, Social Policy Coordination, Department of the Chief Minister. 24 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional policy and implementation
- Kris Evans, Detective Superintendent, Sex Crimes Section, Department of Police, Fire and Emergency Services. 24 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional policy and implementation
- Jane Burton, Director, Intergovernmental Relations, Strategy Branch, Department of Children and Families. 24 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional policy and implementation
- Lee-anne Jarrett Sims, Senior Policy Officer, Department of Children and Families. 24 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional policy and implementation

- Naomi Brennan, Senior Policy Officer, Domestic Violence Directorate, Department of Attorney General and Justice. 24 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional policy and implementation

Total number of Northern Territory stakeholders engaged through the project – 15.

#### *Queensland stakeholders*

- Majella Ryan, Assistant Executive Director, Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services. 30 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional executive
- Ken Gall, Executive Director, Corporate Services, Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services. 30 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional executive
- Megan Giles, Director, Child and Family Policy, Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services. 30 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional executive
- Temi Oladapo, Manager, Intergovernmental relations, Child and Family Policy, Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services. 30 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional policy and implementation
- John Morrison, Manager, OOHC Programs, Department of Communities, Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services. 30 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional policy and implementation
- Justin Murphy, Director, Child Protection reform Taskforce, Department of Communities, Department of Premier and Cabinet. 30 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional policy and implementation
- Eleanor Balkin, Department of Communities, Department of Premier and Cabinet. 30 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional policy and implementation
- Sue Wilson, Director, Child Protection Unit, Department of Education and Training. 30 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional policy and implementation
- Kim Tually, Senior Advisor, Strategic Policy, Department of Education and Training. 30 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional policy and implementation
- Graham Kraak, Director, Policy, Department of Health. 30 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional policy and implementation
- Steven O'Reilly, Manager, Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnership. 30 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional policy and implementation
- Anne-Marie Osborne, Director, Department of Housing and Public Works. 30 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional policy and implementation
- Jen Glover, Legal Aid, Department of Justice and Attorney General. 30 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional policy and implementation
- Anthony Benedetti, Director, Office of Public Guardian. 30 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional policy and implementation
- Jo Walker, Public Safety Business Agency. 30 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional policy and implementation
- Julie Harcourt, Director, Queensland Family and Child Commission. 30 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Children's Commissioners
- Emma Heller, Senior Research Officer, Queensland Family and Child Commission. 30 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Children's Commissioners
- Lucas Moore, Queensland State Coordinator, CREATE Foundation, Queensland. 30 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO representative

- Natalie Lewis, Director, Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak Ltd. 30 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO representative
- Mark Henley, CEO, Queensland Council of Social Services. 30 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO representative
- Tracey Smith, Principal policy Officer, PeakCare, Queensland. 30 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO representative
- Steve Armitage, Principal Commissioner (interim), Queensland Family and Child Commission. 9 April 2015, telephone consultation. Children's Commissioners
- Julie Harcourt, Director, Strategic Research, Evaluation and Reporting, Queensland Family and Child Commission. 9 April 2015, telephone consultation. Children's Commissioners

Total number of Queensland stakeholders engaged through the project – 23.

#### *South Australia stakeholders*

- Ben Sanderson, A/Manager Aboriginal Services Families SA, Department for Education and Child Development. 26 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Practitioner perspectives
- Tammy Brooks, Principal Aboriginal Consultant, Families SA, Department for Education and Child Development. 26 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Practitioner perspectives
- Claire Horgan, Principal Social Worker, Families SA, Department for Education and Child Development. 26 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Practitioner perspectives
- Akash Segal, Manager Southern Protective Intervention, Families SA, Department for Education and Child Development. 26 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Practitioner perspectives
- Adam Reilly, Manager Marion Southern Guardianship, Department for Education and Child Development. 26 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Practitioner perspectives
- Ron Ernst, Supervisor Planning and Reporting, Department for Education and Child Development. 26 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Practitioner perspectives
- Linda Hurley, Manager, Central Guardianship Hub (Woodville), Department for Education and Child Development. 26 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Practitioner perspectives
- Dan Mitchell, Acting Manager, Port Augusta office, Families SA, Department for Education and Child Development. 26 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Practitioner perspectives
- Crisoula Katsambis, Senior Policy and Program Officer, Strategic Care and Protection Policy, Department for Education and Child Development. 26 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional policy and implementation
- Etienne Scheepers, Deputy Chief Executive, Office for Child Safety, Department for Education and Child Development. 27 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional executive
- Dr Jennifer Harvey, Manager, Strategic Care and Protection Policy, Department for Education and Child Development. 27 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional executive
- Trish Strachan, Executive Director, Office for Children and Young People, Department for Education and Child Development. 27 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional executive
- Liz Browne Program Manager, Department for Education and Child Development. 27 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional policy and implementation
- Rennie Strawbridge, Program Manager, Disability Services Children and Youth, Department for Communities and Social Inclusion. 27 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional policy and implementation

