

NATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR
PROTECTING AUSTRALIA'S
CHILDREN 2009–2020

Protecting children is Everyone's Business



2018–19,
2019–20
& 2020–21
**ANNUAL
REPORT**
with a focus on
key activities under
the Fourth Action
Plan 2018–2020

An Initiative of the Council of Australian Governments

An Initiative of the Council of Australian Governments

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Foreword

This is the eighth in a series of progress reports on the *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–2020* (the National Framework). It is the final progress report for the National Framework, and it combines the two reporting years 2018–19 and 2019–20 as well as the Framework's extension to the end of June 2021. This three-year period corresponds to the implementation of the Framework's Fourth Action Plan, and so the efforts and achievements reported here are the culmination of the reforms and actions undertaken pursuant to the Framework's fourth and final action plan.

This report describes many significant reforms to Australia's child protection systems to improve outcomes for Australia's children and young people that deliver the objectives of the Fourth Action Plan, focusing particularly on out-of-home care, the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, and embedding the Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander Child Placement Principle. Several case studies illustrate the impact of these initiatives on the ground.

With the conclusion of the National Framework, more work remains to be done. In 2020, the Department of Social Services commissioned PwC to undertake an evaluation of the National Framework. Its findings and recommendations, along with broad consultation, have informed the development of *Safe and Supported: The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021–2031*.

Safe and Supported will see a new partnership between Australian, state and territory governments and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership Group, in collaboration with the non-government sector, to continue efforts in achieving the goal of Australia's children and young people reaching 'their full potential by growing up safe and supported, free from harm and neglect'.

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‘Protecting children is everyone’s business’

The National Framework’s key message — ‘Protecting Children is Everyone’s Business’ — aspires to make child safety and wellbeing ‘everyone’s responsibility’ and change the way governments, non-government organisations (NGOs) and the broader community act to protect children. It reflects the understanding that building collaboration and capability within the child and family welfare sector, and across other service sectors and reform agendas, is the only way to address complex issues, ensure that children get the best start in life, and are given the opportunity they need to realise their full potential and grow up to become resilient, independent and productive members of society.

Since the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) endorsed the National Framework in 2009, all Australian governments and the non-government sector, through the National Coalition, have been working together to ensure Australia’s children and young people are safe and well.

The National Coalition, established in 2007, has played an important role in advocating for, negotiating, and helping to implement the National Framework. The National Coalition is made up of about 200 non-government community organisations that provide services to children, young people and families across Australia, as well as many key advocates and researchers in the fields of child protection and children’s wellbeing.

Governance of the National Framework and the Fourth Action Plan

Shared responsibility across the Australian, state and territory governments and the non-government and research sectors underpins the National Framework.

Commonwealth, state and territory ministers for portfolios such as family, community, disability, children and young people, child protection and family support services are responsible for agreeing to the national strategies and actions and overseeing the progress and overall direction of the National Framework.

The Children and Families Secretaries (CAFS) group consists of senior officials from relevant government departments and supports Ministers to implement the Fourth Action Plan. It ensures whole-of-government involvement with the National Framework by engaging and partnering with departmental officers within jurisdictions and at a national level. CAFS is responsible for the policy directions of the Fourth Action Plan.

The National Forum for Protecting Australia's Children (the National Forum) comprises representatives from the Australian Government, state and territory governments, key non-government organisations and the National Children's Commissioner. Non-government organisations and researchers are represented by the National Coalition on Child Safety and Wellbeing. The National Forum provides advice and consultation to support actions under the National Framework where required.

The Fourth Action Plan has additional governance arrangements — a working group for each of the four Priority Areas of the plan. The working groups provide oversight and drive implementation and include representatives from the Australian Government, state and territory governments and key non-government organisations, as well as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives.

What is the National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children 2009–2020?

The high-level outcome

The National Framework, now at its conclusion, was a long-term, ambitious approach to promote and enhance the safety and wellbeing of Australia’s children and young people. Its high-level outcome and six supporting outcomes spanned domains associated with child protection and child wellbeing. Activities to achieve the outcomes were implemented through a series of action plans.

The National Framework’s high-level outcome was that Australia’s children and young people are safe and well.

The six supporting outcomes

The National Framework set out six supporting outcomes, and associated national priorities, to help focus effort and actions to reach the high-level outcome that Australia’s children and young people are safe and well. They were:

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.

The Fourth Action Plan

The final Action Plan of the National Framework – the [Fourth Action Plan \(2018–2020\)](#) – was endorsed by Commonwealth, state and territory Ministers in December 2018. Its aim has been to continue to build the foundations and evidence base to enable continued improvement in outcomes for Australia’s children and young people beyond 2020. The Fourth Action Plan built on priorities from the Third Action Plan, such as improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who are at risk of entering, or are in contact with, child protection systems, and improving outcomes for children in out-of-home care.

Priority Areas and Objectives

The Fourth Action Plan set out the following four key Priority Areas and their associated objectives:

Priority Area 1: Improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children at risk of entering, or in contact with child protection systems.

- **Objective 1:** Uphold the five elements of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (prevention, partnership, placement, participation and connection) to recognise the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to be raised in their own culture and the importance and value of their family, extended family, kinship networks, culture and community.
- **Objective 2:** Where appropriate, acknowledge and support the important role Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander managed services have in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families at risk of entering, or in contact with, child protection systems.

Priority Area 2: Improving prevention and early intervention through joint service planning and investment.

- **Objective 1:** Children grow up in thriving families and communities and develop into healthy, connected, nurturing and productive adults and parents.
- **Objective 2:** Young people are supported to transition from out-of-home care into adulthood.
- **Objective 3:** Best practice knowledge is developed on addressing the drivers of entry into child protection systems.

Priority Area 3: Improving outcomes for children in out-of-home care by enhancing placement stability through reunification and other permanent care options.

- **Objective 1:** Permanency outcomes for children and young people in out-of-home care are publicly reported on with reliable and consistent data to support improved policy and decision making.
- **Objective 2:** Children and young people in out-of-home care achieve safe and stable care, in a timely manner, that supports lifelong relationships, belonging, identity and connection that takes into account the views of the child.
- **Objective 3:** There are sufficient permanent carers with the right skills and support to provide safe and stable care to children.

Priority Area 4: Improving organisations' ability to keep children and young people safe from abuse.

- **Objective 1:** Organisational cultures that foster child safety and wellbeing are embedded across organisations engaging with children and young people.
- **Objective 2:** State and territory child protection agencies have adequate information to identify potential risks to children and better support children.

The plan set out 13 actions intended to realise these objectives.

Reporting achievement

Reporting achievement under the National Framework's Fourth Action Plan has been supported by an implementation plan monitored by the Priority Area Working Groups. The effectiveness of implementation of the individual actions is measured by tracking and reporting on the progress of each action over time. Children and Families Secretaries reports to Community Services Ministers on progress.

Achievements under the Fourth Action Plan, as reported by the Australian, state and territory governments and National Coalition, are described in the subsequent sections of this progress report.

PwC Evaluation of the National Framework

Approaching the National Framework's final year of operation, the Department of Social Services (DSS) commissioned PwC and PwC's Indigenous Consulting (PIC) to evaluate the National Framework and its Third and Fourth Action Plans. The evaluation's objectives were to:

- assess the National Framework in terms of implementation and outcomes achieved, with a particular focus on the actions and outcomes achieved under the Third and Fourth Action Plans
- assess the effectiveness of the overarching framework, including its governance arrangements and the broad implementation of the action plans
- assess how the National Framework has coordinated effort across governments and the non-government sector and reduced the prevalence of child abuse and neglect.

PwC found that the National Framework had been an important mechanism for national collaboration on protecting Australia's children and reducing child abuse and neglect, but that its intended outcome in 2009 of achieving a substantial and sustained reduction in child abuse and neglect had not been achieved and remained a significant challenge for Australia in 2020. The evaluation produced findings and opportunities to provide for a strengthened successor framework, including recommendations on its scope and purpose, its supporting governance arrangements and data collection and monitoring. PwC's findings and recommendations have informed the development of *Safe and Supported: The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021–2031*.

In November 2020 the [PwC evaluation report](#) was published on the Department of Social Services website.

Key activities under the Fourth Action Plan

The following section of the report highlights key initiatives undertaken across jurisdictions during the reporting period and presented

against the Priority Areas and Objectives for the National Framework’s Fourth Action Plan.

PRIORITY AREA 1:

Improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children at risk of entering, or in contact with, child protection systems

Objective 1 – Uphold the five elements of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle

Objective 2 – Acknowledgement and support the role of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander managed services

Australian Government: Upholding the five elements of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle

Action 1.1 relates to active implementation of legislation, policy and practice to ensure compliance with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (ATSICPP). The objective of Action 1.1 was to uphold the five elements of the of the ATSICPP (prevention, partnership, placement, participation and connection) to recognise the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to be raised in their own culture and the importance and value of their family, extended family, kinship networks, culture and community.

The Department of Social Services funded SNAICC – National Voice for our Children (SNAICC) to undertake four projects in support of Action 1.1 under the Fourth Action Plan. The purpose of these projects was to support states and territories with implementation of the ATSICPP and to embed continuous improvement.

- **Project 1 – Practical resource:** develop a practical resource for child protection practitioners and policy makers to better implement the Principle.

The purpose of Project 1 was to develop a detailed set of practical resources that address each of the five elements of the ATSICPP and promote implementation action and accountability for realising full compliance with the five elements of the ATSICPP. The resource is available on SNAICC's [website](#).

- **Project 2 – Workshops:** conduct workshops in each state and territory in the first half of 2019 to support jurisdictions to use the resource, and strengthen their implementation of the Principle.

The purpose of Project 2 was to deliver educational workshops to state and territory government child protection practitioners and policy makers tailored to each jurisdiction and based on the practical ATSICPP resource. These were delivered in 2019.

- **Project 3 – Desktop Review:** a desktop review of active efforts, key legislation, policy and practice in place to implement the ATSICPP.

The purpose of Project 3 was to assess, against the nationwide baseline, compliance with the ATSICPP, which SNAICC completed in 2018. The baseline analyses identified extensive gaps in implementation across legislation, policy, programs, processes and practices in all states and territories. While many jurisdictions are actively adapting their policy and practice frameworks to improve compliance with the ATSICPP, there is significant variation across the country.

SNAICC provided the final ATSICPP [implementation reviews](#) and these were published on the SNAICC website in March 2021.

- **Project 4 – Case studies:** examples of recent reform, promising practice and case studies of successful models of implementation of the ATSI CPP and active efforts shared with jurisdictions.

The purpose of Project 4 was to identify, document and promote examples of good practice early intervention initiatives targeting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

SNAICC identified good practice early intervention and prevention initiatives

that are being delivered by Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations across the nation. SNAICC sought to include examples from all jurisdictions, including a range of urban, regional, rural and remote examples. After identifying the good practice initiatives, SNAICC developed a series of best practice profiles.

SNAICC completed site visits with the organisations and published the profiles on [SNAICC's website](#).

Australian Capital Territory: Implementing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle

Between 2018–19 and 2020–21, the Community Services Directorate (CSD) focused on ensuring Child and Youth Protection Services (CYPS) staff had the cultural knowledge and skills to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families. This included work to actively implement the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle in child protection policy and procedures, and ensuring all staff receive cultural safety and awareness training.

During 2018–19, CYPS undertook various activities to embed the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle into practice, policy and training. In October 2018, CYPS engaged Aboriginal owned organisation, Curijo, to develop a guide to help CYPS staff effectively embed 'active efforts' for best practice case management under each element of the Child Placement Principle. Seven

stakeholder workshops contributed to developing the guide for 'Working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Families: Providing Culturally Responsive Practice', including workshops with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community organisations and the *Our Booris, Our Way* Review Team. The guide was released in September 2019 and published on the [Community Services Directorate website](#).

In 2018–19, CYPS also engaged SNAICC to provide staff training focused on understanding and applying all elements of the principle to practice. Training was tailored to the specific needs highlighted by staff as priorities for effective working relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. Almost 130 CYPS staff completed the training.

In 2019–20, the ACT and Queensland co-led national work to support the implementation

of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle across all states and territories. As part of this work, the ACT and Queensland co-sponsored the Priority One Working Group, focused on improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

In 2019–20, the ACT also appointed several new designated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff in CYPS, including the role of Practice Leader who has a key role in embedding the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle within the Community Services Directorate and a Senior Policy Officer, responsible for the development of a strategy to implement the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle into CYPS policies and procedures.

During 2019–20, CYPS worked to increase the cultural proficiency of all staff to ensure a greater understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, with a focus on collaboration and the establishment of positive working relationships. A number of practice guides, procedures for staff and information sheets for families, and advocacy groups were implemented. Since

the commencement of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Senior Policy Officer in 2019, specific policy and practice documents to support CYPS staff in their work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families were developed through consultation with the Aboriginal Cultural Services Team, Ngura Naraganabang (Safety in the Pouch) Advisory Group and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Co-design network.

In 2020–21, CYPS continued to engage SNAICC to deliver training for staff on the implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle. In March 2021, SNAICC delivered two days of training to 12 CYPS staff and further sessions are planned in October 2021. This is required training for staff working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. CSD also established a panel of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander professionals to inform, develop and implement cultural plans. The panel is a priority of the Cultural Services Team, with terms of reference that reflect the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle.

New South Wales: Family is Culture Report and NSW Government response

In November 2019, an independent report into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People in out-of-home care in NSW was delivered to the NSW Government. Professor Megan Davis's report, titled *Family Is Culture, Independent Review of Aboriginal Children and Young*

People in Out-of-Home Care, was commissioned by the NSW Government in 2016 and made 125 recommendations to the NSW Government based on a review of 1,144 children and young people who entered care in 2015–16.

This review aimed to examine the high rates of Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care (OOHC) in NSW and the implementation of the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle in this jurisdiction. As well as the 125 recommendations relating to the way NSW delivers services, the review made more than 3,000 recommendations referring to specific children and young people.

On 7 July 2020, the NSW Government provided a formal response to the Family is Culture Report. The response made a clear commitment to building a child protection system that is more responsive to the needs of Aboriginal children, families and communities. NSW is working in partnership with Aboriginal communities to address the recommendations outlined in the Family is Culture Report.

The NSW Government released a progress report on 25 November 2020 that outlined progress to date in responding to the report's systemic recommendations. Implementation of responses is being led through a partnership approach with stakeholders and Aboriginal communities to ensure that Aboriginal voices inform development and design.

For further information, see the [Family is Culture review and the NSW Government's response](#).

NSW has also signed the 10-year National Agreement on Closing the Gap, developed jointly by governments and the Coalition of Peak Aboriginal Organisations. The agreement takes a holistic approach to the systemic change needed to improve outcomes and includes targets to reduce the rate of over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in OOHC. The agreement provides a way of working across governments to address these issues.