- Andrew Cockington, Manager, Community Programs and Policy, Department for Communities and Social Inclusion. 27 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional policy and implementation
- Melissa John, Manager, Child Protection Services Women's and Children's Health Network. 27 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional policy and implementation
- Kerry Beck Manager, Practice Development, Department for Communities and Social Inclusion (Housing SA ). 27 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional policy and implementation
- Magdalena Madden, Principal Consultant, The Council for the Care of Children. 27 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO representative
- Anthea Pavy, CEO, UnitingCare Wesley Country SA. 27 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO representative
- John Smith, Strategic Projects Manager, Junction Australia. 27 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO representative
- Curtis Richards, Manager, Children's Services, Anglicare Community Care Inc. 27 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO representative
- Susan Lane, Deputy Director, Lutheran Community Care. 27 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO representative
- Karen Lewis, SA Operations Manager, the Australian Centre for Social Innovation / Family by Family. 27 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO representative
- Peter Sandeman, CEO, Anglicare SA. 27 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO representative
- Julie Dini, Coordinator Living Arts, Life Without Barriers. 27 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO representative
- Sharron Williams, CEO, Aboriginal Family Support Services. 27 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO representative
- Albert Barelds, Executive Director, Child and Family Welfare Association of SA. 27 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO representative
- Fiona Ward, Director Strategic Policy and Coordination – Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation, Department of State Development. 27 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional policy and implementation

Total number of South Australian stakeholders engaged through the project – 29

#### *Tasmania stakeholders*

- Tony Kemp, Deputy Secretary Children, Department of Health and Human Services. 1 April 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional executive
- Jeremy Harbottle, Acting Director, Strategic Policy Planning Development and Legislation, Children and Youth Services, Department of Health and Human Services. 1 April 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional executive
- Claire Corbett, Government Relations and Strategic Policy, Department of Health and Human Services. 1 April 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional policy and implementation
- Kelly Ford, Manager, Policy and Programs, Disability Services, Department of Health and Human Services. 1 April 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional policy and implementation

- Le-ella Doyle, Acting Senior Program Co-ordinator, Health Improvement Services, Department of Health and Human Services. 1 April 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional policy and implementation
- Nerilie Gilson, Manager, Community Services, Department of Health and Human Services. 1 April 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional policy and implementation
- Monique Gowans, Research and Support Officer, Department of Education. 1 April 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional policy and implementation
- Suzanne Pennicott-Jones, Principle Policy Analyst, Department of Education. 1 April 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional policy and implementation
- Donna Evans, Manager, Good Beginnings, 1 April 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO representative
- Susie Bond, Regional Programs Manager, The Smith Family. 1 April 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO representative
- Raylene Foster, Regional Manager, Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre. 1 April 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO representative
- Cathy Hurst, Manager, Bapcare. 1 April 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO representative
- Joanna Siejka, CEO, Youth Network of Tasmania. 1 April 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO representative
- Anagha Jayaker, Community Paediatrician, Department of Health and Human Services. 1 April 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional policy and implementation
- Stuart Oldfield, Area Manager, Youth Justice, Department of Health and Human Services. 1 April 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional policy and implementation