South Australia: Embedding the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle

South Australia is committed to implementing active efforts to embed the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (ATSICPP) as the principal framework for decision-making in relation to Aboriginal children and young people. As well as embedding the principle in the Department for Child Protection's (DCP) Practice Approach and Aboriginal Action Plan, and as a key principle to guide reform of the intensive family support system, South Australia has worked to ensure that the legislative and governance frameworks are in place to consolidate these efforts.

Recognising the principle as more than just a placement hierarchy, the SA Government has committed to ensuring that the ATSICPP is fully articulated in child protection legislation, and to position it as the paramount consideration in child protection decision-making for Aboriginal children and young people. The SA Government will consult with SA Aboriginal communities as part of the full legislative review of child protection legislation in 2022–23, with a view to delivering on this commitment and enabling delegated decision-making in respect of case management.

To support SA's full implementation of the principle, DCP has engaged SNAICC to

support an Aboriginal-led design process for a peak body to represent the interests of Aboriginal children and young people. The peak body will privilege the voices of Aboriginal children and young people and be child-centred in its approach, maintaining a clear focus on protecting and promoting children's safety and wellbeing. It will also focus building the Aboriginal community-controlled sector to provide services to Aboriginal children and young people and partner with government in efforts to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people in the child protection system, including those in care. The Government has received SNAICC's final report and is currently considering its recommended model.

The peak body will work alongside existing Aboriginal governance, advisory and oversight bodies established in the reporting period. These include DCP's Expert Aboriginal Child Protection Advisory Committee, established in 2019 and comprising national experts. It will also work closely with the Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People, which position was established in 2018 and whose role has been embedded in legislation with the same powers as SA's Commissioner for Children and Young People.

Victoria: Implementing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle

In 2016, the Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People (CCYP) undertook the *In the child's best interests* inquiry, which focused on Victoria's compliance with the intent of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (ATSICPP). The ATSICPP aims to ensure that, wherever possible, an Aboriginal child is placed with Aboriginal extended family or relatives. All recommendations were accepted by the Victorian Government.

The Victorian Government introduced legislation in February 2023 which expressly includes all five aspects underpinning the intent of the ATSICPP, namely: prevention, participation, partnership, placement, and connection. The Bill seeks to address the over-representation of Aboriginal children in care in Victoria and, if passed, it will expand the role of Aboriginal agencies delivering children and family services. The proposed legislation includes a Statement of

Recognition of the impact of past policies on Aboriginal people, designed in close consultation with Aboriginal-led children and families services providers. The proposed legislative change is consistent with Action 1.1 of the Fourth Action Plan 2018–2020 of the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children, which was endorsed by the Victorian Government. Action 1.1 requires states and territories to actively implement legislation, policy and/or practice to ensure compliance with the five elements of the ATSICPP. The wording of these principles in the Bill is based on the wording used by the Secretariat for National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) to describe the principles, which is the nationally accepted definition of each element. Embedding these principles in the Children, Youth and Families Act will help drive child protection practice with Aboriginal children and families towards better outcomes.

Northern Territory reform

Please note: following the August 2020 Northern Territory Election the former Territory Families agency became part of a new agency, now known as the Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities. For time periods before that date, references have been maintained as Territory Families.

Key Northern Territory initiatives during the reporting periods of 2018–19, 2019–20

and 2020–21 have been coordinated under a whole-government program of reform for children, young people and families, known as the [Safe, Thriving and Connected: Generational Change for Children and Families Plan](#), released in April 2018. The Plan responded to the Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory's final report, delivered in 2017.

Northern Territory: Aboriginal Cultural Security Framework 2018–19

A key achievement for Territory Families in 2018–19 was the introduction of a whole-of-agency [Aboriginal Cultural Security Framework](#). The Framework was developed in consultation with Aboriginal stakeholders to improve the quality of services to Aboriginal clients and to empower families and the community to engage with the organisation.

Through the framework the agency committed to design and deliver services that are culturally safe and responsive to

the needs and aspirations of Aboriginal children, young people, families and the broader community. The framework is intended to improve cultural proficiency across the agency's workforce, services and governance and has been instrumental in driving positive change in recent years. It directly influences and informs strategic and business planning, personal development planning, policy development, communications, relationships and partnerships.

Northern Territory: Signs of Safety Model for child protection and youth justice 2018–19, 2019–20

In 2019, Territory Families commenced the implementation of the Signs of Safety practice model for child protection and youth justice. The practice model complemented other agency reform initiatives. Signs of Safety focuses on working with families to keep their children safe. It centres on holistic family safety assessments and support and has moved child protection processes away from an incident- and risk-focused response. Throughout 2019 and 2020, more than 500 departmental staff and 50 service providers were trained in the model and the department aligned its practice guidance policies and procedures accordingly.

Aboriginal staff are central to implementation of Signs of Safety, including engaging with

Aboriginal organisations and communities throughout the process. A Signs of Safety Aboriginal Leadership Group was appointed, operationalising the Territory Families Aboriginal Cultural Security Framework.

Through the Signs of Safety Practice model, family and natural network participation is a key feature in child protection case work. It is an embedded practice under Signs of Safety and it offers many advantages, including encouraging an important collaborative approach by all parties. This new approach to child protection encourages caseworkers to tailor individual responses to each child and family situation and empower parents and families.

Northern Territory: Transforming the Out-of-Home Care model

In 2019, as part of the Northern Territory Government's significant investment through the Safe, Thriving and Connected reform plan, Territory Families announced the 'Transforming Out-of-Home Care in the Northern Territory' initiative to comprehensively overhaul the child protection service system and improve outcomes for children in care. The key elements of a new model of care, which is being progressively introduced, include:

- enhancing collaboration with families and young people
- partnering with community and government
- establishing supportive systems to deliver out-of-home care services
- prioritising family/kin care-givers and improved support for all family carers
- services tailored to meet the needs of children and young people in care
- therapeutic services designed to achieve positive outcomes for children and young people in care.

Two examples of new service elements to improve outcomes for Aboriginal clients are described below.

1. Aboriginal Carers Growing Up Aboriginal Children Grants 2018–19 and 2019–20

The *Aboriginal Carers Growing up Aboriginal Children* grants program was developed to help find appropriate Aboriginal carers, provide ongoing support to them and ensure they feel valued for their contribution to caring for children within their family.

Through the program, Territory Families partners with Aboriginal organisations to identify and recruit more Aboriginal family, kinship and foster carers so Aboriginal children can remain connected to their culture, kin and country. In 2019–20, Territory Families funded Larrakia Nation to develop the Family and Kinship program *Minbani Bebe*. The family finding program aims to identify Aboriginal family connections to find suitable kinship placement for children needing care. The Aboriginal Child Placement Principle is used to undertake family mapping and the Signs of Safety approach is used to support families to make decisions about the needs of their children.

2. Collaboration with Tangentyere Council to develop *Children Safe, Family Together*, the new family and kin care model 2019–20

Territory Families collaborated with Tangentyere Council Aboriginal Corporation to develop *Children, Safe, Family Together* – a comprehensive culturally safe Aboriginal kinship care service model to act as a blueprint for implementation across the Territory. The model supports Aboriginal organisations to identify, recruit and support Aboriginal kinship and foster carers.

The model seeks to reinforce the voices of Aboriginal organisations and communities for the out-of-home care sector to honour the primacy of family and kin, and ensure the continued connection of Aboriginal children to language, land and culture as expressed in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle. It also

aims to transition family and kin care service delivery to Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and increase the decision-making power of Aboriginal children, families, communities and organisations in relation to the care and protection of Aboriginal children.

This is a fundamental step towards increasing community control and self-determination for Aboriginal people and communities. The model acknowledges that children are best placed in their family home, and that it is critical that all potential strategies and active efforts are exhausted in supporting the preservation of families in order to prevent the need for removal. It also acknowledges that, in instances where the removal of the child is necessary, timely family reunification is always the best and most desired outcome.

The model is available on the Tangentyere Council [website](#).

South Australia: New models to increase participation in decision-making

In 2020, DCP commenced a new approach to working with kinship carers of Aboriginal children and young people in a culturally safe way. The Aboriginal Kinship Care Support Program aims to deliver better support to kinship carers of Aboriginal children and young people in care. The program recognises that Aboriginal organisations are best placed to maintain and build children and young people's sense of identity and connections to family, community and culture, as well as achieve longer

term positive outcomes. Three Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) have been engaged to provide specialised culturally specific supports.

From January 2020, the Department for Child Protection (DCP) implemented a \$1.6 million [Family Group Conferencing service](#), delivered by Relationships Australia South Australia. The program has a strong focus on supporting Aboriginal children and families to lead decision making through

its Ngartuitya program. 'Ngartuitya' is the Kurna word meaning 'for the children'. The program supports Aboriginal family and community members to lead strategies to keep Aboriginal children and young people safe with family and kin. Following a successful pilot, the Government has committed \$3.7 million over four years to support this program. DCP is also trialling a new targeted Family Group Conferencing program for Aboriginal Unborn Child Concerns and an Aboriginal-specific program through local Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation and partner, Aboriginal Family Support Services.

The South Australian Government has worked in partnership with the Narungga Nation Aboriginal Corporation, representing the Narungga community to implement the [Buthera Agreement](#). The agreement commits both parties to working together on areas of mutual interest across a range of portfolios, including child protection. To progress the child protection commitments in this agreement, DCP and the NNAC have entered into a Memorandum of Administrative Agreement (MoAA). The MoAA and associated work plan describe how DCP and NNAC work together on shared priorities, how DCP will engage NNAC in child protection decision making at a policy and practice level, and

the commitment to implementation of the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle in DCP's work with Narungga children and families.

DCP has partnered with Winangay Resources to implement the Winangay Aboriginal Kinship Carer Assessment Tool for initial and full assessments of carers who care for Aboriginal children and young people. This has delivered a culturally appropriate, strengths-based approach to engaging, assessing and supporting kinship carers. The tool is being rolled out across DCP and used to guide decision-making relating to the assessment of carers, and has also supported DCP to engage and retain more Aboriginal Kinship Carers to support Aboriginal children and young people in care.

DCP has commenced a collaborative research project with the Social Work Innovation Research Living Space (SWIRLS) called 'Privileging Aboriginal Culture and Strength: Building Practice', which is exploring the strengths of Aboriginal culture and examining how these can be incorporated into child protection practice to improve outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people. Critical to this project is privileging the voice of Aboriginal people.

Victoria: Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care

Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care is a program for Aboriginal children and young people subject to a Children’s Court protection order.

Section 18 of the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* enables the Secretary of the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) to authorise the principal officer of an Aboriginal agency to undertake specified functions and powers in relation to a Children’s Court protection order for an Aboriginal child or young person.

This means that, once a protection order for an Aboriginal child or young person

has been made by the Children’s Court, an approved Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO) may be authorised to take on responsibility for the child’s case management and case plan.

Under the Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care program, authorised ACCOs will have the opportunity to actively work with the child’s family, community and other professionals to develop and implement the child’s case plan and achieve their permanency objective in a way that is culturally safe and in the best interests of the child.

South Australia: Investing in Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations

A deliberate and comprehensive procurement strategy has resulted in the Department for Child Protection (DCP) increasing its procurement from ACCOs to above 7.5% of its total spend in 2020–21. Recognising that ACCOs are best placed to deliver services for Aboriginal children and families, DCP’s Aboriginal Procurement Policy sets out targets to significantly increase the department’s purchase of services from Aboriginal organisations and businesses, and has seen the introduction of a range of strategies to increase participation by ACCOs. These including selective tendering and dialogues with ACCOs to reduce traditionally adversarial aspects of competitive tender processes. Consortium approaches have been encouraged where ACCOs providing a service for the first

time have partnered with agencies with experience in the service area.

The strategy has resulted in new and targeted investment in ACCOs to deliver a range of child protection services such as Family Group Conferencing and Kinship Carer supports, as well as support Aboriginal-led training for staff. The strategy has also seen an increase in funding support for community events and organisations, including Reconciliation SA and Family Matters SA. In recognition of DCP’s work in partnering with Aboriginal businesses, the department was awarded the Supplier Diversity award in the 2020 Chartered Institute of Procurement and Supply Australasia Awards.

This commitment to investment in ACCOs is also evident in the state Government's redesign and recommissioning of all intensive family support services delivered by the Department of Human Services. As part of this significant reform of the family support services system, the Government earmarked 30% of funding for investment towards

ACCOs. All mainstream NGOs submitting tenders for intensive family services were required to demonstrate how they would use the Aboriginal System Design Criteria and co-design principles, including how they would work in partnership with ACCOs to help inform their provision of services to Aboriginal children and families.

Victoria: Wungurilwil Gappagduir Principles

The following seven principles outline the way in which the Aboriginal community, the Victorian Government and the child and family services sector will work together to implement the agreement for the benefit of Aboriginal children and families.

1. Aboriginal self-determination

Aboriginal self-determination is the overarching principle of the agreement. This involves government and mainstream organisations relinquishing power, control and resources to Aboriginal organisations.

2. Aboriginal culture and community

Aboriginal communities have choice, control, authority and responsibility for determining the priorities and delivering services for Aboriginal communities. Culture, self-determination and self-management sit at the heart of all policies, practices and decisions.

3. Families are at the centre of raising children

Families and Aboriginal child-rearing practices are fundamental to raising strong Aboriginal children and young people.

4. Respect

Aboriginal culture is respected and the perspectives and strengths of Aboriginal communities are valued, heard and influential.

5. Acknowledge strengths and celebrate success

Aboriginal communities, government and the child and family services sector collaborate to develop, celebrate and share what works well to keep Aboriginal families safe and strong.

6. Trusted relationships driven by accountability

Active, honest and respectful partnerships operate where Aboriginal communities participate equitably and with confidence alongside government and the child and family services sector. Accountability and ownership for just and equitable outcomes rests with all parties, starting at the highest levels.

7. Investment and resource equity

A shared commitment and responsiveness to address the current and historical funding inequities and barriers so Aboriginal organisations and communities are fully resourced to deliver a continuum of services.

Northern Territory: Health care for young people

NT Health improved the health and wellbeing services for children and young people in care and detention through transitioning the Juvenile Detention Centre's health services to local Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs). Darwin Juvenile Detention Centre has transitioned and the Alice Springs Juvenile Detention Centre is in the final stage of transition.

These ACCHOs provide young people in detention with culturally appropriate assessments and regular medical checks for physical and mental health, behaviour and disability and timely access to health care provision, and also improve access to therapeutic counselling and drug and alcohol treatment programs.

Northern Territory: Families as First Teachers Program

Operating since 2009, the Families as First Teachers (FaFT) program is an early learning and family support program that aims to improve the lifelong education, health and wellbeing outcomes for young children and their families. It focuses on children aged from birth to the year before they commence full-time schooling, and their families. FaFT builds parents' knowledge and understanding of children's development and how they can positively influence their children's development and long-term success.