Total number of Tasmanian stakeholders engaged through the project – 16

#### *Victoria stakeholders*

- Beth Allen, Assistant Director, Child Protection, Statutory and Forensic Services, Department of Health and Human Services. 14 April 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional executive
- Sylvia Barry, Manager Partnerships & Primary Health, Department of Health and Human Services. 14 April 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional policy and implementation
- Danni DeKretser, Department of Health and Human Services. 14 April 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional policy and implementation
- Graham Brewster, Principal Program Officer, Child Protection, Statutory and Forensic Services Design Branch, Department of Health and Human Services. 14 April 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional policy and implementation
- Simon Booth, Director, Vulnerable Children Reform Unit, Service Integration, Innovation and Partnerships Branch, Strategy and Analytics Group, Department of Health and Human Services. 14 April 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional policy and implementation
- Sophie Nevell, Assistant Director, Out of Home Care, Statutory and Forensic Services Design Branch, Department of Health and Human Services. 14 April 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional policy and implementation
- Deb Maher, Manager, Wellbeing, Health & Engagement Division, Department of Education and Training. 14 April 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional policy and implementation
- Deb Tsorbias, CEO, Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare. 16 April 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO representative

- Edith Loch, General Manager, Client Outcomes, Mackillop Family Services. 16 April 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO representative
- Kerrie White, Regional Services Manager, EW Tipping Foundation. 16 April 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO representative
- Trish Chapman, General Manager Community Services, Connections UnitingCare. 16 April 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO representative
- Carly Black, Manager, Social Policy and Research, Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency. 16 April 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO representative
- Aileen Ashford, CEO, Children's Protection Society. 16 April 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO representative
- Lynne McCrae, Senior Manager, Child and Family Services, OzChild. 16 April 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO representative
- Mick Naughton, Director of Strategic Projects, Centre of Excellence in Child and Family Welfare. 16 April 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO representative
- Chris Walsh, Deputy CEO/Director of Services, Family Life. 16 April 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO representative
- Katie Hooper, CEO, Foster Care Association of Victoria. 16 April 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO representative

Total number of Victorian stakeholders engaged through the project – 19

*Western Australia stakeholders*

Emma White, Director General, Department for Child Protection and Family Support. 24 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional executive

Kay Benham, Executive Director, Policy and Learning, Department for Child Protection and Family Support. 24 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional executive

Audrey Lee, Director Policy, Child Protection and Children in Care, Department for Child Protection and Family Support. 24 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional executive

Les Lazarakis, Child Protection Principal Consultant, Department of Education. 24 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional policy and implementation

Susan Hudd, A/Executive Director, Child and Adolescent Community Health, Department of Health. 24 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional policy and implementation

Andrew Salter, Director, North Youth Justice, Department of Corrective Services. 24 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional policy and implementation

Jacki Hollick, Sector Service Development, Disability Services Commission. 24 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional policy and implementation

Timothy Smith, Eligibility Assessment Team Leader, Disability Services Commission. 24 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional policy and implementation

Tine Hault, Senior Consultant, Aboriginal Services, Aboriginal Engagement and Coordination, Department for Child Protection and Family Support. 24 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional policy and implementation

Julie Dixon, Director, Family Support and Reporting, Department for Child Protection and Family Support. 24 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional policy and implementation

Caroline Spiers, Specialist Community Child Protection Worker, Department for Child Protection and Family Support. 24 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Practitioner perspectives

Deborah Gould, Director, Case Practice and Coordination, Country Services, Department for Child Protection and Family Support. 24 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Practitioner perspectives

Elke Browne, Director, Aboriginal Affairs Coordinating Committee, Department of Aboriginal Affairs. 24 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional policy and implementation

Troy Daniels, Director, Service Delivery, Department of Local Government and Communities. 24 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional policy and implementation

Glenda Kicket, Aboriginal Cultural Advisor, Centrecare. 24 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO representative

Sue Nye, Manager, Social Policy, Western Australian Council of Social Services. 24 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO representative

Tunya Petridis, Children's Consultant, Anglicare. 24 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO representative

David Zarb CEO, Playgroup WA. 24 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO representative

Tara Seaward, Manager, OoHC Services, Uniting Care West. 24 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO representative

Megan Richards, Manager, Therapeutic and Social Support Services, Uniting Care West. 24 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO representative

Kris Robertson, General Manager, Accord West. 24 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO representative

Basil Hanna, Chief Executive, Parkerville Children's and Youth Care Services. 24 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO representative

Lindsay Leek, Acting Assistant Director Strategic Policy, Mental Health Commission. 23 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional policy and implementation

Robyn Kinkade, Manager Special Projects, Office of Early Childhood Development and Learning, Department of Education. 23 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional policy and implementation

Melanie Samuels, Director Case Practice and Coordination, Country Services, Department of Child Protection and Family Support. 23 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Practitioner perspectives

Mandy Gadsdon, Executive Director, Aboriginal Engagement and Coordination, Department of Child Protection and Family Support. 23 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. Jurisdictional policy and implementation

Judith Wilkinson, Director, Key Assets WA. 23 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO representative

Tricia Murray, CEO, Wanslea. 23 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO representative

Pauline Dixon, Executive Manager, Family Services, Wanslea. 23 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO representative

Jennie Hannan, Principal Clinician, Anglicare. 23 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO representative

Kim Brooklyn, Executive Manager, Strengthening Communities, Uniting Care West. 23 March 2015, face-to-face consultation. NGO representative.

Total number of Western Australian stakeholders engaged through the project – 31.

## Appendix B: Evaluation tools

### Overview of tools

Two separate tools were developed to support this project. They included:

- National Consultation guide
- Jurisdictional stocktake tool

Both tools were presented to the NFWEG for comment. They were then both subsequently agreed to as part of the finalisation of the evaluation work-plan and framework.

Both the national consultation guide and the stocktake tool are reproduced here.

### National consultation guide

The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020: baseline evaluation consultation guide

#### This consultation guide

ACIL Allen Consulting has been engaged by the Commonwealth Department of Social Services (DSS) to undertake a baseline evaluation of the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020 (the National Framework).

A central data collection activity for the evaluation is a national consultation program that engages with key stakeholders with varying perspectives and backgrounds, from across each of the jurisdictions and sectors involved in the National Framework.

This consultation guide provides the context to the project and overview of the National Framework, before outlining the full set of consultation questions and maps them to the different types of stakeholders to be engaged throughout the project.

#### Evaluation context

ACIL Allen is an independent public policy and economics consulting firm. ACIL Allen was engaged by DSS in December 2014 to commence the evaluation. The evaluation is due to conclude in June 2015.

Key areas of focus for the evaluation comprise:

- Exploring the barriers, strengths and opportunities arising from the National Framework's tripartite approach to implementation and governance
- Determining whether the National Framework has added value to processes and / or systems aimed at protecting children
- Determining whether government efforts across jurisdictions have shifted focus from the statutory system to prevention initiatives and early intervention approaches
- Establishing a baseline for subsequent evaluations, which will enable judgements about the National Framework and the extent to which it is achieving its high level outcomes over the long term.

The evaluation is a narrative based, process evaluation. It will focus on implementation matters and processes associated with progressing the National Framework. The results of the evaluation will

inform the development the Third Action Plan, and lay the groundwork for future outcome and performance based evaluations of the National Framework.

The evaluation involves significant national consultation, and analysis of relevant national datasets and documentation. The evaluation will not be a comprehensive audit of activity undertaken through the National Framework, or of the performance of systems for protecting children in particular jurisdictions.

### The National Framework

The National Framework is a nationally agreed, long-term approach to protecting Australian children.

It was endorsed by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) on 30 April 2009, when Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments, and non-government organisations (NGOs) committed to working together to deliver an improved and integrated response to issues of child vulnerability and protection.

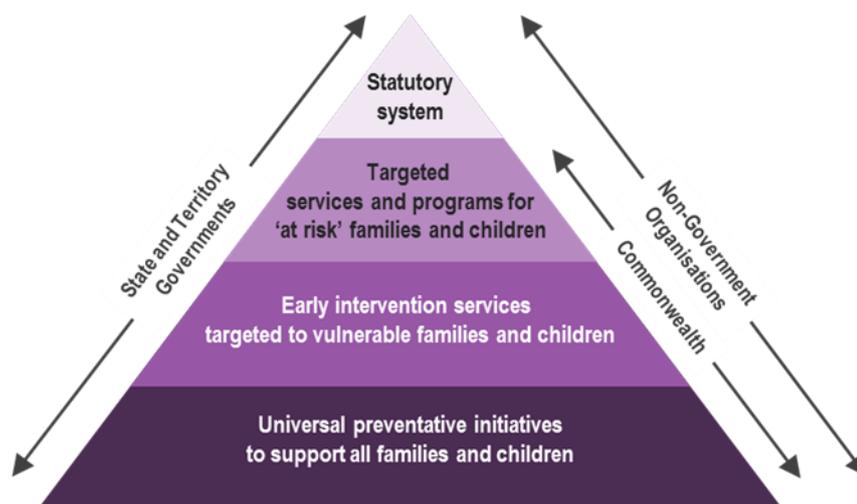
The headline outcome for the National Framework is for all children and young people to be safe and well.