FaFT works closely with community services such as the local health clinics and with the Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities to ensure vulnerable children and families can access

the support they need. In 2019–20, FaFT was delivered in 55 locations across the Northern Territory; in 2021, four of these ceased operating as a result of housing availability or staffing challenges. FaFT programs use the Abecedarian Approach Australia (3a), which is a recognised early literacy and numeracy learning approach for young children, particularly children and families experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage. In 2021, 2,723 children participated in the program's early learning activities. During 2021, there was a focus on consolidating and embedding quality practices into program delivery to strengthen child development and parenting capacity to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Northern Territory: Aboriginal Carer Services

The Aboriginal Carer Services (ACS) program was launched in late 2018 to fund Aboriginal-led organisations to find, assess, train and support Aboriginal Kinship and Foster Carers for Aboriginal children and young people in Out of Home care

(OOHC). Through three competitive grant processes, seven organisations are funded and delivering the program in Greater Darwin, Arnhem, Big Rivers, Barkly and Central regions.

Northern Territory: Community of Practice

The Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities hosts Community of Practice (CoP) events on a four-monthly basis for providers of Aboriginal Carer Services (ACS). The CoP brings together all

ACS providers and key regional department staff to share learnings, develop service relationships and identify opportunities to innovate and share resources.

Queensland: Changing Tracks actions

Queensland has implemented the first two of seven action plans across three phases of the 20-year Our Way strategy. Changing Tracks (2017–2019) and Changing Tracks (2020–2022) set the foundations for change across the child protection system in Queensland to eliminate the disproportionate

representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the child protection system by 2037.

Further information: [Changing Tracks Action Plan 2020–2022](#).

Queensland: Delegation of the Chief Executive's powers and functions

Implementation of delegated authority has commenced in Queensland in partnership with the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak (QATSICPP) and member organisations to enable the Chief Executive to delegate functions and powers under the *Child Protection Act 1999* in relation to an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child to

the Chief Executive Officer of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander entity to authorise them to make decisions for the child.

This initiative also relates to National Priority Area 2.

Further information: [Changing Tracks Action Plan 2020–2022](#).

Queensland: Implementation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family-led decision-making principles

Commissioned by the Queensland Government in 2018–19, these principles draw on traditional Indigenous consultative methods to create safe spaces where families can make decisions in the best interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander children, grounded in culture and family.

Further information: [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family led decision making](#).

Queensland: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Wellbeing Services

Delivered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisations, Family Wellbeing Services (FWS) provide flexible, strengths-based, culturally safe case management to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander families and their children for early intervention and prevention, and to scale families down the continuum of need, away from statutory involvement. FWS make it easier for Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander families in communities across Queensland to access culturally responsive support to improve their social, emotional, physical, and spiritual wellbeing, and build their capacity to safely care for and protect their children.

Further information: [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Wellbeing Services](#).

Case study – Queensland: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Wellbeing Services

Two boys were in a family where both parents were using ice and perpetrating domestic violence against each other. The mother, who was pregnant, was sentenced and gave birth in jail. Child Safety intervention was required, and the boys were placed with their grandmother.

Family Wellbeing Services supported the mother to address her drug usage while she was in jail and she was able to look after her new baby and plan for her return home.

Family Wellbeing Services support continued after she was released from jail so she could be reunited with her two boys. After six months the boys returned home to live with their mother and the new baby. Family Wellbeing Services continue to be involved, along with foster and kinship care staff.

Queensland: Wellbeing Outcomes Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in Queensland (the WOF)

Queensland developed the WOF in partnership with the Queensland First Children and Families Board, Family Matters Queensland, QATSICPP (Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak) and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and stakeholders. The WOF defines the wellbeing outcomes and indicators for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in Queensland and

will be used to inform future government investment, service planning, development and delivery, to maximise wellbeing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in Queensland.

Further information: [A Wellbeing Outcomes Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people](#).

Queensland: Establishment of the Queensland First Children and Families Board

This board was established in 2018 and is made up of nine eminent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders, along with the Directors-General from the Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs, and the Department of Seniors, Disability Services and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnership. The board provides strong cultural leadership, strategic oversight and advice to the department and government on the implementation of the Our Way strategy and

action plans, and holds government and partners accountable for the achievement of improved outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families in Queensland.

Further information: [Queensland First Children and Families Board terms of reference](#).

Queensland: Meriba Omasker Kaziw Kazipa (Torres Strait Islander Traditional Child Rearing Practice) Act 2020

This Act, which was passed on 8 September 2020, enables Torres Strait Islander children and adults who have grown up with traditional adoptive parents to have their legal identity recognised and match their cultural identity. It establishes a process for applying for and deciding on a cultural recognition order. Where a cultural recognition order is made, it will result in a permanent transfer of parentage from the

birth parents to the cultural parents and the issuance of a new birth certificate to reflect the order.

This legislation relates also to National Priority Area 2.

Further information: [*Meriba Omasker Kaziw Kazipa \(Torres Strait Islander Traditional Child Rearing Practice\) Act 2020*](#).

Queensland: Navigate Your Health Program

In response to the Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry (2013), Children's Health Queensland Hospital and Health Service (CHQ) and the Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs (DCYJMA) partnered together since 2017–18 to pilot, deliver and expand the Navigate Your Health Program to achieve a more integrated, collaborative and sustainable response to improving health outcomes for children and young people. From 2020, the program has also supported young people who are subject to Youth Justice orders. Navigate Your Health facilitates eligible children and young people in Brisbane, Cairns and Logan having a health check – called a comprehensive health assessment (in line with the National

Clinical Assessment Framework for children in care) – to ensure that important physical, dental, developmental, emotional and mental health screening and assessments occur. These assessments are done by a range of healthcare providers, including general practitioners, child and family health nurses and Aboriginal Medical Services. The team of Nurse Navigators then develops a Health Management Plan to support meeting the healthcare needs of each child or young person for the following 12 months.

This program is ongoing since 2017–18 and relates also to National Priority Areas 2 and 4.

Further information: [*Navigate Your Health*](#).

Queensland: Growing Deadly Families

Queensland Health's *Growing Deadly Families (GDF), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Maternity Services Strategy 2019–2025* is a significant reform that seeks to ensure that every woman in Queensland giving birth to an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander baby has access to high-quality clinical and culturally capable maternity services.

This reform relates also to National Priority Area 2.

Further information: [Growing Deadly Families Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Maternity Services Strategy 2019–2025](#).

Queensland Family and Child Commission

In 2020–21, the Commission commenced a program of oversight monitoring, evaluating, and reviewing the application of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle.

Further information: [Principle Focus | Queensland Family & Child Commission](#).

Victoria: Wungurilwil Gapgapduir – Aboriginal Children and Families Agreement

Over the past four years, the Victorian Government has committed, through the Roadmap for Reform and the more recent *Wungurilwil Gapgapduir: Aboriginal Children and Families Agreement*, to prioritise efforts to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal children involved in child protection and out-of-home care.

Wungurilwil Gapgapduir supports the Victorian Government's commitment to increase Aboriginal self-determination for Aboriginal people and to ensure that all Aboriginal children and young people are safe, resilient and can thrive in culturally rich and strong Aboriginal families and communities.

Wungurilwil Gapgapduir commits to reviewing the current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (ATSICPP) to support all five elements of the ATSICPP and develop an implementation strategy to measure compliance. The cornerstone commitment to legislate all five elements of the ATSICPP is underway.

Funding through *Wungurilwil Gapgapduir* will contribute to Victoria's reform of the out-of-home care services and enable the continued transfer of care and case management of Aboriginal children and young people to Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs).

Since 2018, the Victorian Government has invested more than \$160 million to implement *Wungurilwil Gapgapduir* and its nation-leading initiatives. A recent evaluation of initiatives within *Wungurilwil Gapgapduir* revealed that Aboriginal children involved with child protection and managed by an ACCO are provided culturally appropriate, trauma-informed and timely case management. Aboriginal children managed by an ACCO state they are better connected to culture, Country and family. ACCOs are increasing the number of Aboriginal children reunified with family or in stable, culturally safe alternative care.

At 30 August 2021, 50% of Aboriginal children across kinship, foster and residential care were either subject to authorisation or had their case management contracted to an ACCO.

The Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care (ACAC) program enables ACCOs to be authorised to exercise functions and powers usually exercised by the Secretary of the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) and assume responsibility for Aboriginal children on Children's Court protection orders.

At the end of September 2022, 99 Aboriginal children were authorised to the CEO of Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) and 90 Aboriginal children authorised to the CEO of the Bendigo and District Aboriginal Cooperative (BDAC). The 2020–21 State Budget made funding

for ACAC ongoing, and it will support the authorisation of up to 396 Aboriginal children and young people by 2024.

The Ballarat and District Aboriginal Cooperative (BADAC) and Njernda Aboriginal Corporation are currently preparing for authorisation to fully implement ACAC. ACAC growth funding enables an additional ACCO to prepare to deliver ACAC (being Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative).

The Transitioning Aboriginal Children to ACCOs initiative sees the transfer of case management of Aboriginal children in care from the Department and community services organisations to approved Aboriginal agencies. As of the end of September 2022, 48% of Aboriginal children in care are case managed by ACCOs.

Another national first is the establishment of a new Aboriginal response to child protection reports. This initiative will establish Aboriginal-led teams at two pilot sites to respond to child protection reports, helping local families and addressing the over-representation of Aboriginal children in care.

Victoria has signed the Closing the Gap National Agreement, which now includes a target to reduce the rate of over-representation of Aboriginal children in care by 45% by 2031. Agreed actions in *Wungurilwil Gapgapduir* form the foundations for how Victoria will achieve this target.

Western Australia: Aboriginal In-Home Support Service

The Aboriginal In-Home Support Service (AISS) program is part of a suite of contracted services under the Earlier Intervention and Family Support (EIFS) Strategy. The EIFS Strategy recognises that earlier and intensive intervention and engagement provides the greatest opportunity to effectively support and benefit children and families. The strategy aims to align and coordinate government services at a local level with a shared role in supporting vulnerable families, as well as focusing work to address the over-representation of Aboriginal children in the child protection system.

AISS is a targeted and culturally responsive program delivered by an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO). It is a metropolitan service that provides intensive in-home support to Aboriginal families where children are at imminent risk of entering care, as well as supporting children to reunify safely with their parents.

AISS supports families for up to 12 months utilising Aboriginal ways of working, including

a holistic and cultural assessment approach, and strengthening connection to culture, families, and community.

The AISS program is led by Wungening Aboriginal Corporation and delivered by Wungening Moort. Wungening Moort is a consortium of ACCOs, comprising the following partners:

- Wungening Aboriginal Corporation
- Coolabaroo Community Services
- Ebenezer Aboriginal Corporation
- Moorditj Koort.

AISS commenced operation in May 2018. The program has recently been extended for a further two years, with the new contract commencing on 1 July 2021 and ceasing on 30 June 2023.

AISS was formally evaluated by Social Ventures Australia. More information on the AISS program, the formal AISS evaluation, and the broader EIFS Strategy and services can be found on the [WA Government website](#).

PRIORITY AREA 2:

Improving prevention and early intervention through joint service planning and investment

Objective 1 – Children grow up in thriving families

Objective 2 – Young people supported from out-of-home care into adulthood

Objective 3 – Addressing the drivers of entry into child protection systems

Australian Government: Stronger Places, Stronger People

Priority 2 of the Fourth Action Plan includes the Australian Government's commitment to jointly invest in 10 disadvantaged communities across Australia to implement a place-based collective impact initiative, *Stronger Places, Stronger People*, which focuses on interrupting the cycle of childhood vulnerability and disadvantage.

More than \$45 million in cash and in-kind support over five years from 2019–20 has been committed from the Commonwealth and state and territory governments.

Stronger Places, Stronger People involves collaboration that includes the whole community, all levels of government, service providers, business, philanthropy and others to deliver on a locally designed strategy and plan of action to increase opportunities for vulnerable children to thrive.

The 10 *Stronger Places, Stronger People* communities are Logan, Rockhampton and Gladstone in Queensland, Bourke and Kempsey in New South Wales, Mildura in Victoria, Burnie in Tasmania, the Far West Region (including Ceduna) in South Australia and the Barkly Region (including Tennant Creek) and a second community in the Northern Territory.

All *Stronger Places, Stronger People* communities have (or are developing) their own vision, strategy and priorities, and are at different stages of realising their plans to improve outcomes for families and children.

- LoganTogether in Queensland is working towards its goal that, by 2025, Logan kids will be as healthy and full of potential as any other group of Queensland children. Logan Together worked with partners and over 500 women from diverse backgrounds to co-design a model for community-based maternity care. As a result, four Maternity Hubs have now been established in Logan, with the support of Metro South Health and the Queensland Government, with data indicating that women who received Maternity Group Practice and Maternity Hub care in Logan were more likely to: attend 5 or more antenatal appointments (97.7% compared to 93.6%); more likely to receive an influenza vaccine (65.6% compared to 59.4%); more likely to experience a spontaneous onset of labour (54.9% compared to 44.3%); and more likely to exclusively breastfeed (74% compared to 69%), as compared to women who received standard care. (Source: 2020 Evaluation Report (O'Connor, M., & Firmin, M. (2020). *Community Maternity Hubs Model: Evaluation 30/10/2020*. Queensland Health), as quoted by Clear Horizon (2021) in 'Logan's Community Maternal and Child Health Hubs: The contribution case for collective impact practice'.)

- Each week day, Maranguka Bourke in NSW hosts a ‘check in’ where police, teachers and service providers meet to discuss options to help kids in the community who are skipping school, have been picked up by the police, or are experiencing family violence.
- Burnie Works’ collective impact initiatives include a focus on child, youth and family wellbeing. Its Dream BIG program has been well received by teachers, businesses, parents and students for building aspirations in students and developing knowledge in their area of interest and in education pathways to careers.
- Hands Up Mallee in Mildura, Victoria is working to create a connected community where families matter and children thrive. It has supported ‘Home Base’, an initiative conceived by local youth, including young mums, providing an out-of-hours place where 10- to 17-year-olds can come to connect with each other, feel safe, learn new skills and have a place to belong.

More information can be found at [Stronger Places, Stronger People | Department of Social Services, Australian Government \(dss.gov.au\)](https://www.dss.gov.au/stronger-places-stronger-people).

South Australia: Safe and well

Safe and well: Supporting families, protecting children is South Australia’s plan for supporting families at risk of entering the child protecting system to safely care for their children, protecting children and young people from harm including when they are in care, and investing in young people in care and leaving care to provide them with opportunities for a bright future.

Safe and well brings together the findings from two significant Royal Commissions: the *Child Protection Systems Royal Commission* and the *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse*. In doing so, the aim is to create a connected, coordinated and programmatic reform approach that looks forward beyond the Royal Commissions towards a responsive and integrated child protection system.

Northern Territory: The Children and Families Tripartite Forum

The Children and Families Tripartite Forum (Tripartite Forum) was established in 2018 and is a multi-sectoral partnership between the NT and Commonwealth Governments and the community sector represented by Aboriginal Peak Organisations NT,

the NT Council of Social Service, and the North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency. The forum provides strategic oversight and facilitates integrated efforts to ensure the best outcomes for children and families are achieved.

The Tripartite Forum has provided guidance on:

- the implementation of the reform agenda arising from the Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory
- the development of a 10-Year Generational Strategy for Children and Families in the Northern Territory
- a response to the Productivity Commission's study into Expenditure on Children in the Northern Territory final report
- the development of a coordinated funding framework between the Commonwealth and NT governments to ensure a joint approach to planning, funding and delivering services that prevent harm and improve the wellbeing of children in the NT
- family and community decision making
- the importance of baseline data on the wellbeing of children as outlined in the Story of Our Children and Young People.

Northern Territory: 10-Year Generational Strategy for Children and Families in the Northern Territory – in development

The development of a 10-Year Generational Strategy for Children and Families in the Northern Territory was a recommendation by the Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the NT.

The strategy is being jointly developed by the Commonwealth Government, NT Government and community sector and overseen by the Children and Families Tripartite Forum.

The strategy will set out a common vision and policy framework to coordinate and improve services for children, young people and families in the Northern Territory. It is

based on a commitment to a local service delivery model underpinned by local design, selection, development, delivery, funding and evaluation.

The strategy will build on existing work such as the Royal Commission, the Productivity Commission study report into Expenditure on Children and Families in the NT and aligns with Commonwealth and NT government strategies such as Safe, Thriving and Connected and the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

Information on the strategy is available on the Northern Territory Government [website](#).

Victoria: Child and Family System Reform

Since its release in 2016, *Roadmap for Reform: Strong Families, Safe Children* (Roadmap for Reform) has been the Victorian Government's blueprint to

transform the child and family system from crisis response to earlier intervention and prevention, to reduce vulnerability and equip children to reach their full potential.

Through Roadmap for Reform, Victoria has delivered fundamental changes to the way government and the community work with and support vulnerable children and families, focusing on earlier intervention and prevention and evidence-informed intensive family preservation and reunification support.

Reforms undertaken include care services, child protection, family and parenting services, family violence and The Orange Door. The reforms also look at how these services connect to other service systems, including universal and adult services, and communities.

Progress under Roadmap for Reform

Victoria has made considerable progress towards the long-term objectives set out in Roadmap for Reform.

Key strategic reforms delivered are:

- The Orange Door network provides coordinated service access and support to children and adults experiencing family violence, and families needing support with the development and wellbeing of children. The Orange Door has rolled out across Victoria, bringing together family violence services, children and families services, Aboriginal services, and services for people who use violence.
- The Family Preservation and Reunification Response (the Response) is an innovative response designed to keep more

families safely together. The Response is delivering intensive, evidence-based, and coordinated support to children and families through a collaborative partnership between Child Protection and children and families services.

- Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care is transferring case management and case planning decision-making for Aboriginal children to Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations. An increasing number of Aboriginal children are now in Aboriginal care.
- The new Kinship care model is the preferred placement type for children who cannot live with their parents. Kinship care identifies kinship networks earlier, promotes placement stability through increased support, and builds community connections for Aboriginal children.
- Better Futures is increasing supports for young people leaving care until they reach 21 years of age. Better Futures helps young people leaving care to achieve their transition goals and provides in-care and post-care individualised support.
- Trials of Early Help Family Services are operating in universal settings, such as schools, health and early education and care services across Victoria. The services are providing individualised and group-based support, including parenting education, and aim to build capacity in universal settings to continue supporting families.

Victoria: Better Futures

Under the Roadmap for Reform, Victoria began piloting a new approach to supporting care leavers in 2016–17.

Known as Better Futures, the pilot programs aimed to engage earlier with care leavers, supporting them to have an active voice in their transition planning, and providing supports across a range of life areas, including housing, education, employment, and community and cultural connections, up until their 21st birthday.

The pilot programs were evaluated and, on the basis of the positive outcomes achieved, Better Futures was rolled out statewide in late 2019. All eligible young people in care are referred to their local Better Futures provider at 15 years and 9 months, with the level of support offered by Better Futures dependent upon the circumstances of the young person and the context of their care status.

Better Futures for a young person in care

A Better Futures worker provides secondary consultation to care teams, lending expertise to the transition process. Support from the Better Futures worker increases as the young person prepares to transition from care. Through Better Futures, the young person has access to flexible funding to support their goals for independence, such as housing establishment and costs associated with further education.

Better Futures for a young person post-care

The same key worker continues to support the young person throughout their transition up until their 21st birthday. The key worker provides the young person with direct case work support, information and advice and access to flexible funding to help them achieve their goals, such as driving lessons and costs associated with getting a licence, or costs to support participation in community activities such as sporting clubs, or to pursue career goals – for example, work-related equipment and uniforms.

Victoria: System reform through COVID–19

In 2020, some planned reform was postponed to enable government and service providers to focus on the COVID–19 response.

New funding to support children and families during the COVID–19 response has provided opportunities to advance system reform towards the Pathways to Support model.

In April 2020, the Victorian Government announced \$46 million through the ‘More Support to Keep Families and Children Safe’

funding package, including \$39.6 million to deliver a new Victorian and Aboriginal Family Preservation and Reunification Response aimed at keeping families safely together.

The response is an innovative new approach to delivering evidence-informed and integrated support to vulnerable children and families, in partnership with Child Protection, that supports and embeds a number of key system reform features in service delivery.

Victoria: Pathways to support for children and families: priority setting plan 2021–2024

As part of the Roadmap for Reform agenda, the *Pathways to support for children and families: priority setting plan 2021–2024 (the priority setting plan)* details priorities the Victorian Government is committed to progressing with its partners.

The priority setting plan reflects a shift towards more person-centred, evidence-informed and integrated service approaches for people and communities. It seeks to progress self-determination for Aboriginal Victorians and elevate client voice across the system.

The priority setting plan is helping to:

- shift the child and family system to intervene earlier to improve family functioning, keep children with their families and safely reunify children with their families, with a priority focus on Aboriginal families

- build evidence across the system to enable effective services targeted to the needs of priority groups of children and families
- strengthen partnerships between child protection, family violence, sexual assault and child and family services to enable improved experiences and outcomes for children and families
- advance Aboriginal self-determination and self-management, including through care and case management of Aboriginal children by Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and Aboriginal-led service offerings.

The *Rolling action plan 2021–22* details the actions and initiatives the Victorian Government will deliver over the next 12 months to improve the child and family system and implement the Victorian Government’s significant investments in

reform through the 2020–21 and 2021–22 Victoria State Budgets. Some key examples include:

- embedding family services in universal settings
- the expansion of the Family Preservation and Reunification Response. The evidence-based response is now available for more than 2,000 families each year and there is an Aboriginal provider in every area across the state
- trialling Putting Families First, a new support model providing integrated interdisciplinary support for families involved in the justice system
- establishing 2–3-bed residential care, which will provide additional system capacity and improve the quality of care to children and young people in residential care placements through increased access to therapeutic and educational supports
- expanding the already successful Keep Embracing Your Success (KEYS) program, an 18-month transitional

support service for young people with complex needs (aged 12–16 years), providing wrap-around multidisciplinary supports. This includes residential, specialised services and outreach components

- trialling a Care Hub approach over two years to provide wrap-around support for children and young people entering care for the first time to reunify them with their families earlier, divert them from residential care and improve their placement stability. It also includes intensive support for sibling groups.
- launching the Menu of Evidence Informed Practices and Programs – an online portal presenting the best available evidence on what works for children and families services.

While the Rolling Action Plan sets out priorities and actions that Victoria will deliver with its partners, it is also a call to action for other services and systems to join up efforts to promote the safety and wellbeing of children and families.

Tasmania: Strong Families, Safe Kids – Advice and Referral Line

In August 2015, the Tasmanian Government committed to a comprehensive redesign of child protection services in Tasmania. The redesign proposed to shift the focus from concentrating solely on a statutory response to children’s safety and wellbeing towards a broader public health approach to improve the safety and wellbeing of Tasmanian children.

This Strong Families, Safe Kids (SFSK) reform agenda was supported by the *Strong Families, Safe Kids Implementation Plan 2016–2020*. This project commenced in July 2016 and closed on 30 June 2020.

One of the key initiatives of the SFSK Implementation Plan was the establishment of the Advice and Referral Line (ARL) in Tasmania in December 2018. The ARL is

the single point of contact for concerns in relation to child wellbeing and safety and works with notifiers to assess the need for a child protection response, as well as identifying and responding to the support needs for children and families.

The ARL provides information, advice and support to people who contact the Child Safety Service as a result of being worried about the safety or wellbeing of a child. Staff in the ARL use a conversational approach to explore the matter that has been raised and to understand the needs of the child and family involved. A collaborative approach is taken by ARL staff, which is as inclusive as possible of all the people involved

with the care of the child, including the child's parents.

The SFSK 'Next Steps Action Plan' was launched on 25 March 2021, outlining a vision that the safety and wellbeing of all children, young people and families are improved through cross-agency collaboration and a focus on primary and early intervention approaches.

The Next Steps Action Plan commits the Tasmanian Government to publicly report implementation progress and outcomes of the actions annually. The first progress report on the Action Plan will be released towards the end of 2021.

Tasmania: Intensive Family Engagement Services

The Intensive Family Engagement Services (IFES) program commenced in Tasmania in February 2018 to provide intensive, assertive and specialised support to families identified by the Child Safety Service as at risk of entering the statutory system. The primary aim of this program is to support families to develop parenting skills where there are concerns for safety and wellbeing of children and young people and, in turn, attempt to prevent the imminent separation of children from their primary caregivers. This program aimed to fill a gap identified by Professor Maria Harries in her *Strong Families, Safe Kids* Redesign Report 2016. Early intervention services available at the time were not meeting the needs of a cohort of

families at the brink of entering the statutory service system.

The IFES program provides 15–20 hours of service to those in need per week, for approximately 12–16 weeks. The program also provides after-hours service to support families at key stress times and is tailored towards resolving specific needs of the family at hand.

An external evaluation of IFES was undertaken by the University of Tasmania's Institute for the Study of Social Change in February 2019. Recommendations in the report have now been incorporated into a revised model for the program.

New South Wales: Family preservation recommissioning

Family preservation programs aim to prevent entries to out-of-home-care by providing family support to mitigate risks of abuse and neglect, and promote safety and parenting skills. NSW is currently recommissioning all family preservation services to improve outcomes for children and families.

The 2020–21 NSW Budget provided assurance for the portfolio of family preservation services, providing up to \$171.9 million for the continuation of 11 family support trial programs to 30 June 2024. This funding comprises \$41.4 million in 2020–21 and \$43.5 million per annum thereafter. The provision allows the Department of Communities and Justice to continue to test new models of support and verify promising early implementation results with a statistically significant volume of longer term outcomes data. The provision also supplements departmental budgets that recurrently fund existing family preservation programs across NSW with a funding commitment for 2020–21 of \$96.2 million.

These established programs deliver 3,577 program places each year to vulnerable families across all NSW DCJ districts. The effectiveness of family preservation

services in mitigating abuse, neglect and entries to care contributes to two Premier's Priorities relating to increased safety and permanency for children. In 2021, the suite of programs was streamlined into a single program structure comprising three program streams: Family Preservation, Intensive Family Preservation and Aboriginal Family Preservation.

From July 2021, NSW is commencing an incremental process of managed service change and broader system improvements. The planned improvements to outcomes-based data collection across the whole service system will enable comparative analysis of the effectiveness of combinations of program components under the new structure in contributing to reduced re-reports and entries to care.

NSW is also working with current Aboriginal service providers to design a family preservation model for Aboriginal families and scale up Aboriginal-led service provision.

For further information, see [Family preservation recommissioning](#).

Northern Territory: Supported accommodation for Care Leavers in Darwin

To help support young people transitioning towards independence and recognising the importance of stable housing, the Northern Territory Government implemented a Supported Accommodation for Care Leavers program. Funds were allocated over four years from 2018–19 to establish a housing brokerage and support service initially focused in Darwin. Service delivery commenced in June 2019, with Mission Australia providing the tenancy component

of the program and Anglicare NT offering the support element. Some 23 applications were received by the end of June 2020. The program has now been expanded to include Katherine. Mission Australia and Anglicare NT work with each individual to source appropriate housing and transition them into a tenancy under the program. The service is available for young people who have left care up until they are 25 years old.

Northern Territory health initiatives

Healthy Under 5 Kids Partnering with Families Program (HU5K-PF)

The HU5K-PF program is a universal standardised well child and family health program for all NT families with children 0–5 years of age. The program provides a platform that builds on partnerships between the family and the health professional, and provides the care and support needed to empower families to become confident parents and caregivers. The program aims to support optimal child health and development and the best opportunity to succeed in life. The program's schedule enhances the likelihood of embedding a therapeutic relationship with the parents/carers and at the same time provides the opportunity to regularly identify and intervene early when issues are identified. At the core of these key contacts are surveillance of the child's growth and development, parenting education and support, and health promotion.

The program was fully implemented by May 2019 throughout all of the NT Health Primary Health Care Centres and is currently being implemented in a number of Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs) in the NT remote regions.

The Australian Nurse Family Partnership Program (ANFPP) and Maternal Early Childhood Sustained Home-visiting Program (MECSH)

are structured programs of sustained nurse home visiting for families at risk of poorer maternal and child health and development outcomes. The programs use a tiered service model, characterised by primary health care services and more specialised services that families may need. These programs have been implemented across NT regions, and are provided by the ACCHOs and NT Health. NT Health funds the delivery of MECSH by ACCHOs in the East Arnhem, Barkly and Big River regions through grants.

Addressing Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) in the Northern Territory 2018–2024

was released in 2018, with the main focus of this strategy being prevention. The NT FASD Strategy focuses on four key areas:

- broad awareness raising across the entire community
- initiatives that focus on adolescent females and women of child-bearing age pre-pregnancy
- improving availability of alcohol treatment for women (both pregnant and non-pregnant)
- support for new mothers once a baby is born.

The strategy is available on the Northern Territory Government [website](#).

The Territory Government supports the upskilling of staff currently situated in Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services in targeted regions in the NT to take on the additional function of coordinating FASD interventions. The Territory Government also supports the establishment of neurodevelopmental assessment clinics within Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services in targeted regions of the NT in collaboration with The Top End Health Service and Central Australia Health Service so that comprehensive assessments can be conducted by multidisciplinary teams.

The Hearing for Learning Initiative is a research project by the Menzies School of Health Service. The initiative will research

a community-based service enhancement model aiming at developing sustainable, culturally appropriate services to address ear and hearing health in Aboriginal children in the Northern Territory. The initiative is funded through a joint venture where funding is contributed by NT Health, the Australian Government and the Balnaves Foundation.

Consultation identified 20 remote communities that are interested in participating in the initiative. To be included in the research, communities must prioritise ear health and have a health centre, school and infrastructure to support training. Up to 100 casual trainees and 40 part-time Indigenous Ear Health Facilitators are proposed to be employed during the research. Each employed Ear Health Facilitator is expected to see 100 children every six months.

The Hearing Health Partnerships are a coordinated primary health response that employs local community members to work as part of the Department of Education's Families as First Teachers Program (FaFT) team to promote healthy hearing.