Evidence of a substantial and sustained reduction in child abuse and neglect over time is the agreed target with which to measure this outcome.

The National Framework was designed to promote a public health model of care and protection for vulnerable and at risk children and young people. The aim of the public health model approach is to affect institutional and cultural change to addressing child safety and wellbeing by moving effort and investment towards preventative and holistic intervention rather than relying on episodic and reactionary statutory service responses.

A conceptual overview to the National Frameworks public health model is provided below.

### The National Framework's public health model



Source: COAG 2009: The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020

Supporting outcomes were also identified and agreed, to help focus strategies and activity towards the headline outcome. The six supporting outcomes comprise:

1. Children live in safe and supportive families and communities

2. Children and families access adequate support to promote safety and intervene early
3. Risk factors for child abuse and neglect are addressed
4. Children who have been abused or neglected receive the support and care they need for their safety and wellbeing
5. Indigenous children are supported and safe in their families and communities
6. Child sexual abuse and exploitation is prevented and survivors receive adequate support.

A shared responsibility across different sectors and the community for the protecting of children underpins the National Framework. The National Framework is governed through a tripartite approach that comprises national and jurisdictional governments and the non-government sector. Governance arrangements for the National Framework have changed from what was originally agreed to.

Currently the management of the National Framework rests with the National Forum for Protecting Australia's Children, a group of representatives from the Australian, State and Territory Governments and the NGO Coalition.

Implementation activity under the National Framework has been planned and coordinated through the implementation of three year action plans. There have been two Three Year Action Plans covering the periods of 2009-12 and 2012-15.

A Third-Year Action Plan is scheduled for development and release in 2015.

### **National Framework achievements**

Some of the key achievements made to date under the National Framework are provided below. This summary can be used as a reference during the consultation itself

Examples of National Framework achievements:

- Implementation of the National Standards for Out of Home care
- Establishment of a National Children's Commissioner
- Transitioning from care resources and support, including the Transitioning from Out of Home Care To Independence Guide, and increase to the Transition to Independent Living Allowance
- Child Aware Approaches to address risk factors for child abuse and neglect
- Establishment of a National Research Agenda for Protecting Children
- Improvements to Working with Children Checks
- Introduction of research into workforce development and workforce capacity building programs such as BCBB, and development of assessment tools such as the CAARS
- Information and support for carers, including Grandparent and Kinship carers
- Inter-governmental information sharing protocols
- Improvements to national data collection.

### **National consultation**

National consultation with representatives from a range of different stakeholders is a critical input into the evaluation. Consultation will occur with select stakeholders from the following backgrounds:

- Australian Government officials
- Jurisdictional senior officials and executives
- NGO Coalition representatives
- Jurisdictional officers involved in policy and implementation

- Jurisdictional NGOs involved in policy and implementation
- Practitioner perspectives
- Children's Commissioners
- Research organisations.

In designing the consultation questions, a single standardised set of consultation questions was developed and agreed upon.

The full set comprises 28 questions. The intent of the consultation questions is for a transparent and consistent set of questions that can be used to explore particular emphases relevant to the range of different stakeholder types to be consulted. The particular emphases comprise:

- Experience of the National Framework
- Governance arrangements for the National Framework
- Implementation of National Framework related activity
- Value of the National Framework
- Impact of the National Framework
- Evidence and reporting
- Concluding comments (including Second Action Plan comments).

To assist stakeholders in preparation of the consultation, the various set of questions have been mapped to the stakeholder type to the particular emphases to be consulted (though this process should not be interpreted as precluding other questions being explored).

Mapping of consultation question emphasis and stakeholder type:

Experience of the National Framework:

- All stakeholders

Governance arrangements:

- Australian Government officials
- Jurisdictional senior officials and executives
- NGO Coalition representatives
- Children's Commissioners

Implementation of National Framework related activity; and Value of the National Framework:

- Jurisdictional policy and implementation officers
- Jurisdictional NGO policy and implementation representatives

Impact of the National Framework:

- Practitioner / service delivery perspectives

Evidence and reporting:

- Research organisations
- Jurisdictional policy and implementation officers

Concluding comments:

- All stakeholders

Note that mapping of questions to stakeholder types is a guide to particular emphases to be pursued. It does not preclude discussion in areas outside of a particular emphasis.