Families as First Teachers (FaFT) is an early learning and family support program for remote Aboriginal families, which aims to improve developmental outcomes for children by working with families and children prior to school entry. Four Hearing Health Partnership locations with FaFT began in 2019 in Katherine, Tennant Creek, Alice Springs and Palmerston.

Northern Territory education initiatives

Families as First Teachers Program – Ages and Stages Questionnaire – Talking about Raising Aboriginal Kids developmental screening tool:

An important element of the FaFT program is the implementation of the Ages and Stages Questionnaire – Talking about Raising Aboriginal Kids (ASQ-TRAK) developmental screening tool. It is used in FaFT to provide information about how a child’s development (across five developmental domains) is tracking for their age. FaFT staff work through ASQ-TRAK with families to identify a child’s strengths and abilities and areas where support or intervention is needed. This informs the FaFT program so that learning can be targeted, helps engage Aboriginal families in their children’s development, and deepens parents’ awareness of the importance of their children’s development. Developmental screening results for every child are shared between the community health clinic and FaFT. Children who score below a particular threshold are referred to the health clinic to triage and arrange paediatric appointments, the Community Allied Health Team, and/or the Department of Education Student Wellbeing and Inclusion Team. Ongoing communication and collaboration with the health clinic, relevant health professionals and the family ensure that individual children receive the support they need. In 2020–21 the ASQ-TRAK developmental screening tool was being implemented in 80% of NT FaFT programs.

Strong Young Parents Program:

The Young Mothers Strong Mothers program has been operating since 2016. In 2018, the Department of Education expanded to 10 programs across six sites and delivered both mothers and fathers programs. The Strong Young Parents Program is part of the Literacy for Parents Project funded under the National Partnership on Northern Territory Remote Aboriginal Investment. The Literacy for Parents Project is part of the Department of Education’s reform through the Indigenous Education Strategy 2015–24 and Starting Early for a Better Future strategy. The programs provide access to integrated and coordinated education, pregnancy and parenting care pathways across the Northern Territory, including promoting positive parenting attitudes and practices.

The program aims to re-engage parents into education as well as intervene early in a child’s life, even before birth, and strengthen the capacity of young parents to care for their children by providing them with wrap-around care. The program also provides access to services and educational information that addresses areas such as nutrition, financial management, parenting skills and hygiene and health to prevent or decrease risk factors in pregnancy for low birth weight.

The co-design and co-development of each program by community ensures it is delivered in a culturally safe and responsive way that meets the needs of the young parent participants, their children and community. The program works in

partnership with existing service providers within a community to improve outcomes for both children and young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents.

Child and Family Centres:

During 2019, 2020 and 2021, child and family centres offered a soft entry point for vulnerable and disadvantaged children into preschool and school by engaging children from birth, and their families, in quality, integrated early childhood education and care programs. The six Department of Education child and family centres are located in Yuendumu, Maningrida, Ngukurr, Gunbalanya, Palmerston and Alice Springs. The child and family centres facilitate early learning, family support and health service integration in these sites. The centres foster

place-based integrated services focused on supporting young children and their families, particularly Aboriginal, vulnerable and disadvantaged children and families.

The child and family centre model works to achieve community co-design, joined up service provision, sustainable local employment pathways and better education, health and social outcomes for young children. Partnerships with government and non-government agencies enable the delivery of integrated programs to the community such as early childhood education and care, early learning programs, child and maternal health, parenting programs and other community-based programs.

Northern Territory: Additional Child and Family Centres

The Reform Management Office in partnership with the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet Regional Network continued to engage with communities, ACCOs and their elected boards in sites across the NT to establish the 11 new Aboriginal Community Controlled Child and Family Centres. Each centre is unique according to its location but all work to a common model development in consultation with the Children and Families Tripartite Forum.

The centres are developed with local Aboriginal leaders and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, with local families encouraged to participate. The new centres established during 2018–19, 2019–20 and 2020–21 were

Big Rivers in Katherine, operated by Kalano Community Association, Marlungku-kari in Tennant Creek, operated by Julalikari Council Aboriginal Corporation, and Kalkarindji, operated by Gurindji Corporation. Work continues with Wadeye (Thamarrur Development Corporation), East Arnhem, Alice Springs and the northern suburbs of Darwin.

The model is successfully fostering collaborative and integrated services. School principals manage the overall operations of the centres in collaboration with a local advisory group, and everyday operations are managed by a centre manager and an Aboriginal coordinator. Long day-care services at the centres are regulated under the National Quality

Framework. Partnerships with government and non-government agencies enable the delivery of integrated programs to the community such as preschool, Families as First Teachers, crèche, play groups, Strong Women, Strong Babies, Strong Culture and Healthy Under 5s health checks.

A Child and Family Community Fund allocates resources to communities, with the centres to fund priorities for families of children from birth to five years old. The fund is open to on-the-ground initiatives in each community with a Child and Family Centre. The activities are chosen

by the local community. Activities funded in 2019–20 include:

- Baby Families and Schools Together (Baby FAST) program at Ngukurr
- Trauma-informed resources in Warlpiri language at Yuendumu
- revitalising Yuendumu parks to be more child-friendly and functional
- community laundromat at Gunbalanya
- Gunbalanya Young Family Program
- providing a reliable transport service for Big Rivers region using a 25–35 seater bus.

South Australia: Investing in their future

Safe and well is South Australia's plan for supporting families and protecting children. This sets out the actions the government is taking to support families at risk of entering the child protecting system to safely care for their children, protect children and young people from harm including when they are in care, and invest in young people in care and leaving care to provide them with opportunities for a bright future.

The third plank of *Safe and well* is operationalised through the *Investing in their future* initiative, a whole-of-government commitment that recognises the need to invest in children and young people in care and leaving care to provide them with opportunities to reach their full potential. The initiative is about more than meeting basic needs; it is about actively pursuing every opportunity for children and young people in

care and leaving care to have priority access to services that will help them achieve their personal best.

A key aspect of this is enabling priority access to a range of government services across a number of settings. This includes learning support and school enrolments, as well as health, dental, therapeutic support, transition to independence and recreational activities.

In February 2020, the Department for Child Protection (DCP) released the new *Investing in their future* initiative with a refreshed and expanded list of services.

Since that time, DCP has led the further expansion of the *Investing in their future* initiative through a partnering approach with key agencies.

This has delivered priority access to additional services and programs and extended eligibility of some services to care leavers, up to the age of 25 including:

- increased access to dental services through fee waivers for emergency after hours dental care, fee capped orthodontic treatment, and free or discounted services for eligible care leavers from 17 to 25
- free ambulance cover until 21 years of age
- access to public sector traineeships.

Through the new partnering approach, DCP has engaged with partners across a wider spectrum of sectors, including with state and Commonwealth governments, and non-government and philanthropic

organisations, securing new opportunities for children and young people in care and leaving care.

Investing in their future has now evolved into a deliberate and active program of work promoted through a centralised online hub on the DCP website. The online hub provides information about the services available for which children and young people in care and care leavers are eligible to receive priority access. The online hub also provides an avenue for potential new partners to be engaged and register their interest in providing priority access to children and young people in care.

The *Investing in their future* online hub can be found on the [South Australian Government's website](#).

South Australia: Supporting young people into adulthood

Stability in Foster Care program

South Australia was an early adopter of the Homestretch approach, establishing the Stability in Foster Care program, which commenced in January 2019 and provides carer payments for eligible young people in foster and kinship care from ages 18 to 21. The payment enables young people in care to remain with their foster or kinship carer up to the age of 21 years, providing greater stability and opportunities for them to thrive and reach their full potential.

A second program – the Over 18 Education Initiative – provides carers of young people over 18 who are undertaking

study with a carer subsidy and a quarterly education grant.

More information can be found on the [South Australian Government's website](#).

Next steps

Recognising that some young people leaving residential care may need support, the state Government committed \$2.7 million over 3.5 years to trial a new program. The Next Steps Pilot Program will provide support to a minimum of 20 young people aged 17.5 to 21 years as they move into adult life and independence.

The pilot program is for young people who:

- are living in departmental residential care in the Adelaide metropolitan area, and
- have been assessed by departmental staff as having complex needs, and
- are at risk of homelessness.

Young people may receive case management, service coordination and practical support to help them adapt to adult life, including:

- obtaining and sustaining accommodation
- building life skills
- participating in education and training, employment and/or other suitable activities
- building and maintaining networks and community connections.

Next Steps is operated by Catholic Centacare Family Services in partnership with Housing Choices SA and Aboriginal Sobriety Group and commenced in January 2022. The program will operate until June 2025 and will be evaluated.

Building skills to live independently

DCP has designed and commissioned a new Supported Independent Living Services (SILS) model. The model provides individualised support to help young people in care to develop the skills to live independently and prepare for adult life. This includes support with tasks

such as self-care, budgeting and home management, and assistance to access mainstream services, including employment and housing, as well as connecting young people with post-care services.

The new SILS model caters for a broader range of young people aged 16–17 years and is more responsive to the needs of specific groups, including those with complex needs. A key component of the new model is to better support Aboriginal young people to maintain family and cultural connections and to strengthen Aboriginal identity.

SILS support workers provide individualised in-reach support using a step-up/step-down model of care. Service providers are required to provide a baseline service for all young people, which is adjusted according to individual needs and the characteristics of the particular target group. This allows for responsive increases and decreases in direct support hours, to meet the individual needs of young people.

A panel of NGO providers has been appointed and commenced offering services under the new model from 1 July 2021.

The new model has been an important step forward in South Australia's focus on improving outcomes for young people transitioning from care.

More information can be found on the [South Australian Government's website](#).

South Australia: Improving educational outcomes of children and young people in care

A key partnership for supporting the active participation and learning achievement of children and young people in care in South Australian government preschools and schools has seen a new commitment between the Department for Child Protection (DCP) and the Department for Education. A joint Plan of Action focused on enhancing the way DCP and the Department for Education work together with the collective aim of improving educational outcomes for children and young people in care across six key focus areas:

- access and engagement with education
- services and supports for learning
- planning for education achievement
- child-centred collaboration
- collecting and sharing data to inform practice
- communication and capacity building.

Having a joint Plan of Action has promoted a strong, ongoing dialogue between the two departments, driving a continued focus on service improvement reforms for children and young people in care and creating opportunities for identifying new initiatives. The plan has also resulted in investment in professional development and training for trauma-informed practice in education for education staff and school communities. This has supported the development of learning environments that are inclusive and responsive to the needs of students experiencing trauma, including children and

young people in care. Related initiatives are listed below:

- A Children in Care Service was established in the Department for Education to provide expert advice and address barriers that children and young people in care face with their education. This service has increased awareness within schools of the needs of children in care and connected principals, teachers and caseworkers with practical supports available within the education systems.
- Education Champions have been established across DCP to promote the focus on education, as well as supporting DCP staff in planning for successful learning outcomes for children and young people in care.
- All children and young people in care attending a government preschool or school are now expected to have a One Plan. This is a personalised learning plan setting out how a child's inclusion and achievement will be supported, and enables carers and caseworkers to have input in this process.
- In March 2021, the Department for Education made a new commitment of funding for children and young people in care, in addition to the increase in funding that has arisen from the Department for Education's Inclusive Education Support Program (IESP). The new funding is to support children in care who are not already receiving individualised funding, at key transition points in their

schooling, such as starting preschool, preschool to primary school transition, primary school to high school transition, and changing school or preschool. All schools and preschools that enrol a new child or student who is a child in care, or have an existing child or student who transitions into care, will be eligible for the transition funding.

- A one-off funding boost has also been provided to schools to support children and young people in care who are already enrolled in their school. Both new funding

sources can be used at the discretion of the school to support the child or young person in care in a variety of ways, including to help a child settle into their new school, and invest in relevant training for staff, or respond to a child's needs.

The joint Plan of Action has cemented the partnership between the two departments and shown the benefits that can be realised through this approach. A new Joint Plan of Action was developed for 2022.

South Australia: Disability and Development Services Program

Over the past three years, the Department for Child Protection (DCP) has strengthened its focus on the needs of children and young people in care with disabilities and developmental delay through the recruitment of a team of staff with specialist disability and therapeutic expertise. Commencing in July 2018, the Disability and Development Services Program provides specialist disability experts who work across the agency to help identify children and young people with a disability and ensure they access services that best support their needs.

This includes supporting eligible children and young people in care to access a National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) plan that is appropriate to their specific needs and engaging with registered NDIS providers to deliver the specialist services they require. This work is led by the Regional Disability Team, comprising allied health professionals

with expertise and experience supporting children with disability and developmental delay. These staff help caseworkers navigate the NDIS for their clients and identify transition plans so that young people will have their disability support needs met as they leave care.

During 2019–20, the Disability and Development Services Program was expanded, with two new teams providing clinical advice to support care provision that is responsive to the needs of children and young people with disability and developmental delay, including those not eligible for the NDIS. These two new teams are:

- the Specialist Services Team, which supports residential care services to be responsive to the needs of children and young people with disability and developmental delay

- the Therapeutic Carer Support Team, which provides support to family-based carers to understand and respond to the developmental needs of the children and young people in their care.

These teams are positioned centrally within DCP to work across the department.

The Disability and Development Services Program has been central to ensuring that children and young people in care who are eligible for NDIS assistance are accessing the scheme.

South Australia: DCP School Scholarships Program

The DCP School Scholarship Program is part of the *Investing in their futures* initiative. In a first for South Australia, DCP has partnered with non-government and independent schools to offer scholarships to children and young people in care, enabling them to attend at no cost.

The DCP School Scholarship Program recognises that a quality education is foundational to children and young people in care looking forward to a bright future. For some, attending a non-government school can provide educational opportunities that best reflect their particular talents and aspirations.

An inaugural scholarship program commenced in 2020 in partnership with Catholic Education South Australia. Initially comprising 100 scholarships, the program was so successful that these were fully allocated in the first six months, leading to Catholic Education South Australia increasing the number of scholarships available.

There are now over 300 scholarships children and young people in care who have received a scholarship from Catholic

Education South Australia. These give children and young people in care access to education at any Catholic primary or secondary school in the state. In addition to free tuition, a scholarship provides a child or young person in care with learning supports, uniforms, books, excursions and extracurricular activities, and continues each year until they complete year 12.

Feedback from students and carers shows that they value being able to select a school that offers a specific curriculum or learning environment. In some instances, the scholarships have enabled children in care to attend the same schools as other children in their foster family.

DCP has since extended the program to include other non-government and independent primary and secondary schools.

The DCP School Scholarship Program is an exciting innovation to increase the educational opportunities available to children and young people in care and increase their likelihood of a successful transition to adulthood.

Case study – Victoria: Home Stretch

Home Stretch is delivered under Better Futures and was rolled out across Victoria in 2019. Home Stretch offers young people a more gradual and supported transition from care.

Through Home Stretch, young people and their kinship carer, foster carer or permanent carer have the option of the young person remaining with them up to the age of 21 years, supported by an allowance. Young people leaving residential care, kinship care, foster care, or permanent care can access an allowance to support them with housing and associated costs up to the age of 21.

Home Stretch includes an allowance, case work and flexible funding.

In January 2021, Victoria was the first Australian jurisdiction to make extended care universal – meaning all young people leaving foster, kinship and residential care can receive a more gradual and supported transition to adulthood through Home Stretch. Through the Victorian Budget 2021–22, Better Futures and Home Stretch were expanded to include young people on permanent care orders.

In June 2021, the Victorian Government announced plans to enshrine extended support for young Victorians leaving care in legislation, ensuring that the landmark Home Stretch program continues to assist vulnerable young people for years to come.

Home Stretch is supporting care leavers such as 19-year-old Alkira, who is now taking her next steps, confident in the knowledge she can cover rent. With the support of her Better Futures case worker, Alkira recently enrolled in university, and hopes to become a primary school teacher.

[This film with Alkira](#) illustrates the practical help Home Stretch provides to young people leaving care.

Western Australia: Home Stretch trial

In 2018, the Western Australian Department of Communities (Communities) partnered with Anglicare WA to co-design a service delivery model of enhanced access to services and supports for young people transitioning from out-of-home care to independent adulthood aged between 18 and 21 years.

The co-design process involved young people who have experienced leaving care, community service organisations, and academics.

The Home Stretch WA trial commenced in 2019 in the Fremantle child protection district, in the Perth metropolitan area and will conclude in December 2022.

The Home Stretch WA trial aims to assist young people to transition to independence with stable accommodation and a clear pathway to education and employment. This includes mentoring and practical assistance, so they have every opportunity to succeed.

Safe and stable accommodation is a cornerstone of the service delivery model, along with dedicated, intensive youth work support, brokerage funding to be used for both emergency and aspirational purposes, and support circles of trusted people who are committed to the young person and their journey to independence.

The key cohorts in the trial include:

- young people who have experienced foster or family care
- young people who have experienced residential care arrangements and/or homelessness
- Aboriginal young people
- young parents.

Supports offered to participants have included:

- obtaining safe and stable accommodation
- enrolling in further education and connecting to voluntary work opportunities
- mapping out social networks, connecting with family, and identifying where to access supports in the local community
- re-engaging with health services to support existing medical conditions
- clearing existing debts and improving financial skills.

AnglicareWA contracted Curtin University to conduct an evaluation of the trial. Early insights from this evaluation suggest that this approach to post-care support services shows significant promise, and that the Home Stretch WA trial will provide significant groundwork for guiding future reform of the post-care support system in Western Australia.

In January 2021, the Western Australian Labor Government announced a \$37.2 million election commitment to make Home Stretch permanent.

Case study – Western Australia: Home Stretch trial

The Home Stretch WA trial is an innovative model of service delivery for young people leaving out-of-home care aged 18 to 21. This intensive support model was co-designed by young people with an experience of leaving care, community service organisations, and academics, in partnership with Anglicare WA and the Western Australian Department of Communities (Communities).

The Home Stretch approach places a strong emphasis on developing the skills required for independence, rather than simply 'doing for'. For this reason, the experienced youth workers in the trial are known as transition coaches.

Safe and stable accommodation is the cornerstone of the Home Stretch model. Young people who are able to remain in their current foster or family care arrangement after they turn 18 are supported through the continuation of the Basic Carer Subsidy, which is paid to their carer. A housing subsidy is available to support young people who cannot or do not wish to remain in their current placement when they leave care.

The Home Stretch WA trial provides a holistic approach to supporting young people, assisting them to develop their sense of agency and independence, and personal accountability. Transition coaches walk alongside the young person and provide intensive support across all domains of wellbeing, including housing, employment, education and training, life skills, connections to culture, positive supports, and role models.

The Home Stretch WA trial has 15 places for young people in the Fremantle child protection district in Perth, Western Australia. The trial operates on an opt-in, opt-out basis, meaning young people can return to the trial for support as they need it. At 30 June 2021, 13 young people were actively participating in the trial, four of whom were Aboriginal.

Since the Home Stretch WA trial commenced in 2019, Home Stretch transition coaches have helped participants identify key areas of their lives that they wanted to improve, and have supported them with:

- options to move into more safe and stable accommodation
- re-engaging with health and mental health services and supports
- enrolling in education and training
- updating resumes and applying for jobs
- budgeting and money management skills to assist with paying outstanding debts
- providing aspirational brokerage to assist with the purchase of items that will support positive outcomes, such as laptops, drivers licence and equipment for work or training
- mapping social networks and helping to identify where supports can be accessed in the community.

Early insights from the trial have suggested that this model of intensive service delivery shows significant promise, and the trial is funded until December 2022.

Tasmania: Transition to Independence Program

The Tasmanian Government introduced the *Generational Change for Children and Families* policy in June 2018. This policy committed \$3 million over a period of three years to provide extended care to children in out-of-home care up to a maximum age of 21 years. This resulted in the implementation of the Transition to Independence (T2i) program to support young adults (up to their 21st birthday) transitioning from out-of-home care to make a successful transition to adulthood. The program consists of Extended Carer Payments (from July 2018) and a case coordination/support model (from August 2020).

Participation in T2i is voluntary and foster carers, formal kinship carers and third-party guardians are able to apply for Extended Carer Payments to enable the young person

to remain supported in their family-based placement until they reach the age of 21.

T2i Advisers are also available to work with the young adults to assist them in developing goals for their future, including supporting them into safe, sustainable housing and arranging therapeutic support when needed. Brokerage is also available to build relationships and provide holistic support based on the young person's own future goals.

The *Generational Change for Children and Families* policy also included an additional commitment to provide incentive payments of \$2,500 to both the foster carer and young person upon successful completion of the young person's Tasmanian Certificate of Education in Year 12 or equivalent.

Case study – Tasmania: Transition to Independence Program

The Transition to Independence Program (T2i) focuses on engaging with young people aged between 17 and 21 years to help them transition from out-of-home care to independence. T2i is a voluntary program which provides for Extended Carer Payments up to the age of 21 as well as the opportunity for young people to engage with the T2i Advisers to help develop their own goals and build their capacity for independent living. The program formally commenced in Tasmania in August 2020, although the Extended Carer Payments component has been available since July 2018.

Case study

Chloe* had been in state care from 2012. She turned 18 in early 2020. Chloe commenced formal engagement with T2i under the case coordination model in November 2020. Key areas of focus for Chloe for engagement with T2i included accommodation, budgeting and appropriate social behaviour in the community and with her family. Chloe found it difficult to engage initially and struggled with goal setting and maintaining contact with services.

At that time, Chloe and her partner were being evicted from their home due to a breach of their tenancy agreement and had pending criminal charges. Chloe planned on camping over the summer to save money and 'start over'. By January 2021, Chloe had accrued a large debt with unofficial lenders as well as a Housing Tasmania debt, precluding her from obtaining another Housing property. Despite this, she was unable to work with her T2i Adviser on budgeting and missed several appointments with Housing even when supported to attend. Her engagement with T2i throughout this time was largely superficial as a result of its being crisis driven.

In late February 2021, Chloe relocated within the state to camp in a relative's back yard. The T2i Adviser noted concerns that Chloe was the victim of verbal and emotional abuse in her relationship. With the support of the T2i Adviser and her cousin, Chloe was able to link in with a general practitioner and reconnect with Housing. The T2i worker spoke with Chloe about alternative housing options where she could live by herself in a 'pod' available to young people who are leaving the out-of-home care system. Chloe agreed that this would be a positive change and was accepted to this program. She now has a three-month lease and has engaged positively with the on-site mentor and the T2i Adviser. She is now able to engage more meaningfully to work on longer term goals relating to her health. She is also open to assistance with financial budgeting. As part of case coordination within T2i, the adviser continues to engage with Chloe and her support network to help her achieve her goals and independence.

(*Chloe's real name has not been used for privacy reasons.)

Australian Government: Research to address drivers of entry into child protection system

In 2020 the Department of Social Services contracted the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) to deliver on Action 2.3: to undertake research into what works to address key drivers of entry into child protection systems. The objective of Action 2.3 was to develop best practice knowledge addressing the drivers of entry into child protection systems.

The purpose of the project was to explore ways to mitigate early parenthood among young people with experience of the care system, this being a driver of further contact with the child protection system.

The research project consisted of three main components: a rapid review of Australian and international literature; qualitative fieldwork with key stakeholders, including experts, researchers, practitioners and young parents; and a final report.

The key objectives of the project were to determine:

- to what extent young people with experience of ‘contact’ with the care

system become young parents (evident both domestically and internationally)

- the outcomes for this cohort, and their children
- the support needs of the cohort, and the programs and supports shown to be effective for this cohort (domestically and internationally).

The rapid review identified a number of points that provide an opportunity, through appropriate supports, to change the trajectory for both parents and their children. The first was the prevention of pregnancy through targeted sex education and provision of contraception; the second was prevention of child protection interaction through ongoing holistic support commencing at pregnancy and continuing through care; and the third was prevention of repeat removals through intensive support for the parents.

The final report, *Showing the Light: Supporting Young Parents with Experience of the Care System*, was delivered to the Department of Social Services in July 2021 and published on its [website](#).

Northern Territory: Child Youth Development Research Partnership

The Northern Territory Government has partnered with the Menzies School of Health Research in a significant data linkage project undertaken by the Centre for Child Development and Education, Child Youth Development Research Partnership (CYDRP).

CYDRP has three main research themes using linked Northern Territory Government data on: Developmental Health; Child Protection and Family Support; and Applied Education.

South Australia: Child and Family Support System

Reforming South Australia's early intervention and prevention of child abuse and neglect services has been a major state Government strategy over several years, following the recommendations of the 2016 Child Protection Systems Royal Commission.

The Child and Family Support System (CYSS) is the result of major re-design of government and non-government commissioned services that support families to safely care for their children and reduce the need for tertiary child protection involvement.

The Child and Family Support System (CYSS) is made up of a spectrum of services able to respond to different degrees of complexity and safety concerns of children and families. These services span from community capacity building through to intensive case management and prioritise:

- infants at risk
- young parents
- adolescents with complex trauma
- Aboriginal families with multiple and complex needs.

A key component has been investment in Intensive Family Services to deliver new, tailored support services for families whose children are at high risk of entering care, those experiencing domestic violence,

mental illness and drug and alcohol addiction, and their children.

As well, a number of new pilot programs are being trialled and implemented to test practice and provide learnings to better improve support services for families at risk of entering the child protection system, or with open child protection cases.

These include:

- the *Safe Kids, Families Together* program in the northern suburbs run by Anglicare SA and *Taikurtirna Tirra-apingi*, operated by Kornar Winmil Yunti (KWY) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Services, which focus on supporting parents by fostering problem-solving skills to prevent children coming into care
- *Resilient Families*, operated by the Benevolent Society, which works with families in their own homes to focus on their particular safety concerns and risk factors
- *Breathing Space*, which offers intensive case management support to young women who have had a child removed by the child protection system with the aim of preventing intergenerational child protection involvement.

More information about the Child and Family Support System can be found on the [South Australian Government's website](#).

Enhancing Practice – South Australian Department for Child Protection PhD Research Program

A new scholarship program was established jointly by the Department for Child Protection, the Australian Centre for Child Protection (ACCP) and the University of South Australia to support 10 scholarships to deliver a body of research with a focus on enhancing child protection practice.

The Enhancing Practice – South Australian Department for Child Protection PhD Research Program operates under the senior leadership and oversight of the ACCP’s leadership team, who are

internationally recognised child protection experts, and DCP practice experts.

Commencing in September 2020, the program offers 10 scholarships to enable PhD students to research key topics over a three-year period. Topics being considered include responding to trauma, building therapeutic practice, enhancing reunification practice and building the capacity of the child protection workforce to better respond to Aboriginal children and their families.

The South Australian Government has invested in this research initiative partnership as a valuable way to inform child protection practice, to build the evidence base and build the bridge between research and practice.

Queensland: Establishment of the Chief Practitioner

In 2020–21 Queensland’s first Chief Practitioner was established to lead child protection and case management strategies focusing on ongoing, evidence-based practice improvements. This initiative also relates to National Priority Area 4.

Further information: [DCYJMA website – Qld Govt response to the death of Mason Jet Lee](#).

Queensland: Next Step Plus program

The Next Step Plus program, established in 2019–20, provides supports for young people (15–25 years) as they transition from care and links vulnerable young people with supports, such as housing, employment and access to government entitlements.

Further information: [Next Step Plus](#).

Queensland: Supporting Families Changing Futures 2019–2023

This five-year whole-of-government reform strategy for the final stage of the 10-year child and family reform program centres on wellbeing outcomes – safety, security, stability, healthy, learning, earning, development, participation, belonging

and identity. The strategy relates also to National Priority Area 3.

Further information: [Supporting Families Changing Futures 2019–2023](#).

Queensland: Family and Child Connect

Queensland has funded non-government community-based intake and referral services that provide an additional pathway for referring concerns about the wellbeing of children and their families. Family and Child Connect supports vulnerable families

by assessing their needs and referring them to the most appropriate support service/s.

Further information: [Family and Child Connect – Families](#).

Queensland: Intensive Family Support Services

These critical services respond to families experiencing vulnerability with children and young people who are at risk of involvement in the statutory child protection system. Intensive Family Support is a consent-based program providing case management

for families who agree to engage with the service.

Further information: [Intensive family support program](#).

Queensland: Child Protection Amendment Bill 2017

Priority access to housing for young people leaving care was improved for young people leaving care through the *Child Protection Amendment Bill 2017*. The relevant amendment enables the sharing of information across agencies to support the

transition to independence for young people up to 25 years of age.

Further information: [Child Protection Reform Amendment Bill 2017](#) and [Help for young people transitioning to independence](#).

Queensland: A Great Start for All Queensland Children: An early years plan for Queensland

This Early Years Plan outlines actions the Queensland Government is taking to support Queensland children's early learning, health and wellbeing as they grow: from their first 1,000 days, as they branch out into the wider world, and then

through a successful transition into their first years of schooling. The plan also includes information to help families and communities support children as they progress through these stages.

Further information: [Early Years Plan](#).

Queensland: Right@home

In 2018, Children's Health Queensland (CHQ) entered an agreement with the Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs to implement an intensive and targeted home visiting program: right@home. The right@home program

is an evidence-informed, sustained nurse home visiting program that has been proven to result in sustained maternal mental health and parenting enablement outcomes.

Queensland: Connecting Care to Recovery

Under *Connecting Care to Recovery 2016–2021: A plan for Queensland's State funded mental health, alcohol and other drug services*, more than \$87 million has been committed for new services for children, young people, and their families.

As part of this, more than \$31 million in new investment has been allocated over five years for enhancements in perinatal and infant mental health (PIMH) services, including the establishment of the first public mother–baby four-bed mental health unit (Lavender Unit) at the Gold Coast

University Hospital, additional specialist PIMH community positions and the rollout of the Together in Mind Day Program across Queensland, including Mater Health, an e-PIMH telepsychiatry service, Peach Tree peer-led service and the Early Social Emotional Wellbeing service in Ipswich.