### **Consultation questions**

#### *Experience of the National Framework*

These questions explore context and experience as it relates to the National Framework.

1. Please outline your role and relationship to the National Framework.
2. What is your understanding of the National Framework's role and purpose?
3. Are there particular jurisdictional (or other contextual factors) that may have impacted on your experience of the National Framework, that are important to consider during this consultation?

#### *Governance arrangements for the National Framework*

These questions explore the governance arrangements and high level strategy and decision making associated with the National Framework.

4. How clear and well understood across your jurisdiction or sector are the National Framework's tripartite governance arrangements?
5. What have been the key enablers and barriers to clear and effective governance arrangements for the National Framework?
6. How clear are the linkages between the National Framework and other, nationally endorsed priority areas [for example youth justice, homelessness, domestic violence, health, and education and early childhood development]?
7. Has the National Framework informed change in legislation and policy decisions in your jurisdiction, away from statutory services to prevention and early intervention services?
8. How successful have the tripartite governance arrangements been in partnership and collaboration across the two different tiers of government and the NGO sector?
9. How have the three year action plans been used to inform policy and practice activity within jurisdictions? [in particular what impact has the Second Action Plan had on policy and practice activity?]

#### *Implementation of National Framework related activity*

These questions explore implementation of the National Framework related activity

10. What have been the major achievements in your jurisdiction or sector as they relate to each of the six supporting outcomes articulated in the National Framework? Are these achievements a result of, or influenced by National Framework activity? (for reference, key National Framework activity is described in Box 1 of this consultation guide).
  - a) Children live in safe and supportive families and communities
  - b) Children and families access adequate support to promote safety and intervene early
  - c) Risk factors for child abuse and neglect are addressed
  - d) Children who have been abused or neglected receive the support and care they need for their safety and wellbeing
  - e) Indigenous children are supported and safe in their families and communities
  - f) Child sexual abuse and exploitation is prevented and survivors receive adequate support
11. How has workforce and organisational capacity across your jurisdiction / sector impacted on child and family welfare reform? How has National Framework activity in this space been used or informed workforce and organisational capacity and development?

12. Acknowledging the public health model underpinning the National Framework, please indicate which service system tier in your jurisdiction or sector has benefitted the most from National Framework focus and activity to date:
  - a) Statutory system
  - b) Targeted service system for at risk families and children
  - c) Early intervention service system
  - d) Universal service system?
13. How useful have resources and tools produced through the National Framework proven for your jurisdiction or sector? [for reference, some key National Framework resources and tools are described in Box 1 of this consultation guide].
14. What are the key enablers and barriers you confront in your jurisdiction when implementing child protection and wellbeing, reform and innovation [and has the Second Action Plan impacted on these enablers and barriers]?

#### *Value of the National Framework*

These questions explore the value of the National Framework.

15. How has the National Framework helped contributed to reform and innovation across government and non-government sectors?
16. What has been the value and impact of resources and tools produced through the National Framework?
17. How has the National Framework enabled a greater focus on prevention initiatives and early intervention approaches?

#### *Impact of the National Framework*

These questions explore the impact of the National Framework.

18. How collaborative are policy and practice relationships between your services and Australian Government departments and funded services?
19. How collaborative are policy and practice relationships between your services and other different service system tiers (statutory through to universal)?
20. How collaborative are policy and practice relationships between your services and other service types that deal with issues that contribute to child vulnerability and risk (for example mental health, drugs and alcohol, disability, housing etc)?

#### *Evidence and reporting*

These questions explore the role of the National Framework as it relates to evidence and reporting on the safety of children and young people.

21. How has National Framework commissioned research, data and evidence been used by jurisdictions to contribute to child safety, development and wellbeing?
22. How has National Framework data and reporting been used by jurisdictions to inform service planning and delivery?
23. Does National Framework reporting align with jurisdictional outcome / performance reporting for systems designed to protect children?

#### *Concluding comments [including Second Action Plan comments]*

These last questions allows for the discussion of about the future of the National Framework, and any other issues associated with the National Framework not already covered.