Further information: [Connecting care to recovery 2016–2021: A plan for Queensland's State-funded mental health, alcohol and other drug services](#) and [Budget 2020–21 – Budget Statement Women](#).

Western Australia: Towards Independent Adulthood Trial

In 2017, Western Australia was selected as the jurisdiction for the trial location for the three-year Towards Independent Adulthood (TIA) trial.

The trial was an initiative to help young people in out-of-home care (OOHC) to thrive into adulthood.

The trial was funded by the Commonwealth Department of Social Services (DSS). It was supported by a memorandum of understanding between that department and the Western Australian Department of Communities (Communities).

The aim of the trial was to enhance service provision to young people transitioning from OOHC by delivering intensive one-on-one mentoring and supports to improve their social and economic outcomes.

DSS contracted Curtin University (Western Australia) to provide consultancy services to help develop the service model. This included assessing the evidence for programs in the OOHC space that had been evaluated and reviewing the trial program logic and cultural suitability and safety to optimise its integrity and conduct co-production workshops with key stakeholders.

The trial model addressed eight life domains identified for good practice in supporting the transition of young people from OOHC, with a particular focus on education, training, and employment.

The trial was delivered in metropolitan Perth and the Peel, Wheatbelt and South West regions of WA. It commenced on 1 July 2017 and concluded on 30 June 2020.

Wanslea Family Services (Wanslea) was contracted to deliver the service model in collaboration with Communities. Wanslea youth workers provided intensive holistic support to around 80 young people who were aged 16 to 17 years at commencement of the trial, and were on long-term protection orders. Participation was voluntary and young people provided informed consent to participate.

DSS commissioned ACIL Allen Consulting, in partnership with the Social Research Centre, to undertake an evaluation of the trial.

The evaluation found the trial improved access to opportunities and provided a more seamless transition for participants across several areas, including housing stability, employment, education, relationships and support networks, and life skills.

Success factors regarding the achievement of outcomes included a dedicated and capable workforce, effective collaboration across government and non-government service providers, resourcing and case load of youth workers, and the independent operation of the model outside the formal child protection system.

The evaluation found the key benefit identified by participants was their ongoing relationship with their youth worker. Most participants valued the emotional and moral

support provided through these relationships and believed this had positively contributed to their progress.

The findings largely reinforced the collective evidence about good practice in this area and confirmed that the range of similar initiatives in other jurisdictions are drawing

on this evidence base to adapt leaving care programs to their respective contexts and service systems.

Information about the trial, including a copy of the evaluation report, can be found on the [Department of Social Services website](#).

Department of Social Services: Summary of key findings of the TIA trial evaluation

Highlighted below are key findings from the TIA trial evaluation:

- An assessment of the benefits related to justice, health, employment and housing outcomes, made over the one-year period following the trial, estimated that for every \$1 invested in the trial, \$1.80 in benefits was returned. The estimated returns increase significantly if the assessment period is extended to three and five years post-trial.
- The level of active engagement remained higher for females compared to males, non-Aboriginal young people compared to Aboriginal young people and in regional areas compared to metropolitan. Feedback from young people suggested that level of engagement was not necessarily a gauge of level of benefit and that it was possible for some participants to receive initial guidance to give them the confidence to move towards adulthood.
- Young people with complex needs were more likely to need intensive support services to assist in their transition out of care, but if there was instability in their personal circumstances they were also more likely to disengage from programs that were offered. Those with complex needs may include those experiencing disability or mental health challenges, are First Nations people, or those who live in rural and remote areas and experience high levels of disadvantage.
- Participants who were most engaged with the trial were also often those with the most stable circumstances or lower levels of need. If there was instability in their personal circumstances they were also more likely to disengage from programs that were offered.
- Trial participants with complex needs and/or higher levels of disadvantage required longer term intensive support than that offered through the trial.
- There is an existing gap in services and supports for this cohort, in particular the need for accommodation and case management support. Effectiveness of jurisdictions providing appropriate support can be hindered by availability of services, or high demand on services and funding, including housing, therapeutic and mental health.

- Success factors related to the achievement of outcomes include a dedicated, capable workforce, effective collaboration between the leaving care service provider and government, the resourcing and case load, and operation outside the formal child protection system.

Case study – National Coalition: Towards Independent Adulthood trial

Laura is a 20-year-old Indigenous woman, who initially connected frequently with her youth worker at the commencement of the TIA Trial in 2017. Laura moved from her supported placement, while still in care, to live with her boyfriend, spending two years couch surfing and transient. Laura's engagement was intermittent and crisis-based, as it became evident that Laura was also managing a violent and volatile relationship.

During the two-year period Laura was couch surfing, a number of support mechanisms were provided during and outside of the trial. Laura's youth worker made contact by Facebook Messenger each week, providing resources, emergency contacts, offer of support and advice. This method of contact continued to keep Laura connected, as there was no other means of communication, and it is proving to be the most effective method of communication for young people experiencing homelessness and domestic violence. Despite minimal engagement with Laura, the consistent communication kept the opportunity for re-engagement open throughout the trial.

When Laura's partner was incarcerated, Laura reached out to her youth worker. Wanslea and the Department of Communities were unaware of the nature of Laura's relationship. This became known only as Laura's level of engagement with the trial and her workers developed. Laura identified that it was hard to focus on her future while she was in unstable accommodation. The relationship also impacted Laura's capacity to engage in the intensive case management model, which resulted in long-term transience due to the need for consistent engagement to secure housing (crisis, supported, public and private).

Since maintaining regular engagement with her youth worker, Laura has obtained 100-point identification (birth certificate, passport) to progress with an application for priority housing. With a one-year waiting time for public housing, Laura and her youth worker have focused on applications for supported housing options.

Laura has commenced study, a Certificate II in Business with the Wirrapunda Foundation, building on increasing Laura's support network with a foundation mentor and course lecturer. The foundation works directly with the mining industry for employment pathways. Laura has been interviewed for a fly-in fly-out position with Roy Hill in the north of the state, which she will commence once she has achieved her certificate.

Commencing study has increased Laura's eligibility for supported housing options and she is now wait-listed for Foyer Oxford (a supported accommodation provider) – providing stability with a two-year tenancy, building a rental history and increasing community supports with the appointment of a housing mentor. The Foyer tenancy will provide a platform for Laura to develop her independent living skills and increase her knowledge about her rights and responsibilities as a tenant.

Laura has entered into a time-to-pay arrangement to address an accumulation of Transperth fines, which prevent young people from achieving their driver's licence. Laura is now having weekly driving lessons with the goal to purchase her own vehicle by the end of 2021.

Being proactive about planning for her future has allowed Laura to consider other aspects of her life she would like to see change. Laura has used cannabis on a daily basis to manage trauma from her childhood, grief from the death of her mother and, more recently, experiencing physical and verbal abuse in her relationship. Laura is open to engaging with therapy to work through the significant impact these experiences have had on her mental health.

Laura has been supported by her youth worker with referrals to culturally aware, youth-specific clinical therapeutic options and continues to be supported while on the waiting list. Laura's youth worker makes contact weekly to check in on her progress, provide informal counselling and ensure she is connected with the therapy she will continue to engage in.

With the long-term goal of a career in the mining industry, Laura is reducing her cannabis use and plans to be a role model for her family and community, and buy her own house.

Case study – New South Wales: 'This program helped me get my patience back' – Multisystemic Therapy for Child Abuse and Neglect (MST-CAN®)

Nicky is a mother of seven children aged nine to 31. Nicky was referred to the MST-CAN® program following a history of substance use and her children not attending school or being adequately monitored. Two of Nicky's children had been removed from Nicky's care, one child was at home, and another in juvenile detention. At first, Nicky found the program difficult as she had spent more than 25 years struggling with

self-control. The children were also making poor decisions because Nicky was living a separate life. One of her children threatened suicide.

The MST-CAN® therapist made sure to explain things in a way that was easy to understand and culturally appropriate. The therapist adapted her teachings to the family's unique characteristics and made use of the family's strengths to encourage change. MST-CAN® works by focusing on how a family interacts and finding out the main drivers of target behaviours. In Nicky's case it built upon strengths and taught problem-solving skills, making her family more self-sufficient after the end of treatment.

Nicky says that she is now back to the person she was before drugs and feels like herself again. Nicky's oldest daughter previously had no contact. They are now talking again and visiting each other. Nicky's family is now back together and the younger children go to school and are doing well. Nicky is now more actively involved with the school and the kids now feel like they can count on her again.

'Before MST-CAN I felt like I was holding my breath. Now I can breathe again. My therapist Nicolle was persistent and we had a lot of laughs.'

The child who had been in juvenile detention was also released and Nicky was able to set up a behavioural plan for him and the other children to follow. This plan also met the stipulations put forth by the magistrate. Nicky secured employment through her work with MST-CAN®. She had not been able to hold down a stable job previously. She never thought she would have a job and she loves working, earning money, feeling good about herself, and is a hard worker.

Now if her at-risk child threatens suicide again, Nicky has a stable safety plan she can implement through her work with MST-CAN®. Nicky and her therapist worked together to create plans to deal with challenging behaviours and Nicky was eventually able to solve problems on her own.

Nicky now spends time with her grandkids and they love her.

'This program helped me get my patience back.'

A [testimonial video](#) for MST-CAN provides further information.

PRIORITY AREA 3:

Improving outcomes for children in out of home care by enhancing placement stability through reunification and other permanent care options

Objective 1 – Public reporting of permanency outcome for children in out-of-home care

Objective 2 – Timely and consistent decision making for permanency in out-of-home care

Objective 3 – Sufficient carers with the right skills and support

Australian Government: Public reporting

A national Permanency Outcomes Performance Framework was developed and endorsed by the Children and Families Secretaries (CAFS) group in 2019, alongside a commitment to publicly report on a range of indicators.

Using data supplied by states and territories, a set of 15 permanency indicators have

been published annually on the AIHW website, commencing with 2018–19 data: [Child protection Australia, Report editions – Australian Institute of Health and Welfare \(aihw.gov.au\)](#). Work is ongoing with states, territories and the Australian Government to drive continuous improvement in data collection and reporting.

Australian Government: Evidence review: timely decision making for permanency

In June 2019 the Department of Social Services commissioned the Australian Institute of Families Studies (AIFS) to deliver an evidence review on timely decision-making and outcomes for children in out-of-home care. The review was

delivered in June 2019 and published shortly afterward on the department's website: [Timely decision making and outcomes for children in out-of-home care | Department of Social Services, Australian Government \(dss.gov.au\)](#).

Australian Capital Territory: Progressing adoption reform

On 13 August 2020, the Adoption Amendment Bill 2020 was passed in the ACT Legislative Assembly. The Bill made amendments to the *Adoption Act 1993* to ensure the legislation reflects what we know about child wellbeing and development to guide the court's assessment of 'best interests' for a child or young person. Further, the changes place the child's best interests at the centre of decisions about dispensing with parental consent for adoption. The reform work also enables

an adult adoption to go ahead, even if the adoptive family and the adult being adopted do not both live in the ACT.

This legislative reform completed the ACT Government's response to recommendation 3 from the Domestic Adoptions Taskforce, which asked the ACT Government to explore the dispensing with consent provisions in the *Adoption Act 1993*. Implementation of all six of the taskforce's recommendations is now complete.

Case study – Australian Capital Territory: Safe and Connected Youth

Since October 2019, the ACT Government has worked in partnership with Northside Community Service, Woden Community Service, Conflict Resolution Service, and the Youth Coalition of the ACT to deliver the Safe and Connected Youth project. It aims to address the service gap for children and young people under 16 and their families who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

The Safe and Connected Youth project assisted Ryan*, who was 14 years old and experiencing conflict with his parents and step-parents, leading him to move in and out of homelessness with his girlfriend, Lucy*. A Safe and Connected Youth Project Therapeutic Care Worker (TCW) provided support to Ryan, his parents and step-parents, and his sister.

As family conflict escalated with an increasing possibility of domestic and family violence occurring, the TCW engaged Marymead to provide temporary accommodation to Ryan and Lucy for two nights. This safe and supported respite from the family home was critical to de-escalating the situation for Ryan and his family members. With active support from Marymead staff and the TCW during this time, this break provided an opportunity for Ryan and his family members to individually reflect on the impact of their family conflict, while not under the pressure of the home environment.

With the support of staff during his time with Marymead, Ryan was able to identify mental health concerns he was experiencing and accessed support for this through ACT Health mental health services. This prompted Ryan to reduce his current drug use.

Following the combination of active support and respite accommodation, Ryan and his family are open to participating in family mediation. Ryan and Lucy both returned home to their families. Upon Ryan's return home, the TCW engaged with the parents and step-parents to provide brief interventions aimed at reducing instances of family conflict until they can access formal mediation through the Family Support Program.

Additional stimulus funding for Safe and Connected Youth was provided during the COVID-19 pandemic to maintain and expand youth outreach, family support, conflict mediation, and case work coordination, to respond to new and emerging needs throughout the COVID-19 crisis response to 30 June 2021.

(*Ryan and Lucy's real names have not been used for privacy reasons.)

New South Wales: Improving the stability of placements in out-of-home care and increasing open adoption and guardianship

The Permanency Support Program (PSP) focuses on achieving permanency through restoration to family where it is safe and in the best interest of the child, or through guardianship and open adoption (the least preferred option for Aboriginal children) where restoration is not possible. Under the PSP, funding packages are tailored to the individual needs of children, young people and their families. Packages are flexibly applied to be able to respond to any change in a child's needs.

In 2019–20, more children exited out-of-home care (OOHC) than in the previous year, with 1,134 children achieving permanency, up from 1,050 children in 2018–19 (an 8% increase). This included 553 children being restored to their families, 419 children exiting to guardianship and 162 children being adopted. In 2019–20, 21% more Aboriginal children were restored to their families than in 2018–19 and 35% more Aboriginal children exited to guardianship than in 2018–19. More than 70% of children exiting OOHC to restoration, guardianship or adoption achieved permanency within two years.

The PSP is delivered by 48 non-government service providers, in partnership with the Department of Communities and Justice. This includes 14 Aboriginal service providers and four Aboriginal partnerships.

Operated by the Australian Childhood Foundation on behalf of the NSW Government since 2018, OurSPACE is a statewide assertive outreach service providing genuine trauma-informed therapies to create placement stability for up to 270 children under 16 years old in OOHC. The program is a multi-component therapy for children and their carers that tailors individual plans and creates care teams that address the trauma in the child's life. The program also offers consultation and support for up to 1,500 children annually to improve placement stability and relational continuity through empowering care teams and carers to better understand and respond to the needs of children in their care.

Further, on 15 June 2021, the NSW Government announced that vulnerable children in OOHC would be provided permanent and loving homes sooner and with more support, as part of a plan to turbocharge the open adoption and guardianship process. The 2021–22 NSW Budget will include \$12 million to scale up initiatives aimed at increasing the number of adoptions and guardianships, including through the establishment of a Permanency Taskforce.