24. What have been the key achievements in relation to the Second Action Plan?
25. How useful has the activity under the Second Action Plan proven for you jurisdiction or sector?
26. Are there any lessons from the Second Action Plan which should feed into the development of the Third Action Plan?
27. Looking ahead to the development of the Third Action Plan, what future do you envisage for the National Framework?
28. Do you have any other comments about the National Framework and its progress and implementation to date?

Thank you for your time and contribution

If you have any other questions about this process or about the baseline evaluation more generally, please contact the evaluation project manager, David Griffith on the following contact details.

p) 03 8650 6020

e) d.griffith@acilallen.com.au

## **Jurisdictional stocktake tool**

### **National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020: baseline evaluation jurisdictional data tool**

ACIL Allen Consulting has been engaged by the Commonwealth Department of Social Services (DSS) to undertake a baseline evaluation of the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020 (the National Framework).

The baseline evaluation commenced in December 2014 and is due to conclude in June 2015. Its purpose is to measure progress under the National Framework prior to development and implementation of the Third Three-Year Action Plan, which is due in 2015.

Key areas of focus for the evaluation comprise:

- Exploring the barriers, strengths and opportunities arising from the National Framework's tripartite approach to implementation and governance
- Determining whether the National Framework has added value to processes and / or systems aimed at protecting children
- Determining whether government efforts across jurisdictions have shifted focus from the statutory system to prevention initiatives and early intervention approaches
- Establishing a baseline for subsequent evaluations, which will enable judgements about the National Framework and the extent to which it is achieving its high level outcomes over the long term.

The baseline evaluation will be a narrative based project that informs the development the Third Action Plan, and lays the groundwork for future outcome and performance based evaluations of the National Framework.

The baseline evaluation involves significant national consultation, and analysis of relevant national datasets and documentation.

This information request forms part of our national consultation program. We will also be visiting each of the jurisdictions to consult with necessary stakeholders from February to March 2015.

Who should complete this information request?

A single coordinated response to this survey is requested from each jurisdiction. It is intended that the jurisdictional representative on the National Framework Evaluation Working Group will liaise with necessary stakeholders to facilitate a response. A coordinated response is requested from the Coalition of Organisations Committed to the Safety and Wellbeing of Australia's Children and will be facilitated by Families Australia.

Responses need to be submitted by close of business on

Friday 27 February 2015

Completed responses should be emailed to ACIL Allen Consulting

d.griffith@acilallen.com.au

Should you have any questions about this request, please do not hesitate to contact ACIL Allen Consulting at the email address above.

#### Section A: contact details

- State/Territory
- Contact name
- Position
- Organisation
- Contact email
- Contact telephone

#### Section B: Jurisdictional context

1. Please outline the major legislative or policy reforms within your jurisdiction that have occurred over the life of the National Framework (2009 to end 2014)
2. Please outline any major reviews or inquiries that have occurred in your jurisdiction since 2009. Did these reviews or inquiries refer to the National Framework? If so, please outline where reference was made, and the extent to which this reference contributed to systemic change
3. Does current legislation for the protection of children and young people in your jurisdiction make reference to the National Framework?
4. Does the current policy framework in your jurisdiction make explicit reference to the National Framework? If yes, can you please provide a link to the document or supply a copy with this request
5. Is there research that your jurisdiction has undertaken or commissioned that is explicitly linked to the National Framework? If yes, can you explain how it has been used? Can you please supply any relevant research with this request?
6. Are there any other developments in legislation, policy or practice in your jurisdiction that are of relevance to the National Framework? If so, please provide a brief overview

#### Section B: Implementation of activities aligned with the National Framework

7. Please outline key activities underway in your jurisdiction as they relate to each of the supporting outcomes outlined in the National Framework. (Please attach any documents or provide links to appropriate resources or initiatives associated with these activities)
- a) Supporting outcome 1 – Children live in safe and supportive families and communities
  - b) Supporting outcome 2 – Children and families access adequate support to promote safety and intervene early
  - c) Supporting outcome 3 – Risk factors for child abuse and neglect are addressed
  - d) Supporting outcome 4 – Children who have been abused or neglected receive the support and care they need for their safety and wellbeing
  - e) Supporting outcome 5 – Indigenous children are supported and safe in their families and communities
  - f) Supporting outcome 6 – Child sexual abuse and exploitation is prevented and survivors receive adequate support

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