NSW is leading the nation in providing permanency for children in OOHC,

accounting for almost 99% of all open adoptions from care in Australia in 2019–20. NSW is also providing permanency through guardianship, with 3,267 children currently on guardianship orders. The taskforce aims to fast-track the number of matters progressing through the open adoption and guardianship pipeline and boost the number of children exiting out-of-home care

into permanent homes. The investment also aligns with the Premier's Priority of increasing permanency for children in out-of-home care.

For more information, see [Permanency Support Program](#) and [Permanency Taskforce](#).

New South Wales: Shaping a Better Child Protection System – Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Amendment Act 2018

The *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Amendment Act 2018* commenced operation on 4 February 2019. The Act amended the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998* and the *Adoption Act 2000* to support child protection reforms. The amendments aimed to strengthen services to keep children safely at home with their families and restore children to their families when it is safe to do so. When this is not possible, a safe and loving home will be secured for children through guardianship or open adoption. The amendments also aimed to support further reductions in the number of children and young people in out-of-home care (OOHC) and improve the timeliness and quality of services for these children and their families.

The legislative reform focuses on permanency for children and young

people. It provides for shorter-term court orders to focus casework planning to secure long-term permanency outcomes sooner and reduce the time children spend in OOHC. For care plans involving restoration, guardianship or adoption, the maximum period of an order giving parental responsibility to the Minister is 24 months, unless the Children's Court is satisfied that special circumstances exist.

Under the Act before the amendments, the Supreme Court could approve a child's adoption by authorised carers without parental consent. Under the amendments this authorisation was extended to a child's guardian.

For more information, see [Shaping a Better Child Protection System](#).

Queensland: Child Protection and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2020

The *Child Protection and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2021* was passed by the Legislative Assembly in March 2021. The Act amends the *Child Protection Act 1999* to enhance the approach to permanency for children; clarify that adoption is an option for achieving permanency for children in care, as part of the suite of alternative long-term care options available; and clarify the importance of and promote alternative

permanency options for children subject to a child protection order granting long-term guardianship to the chief executive. The Act clarifies that adoption of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child is the least preferred permanency approach.

Further information: [Child Protection and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2020](#).

Queensland: Education Justice Initiative

The Education Justice Initiative (EJI) commenced in December 2018 to support young people who are in contact with the youth justice system to become re-engaged in education. The EJI provides tailored and individualised support to young people

to identify appropriate education and/or training pathways.

Further information: [Government response to the Atkinson Report](#) and [Youth Justice Strategy Action Plan 2019–2021](#).

Queensland: Evolve Therapeutic Services

The Evolve Therapeutic Services (ETS) program, funded by the Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs and delivered by Queensland Health, provides specialist intensive trauma-informed mental health therapeutic interventions for children/young people with severe and complex mental health issues who are subject to active child protection interventions. As well as providing direct specialist mental health services,

ETS provides psycho-education and skill development to foster/kinship carers, residential care providers and government, non-government and private sector service providers with the aim of strengthening the service system available to meet the multiple and varied mental health needs of these children and young people.

Further information: [Evolve Therapeutic Services](#).

South Australia: Redesign of family reunification services

Living with their birth family is always the preferred option for children and young people, where this can occur safely. In South Australia, family reunification services work with parents where it has been identified that it may be possible for a child in care to safely return home. Parents are required to demonstrate progress in meeting goals for changes in their parenting and child safety risks are regularly assessed prior to a child's return.

In 2020 the Department for Child Protection (DCP) recommissioned its family reunification services to strengthen its focus on therapeutically oriented and culturally responsive interventions that improve parenting capacity and family functioning. The refreshed approach enables family reunification services to intervene as early as possible to support families to make the changes necessary for children and young people to safely reconnect with their family. To enable a safe and planned approach to reunification, DCP retains case management responsibility while family reunification services undertake high-quality case work with parents.

The new family reunification services are trauma-informed, demonstrate evidence-based service models and provide both practical and therapeutic support for parents. There is an emphasis

on therapeutically supporting parents to address the underlying issues affecting their ability to provide emotionally and physically safe care for their children, as well as addressing practical issues such as the physical condition of the home.

The refreshed program is results-driven through a fee-for-service model with clearly defined outcomes to be achieved for each family. As of 1 July 2021, nine providers have commenced under the refreshed program, including two Aboriginal-specific services.

The SA Government was also pleased to invest in the New Parent and Infant Network (Newpin) program which commenced in South Australia in mid-2021. This innovative approach is jointly funded by the South Australian and Commonwealth governments through a Social Impact Bond. The Newpin program is delivered by Uniting Communities through a centre-based therapeutic program attended by parents over an 18-month period and targets families with children aged six and under. The program is modelled on the Newpin Social Benefit Bond in NSW, which has shown that children were returned to their parents' care for 60% of parents participating in the program.

More information on the Newpin program can be found on the [Uniting Communities website](#).

Western Australia: Aboriginal Family Led Decision Making

On 10 August 2020, the Western Australian Government provided new funding of \$715,000 to trial Aboriginal Family Led Decision Making (AFLDM).

The pilot is one of the strategies aimed at addressing the over-representation of Aboriginal children in the child protection system by promoting greater participation and self-determination for Aboriginal families and communities. This pilot closely aligns with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap and SNAICC's Family Matters Building Blocks.

During the pilot, Aboriginal families will be supported to make culturally based and family-driven decisions to keep their children safe and reduce the need for them to come into care.

The development of the pilot brings together the Aboriginal community and key stakeholders to co-design and trial a new approach. This included a series of roundtables in late 2020, facilitated by Professor Rhonda Marriot from Murdoch University and Associate Professor Melissa O'Donnell from the Australian Centre for Child Protection, University of South Australia. The roundtables have provided valuable insights from stakeholders (the majority of whom were Aboriginal people) on elements of the model, evaluation, training and convenor competencies.

An Implementation Group was established in February 2021, comprising 10 Aboriginal members external to the Department

of Communities, to provide oversight, guidance and decision making on the various elements of the pilot. The planning is done in partnership with the Department of Communities.

In May 2021, it was decided that the two pilot sites will be Mid-West Gascoyne (regional) and Mirrabooka (metropolitan). Families will come from three cohorts:

- Aboriginal families engaged in pre-birth planning, with the goal of preventing infants from coming into care
- Aboriginal families open to the Department of Communities for intensive family support, with the goal of preventing children from coming into care
- Aboriginal families where one or more of the children in the family group are on a Protection Order (time limited), with the goal of safe return to parents/family and cultural support planning.

Informed by co-design roundtables, the pilot will involve an independent Aboriginal convenor engaging with the parents to identify which family members they would like to be at the family meetings.

At the AFLDM meetings, an independent Aboriginal convenor will facilitate family-led discussion and support the family to understand the Department of Communities concerns. Family members will have 'private family time', which provides a culturally safe space, to identify strategies to address the safety concerns. This will then be shared with the Department of Communities.

The Department of Communities will continue to uphold its statutory responsibility that it is required to carry out under the *Children and Community Services Act 2004*.

Subject to procurement processes, engagement of convenors and induction

training, it is envisaged that implementation will commence from October 2021.

An independent developmental evaluation will be conducted to inform the future direction of AFLDM for Western Australia.

Australian Government: Identifying strategies to better support foster, kinship and permanent carers research project

In 2020 the Department of Social Services contracted the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) to conduct a research project to identify strategies to better support foster, kinship and permanent carers. This project delivered on action 3.3 of the Fourth Action Plan: to develop an approach to recruitment, training and support of more permanent carers, including improving workforce capability to support carers.

The objective of Action 3.3 was to ensure there are sufficient permanent carers with the right skills and support to provide safe and stable care to children.

The purpose of the project was to identify and prioritise key national and

jurisdictional issues faced by carers in their interaction with government services and government-funded organisations that inhibit their ability to provide safe and stable care to children.

The research project consisted of two main components: a desktop review of available services and supports to carers and best practice in providing supports, and qualitative fieldwork with key stakeholders and carers.

The [final report](#) was completed in December 2021 and published on the AIFS website.

Northern Territory: Intensive Therapeutic Residential Care

Under the Transforming Out-of-Home Care model (referenced under Priority Area 1), a new program response known as Intensive Therapeutic Residential Care was developed in 2019–20. The program is a specialist form of residential care focused on recovery from trauma and supporting children and

young people with complex mental health, disability, emotional and behavioural issues and who can present a risk to themselves and to others. Two providers were contracted under the program in 2020–21. Life Without Barriers commenced in

September 2020, followed by CASPA in February 2021.

Intensive Therapeutic Residential Care provides intensive care and support to children and young people aged 12–17 years who have complex or extreme needs and are unable to be placed in family-based care. Through this approach young people are connected to the appropriate support services and treatments, with the aim of

returning them to family-based placements as quickly as possible.

Since 2017–2018, the number of children in residential care has continued to decline as alternative foster and kinship care options are identified, young people exit care to return to birth family and alternative safe places and increased efforts are made in early intervention and family support to keep children out of care.

South Australia: Better support for foster and kinship carers

The Department for Child Protection (DCP) has worked closely with non-government care providers and peak bodies to grow foster and kinship care, recognising that family-based care provides most children with the best environment in which to thrive. Central to attracting new carers and retaining current carers is for the caring experience to be positive, with carers feeling their contribution is valued and respected, and that they have the resources and supports to help them in their role.

For DCP, these principles have established a foundation for working with carers and identifying ways to enhance carers' experience. The principles in the Statement of Commitment guide DCP's interactions with carers from the casework level to all aspects of interaction between DCP and carers. A supporting document to the Statement of Commitment outlines how carers and caseworkers can realise these principles as they work together to support children and young people in care.

Statement of Commitment

In 2020 a Statement of Commitment was developed between DCP and two peak bodies, Connecting Foster and Kinship Carers – SA and Child and Family Focus SA, signifying South Australia's partnership approach to supporting carers. The Statement of Commitment articulates that carers can expect to be informed, supported, consulted, valued and respected.

On-line carer platform

In September 2019, DCP launched a new online carer platform to promote the important and valued role that carers play, and provide information to support them in their caring role. The online platform posts news and information about supports that carers can access and is being expanded to include fact sheets and other ways to help carers understand and respond to the impacts of trauma, disability

and developmental delay on children's behaviour and development. This has been supplemented by a new carer newsletter, providing another mechanism to reach the carer community.

The online carer platform is part of a broader engagement approach to enable DCP to have a direct dialogue with carers. The focus

on engagement with carers will continue in 2021–22 and beyond in order to enhance responsiveness to carers and improve carers' experience of the role.

Further information and the [Statement of Commitment](#) can be found on the [DCP carer website](#).

South Australia: Therapeutic Carer Support Team

In 2019–20, the Department for Child Protection (DCP) established a specific team to support family-based carers to understand and respond to the disability and development needs of the children and young people in their care.

The Therapeutic Carer Support Team, part of DCP's Disability and Development Services Program, provides short-term assistance to kinship carers to help develop their understanding of children's development, strengthening family relationships, and building carers' capacity for continued care.

The work of the team uses a family-centred approach and is grounded in trauma-informed and neurodevelopmental understanding. The team is multidisciplinary and includes occupational therapists, developmental educators, social workers, physiotherapists and a psychologist.

Trauma can impact a child's development in many areas of functioning, including cognitive, social, emotional and physical

functioning, as well as communication. Typically, the team becomes involved at the beginning of a kinship care placement where a caregiver is starting to experience stress or difficulty responding to a child's behaviour or emotional needs. Clinicians in the team provide an understanding of the child's development and the impact of early life through a developmental profile. This helps carers and other family members in their response to the child. The team provides ways for carers to support the child's development and guides carers in building connections with the child. Validating the challenges faced by carers and reinforcing their strengths are also important aspects of the team's work.

By intervening early to support kinship carers who need more support in their caring role, the work of the Therapeutic Carer Support Team has been shown to sustain placements and improve the developmental trajectory and wellbeing for children and young people affected by trauma.

Case study – South Australia: Therapeutic Carer Support Team

The Department for Child Protection's (DCP) Therapeutic Carer Support Team provides short-term, in-home support to family-based carers to assist with their understanding of a child's development, strengthening their relationships, and building their capacity for continued care. The multidisciplinary team uses a family-centred approach that is grounded in an understanding of trauma and neurodevelopment.

The work of this team is best highlighted by a case study of a 5-year-old child, Billy,* in kinship care.

Billy had been placed in the care of his grandmother, who was exhausted and struggling to cope with changes after her grandson was placed with her.

Extended family stressors were heightened by the new care arrangements, and Billy was struggling with emotional regulation, communication and separation anxiety.

DCP case workers enlisted the help of the Therapeutic Carer Support Team. To determine what was going on for Billy and his grandmother, the team first undertook an Adaptive Behaviour Assessment. Team members used the result of the assessment to help Billy's grandmother to understand the delays in her grandson's development and the reasons for his behaviours.

Team members also worked with her so she could understand the importance of building her relationship with Billy in order to support his development. The team provided tips, resources and practical strategies to Billy's grandmother to encourage his development.

The placement was sustained and Billy's grandmother demonstrated a significant increase in her capacity to provide care. Since their involvement, team members noticed that Billy's grandmother now initiates conversations with extended family regarding her grandson's needs, advocates for her grandson when required, and recognises, shares and celebrates the small developmental gains he is making.

The experience of Billy and his grandmother is not uncommon. Many kinship care placements break down due to carers being ill-equipped to care for a child who exhibits the impacts of trauma and development delay. This specialist team provides an opportunity to turn this around.

* not his real name

Victoria: Carer Strategy Action Plan 2021–22 and Carer Census update

The Carer Strategy Action Plan 2021–22 and the first Victorian Home-based Carer Census Report are now available on the [Victorian Government website](#).

The Carer Strategy Action Plan sets out how Victoria will deliver on the *Strong Carers, Stronger Children* strategy in 2021–22. The plan meaningfully advances Victoria's ambition to improve the experiences and outcomes of carers and children in home-based care. It also lays the foundations for subsequent action plans over years to come, as Victoria keeps progressing the shared commitment to support, enable and empower carers.

Home-based carer census report

Alongside the Carer Strategy Action Plan 2021–22, the findings of the first Victorian Home-based Carer Census have been released. The census was identified as a key priority by the Carer Strategy Working

Group as part of the Carer Strategy Action Plan 2020–21 to drive improvements in services and supports available to carers.

An independent consultancy, EY Sweeney, was commissioned in late 2020 to design and undertake a statewide census of kinship, foster and permanent carers. The census was designed to collect baseline demographic and attitudinal data from carers to develop carer profiles and to better understand the experiences of carers.

A total of 1,788 home-based carers took part in the carer census in 2020, providing important insights into carer needs. Researchers, service delivery partners, carers and community can access the census aggregate data sets by contacting the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing. This data will be used to inform and improve policy, programs and services.

The final report from EY Sweeney and infographics of key findings have now been published on the [Victorian Government website](#).

PRIORITY AREA 4:

Improving organisations' and governments' ability to keep children and young people safe from abuse

Objective 1 – Child safe organisations

Objective 2 – Child protection agencies have adequate information to identify risks and support children

Harmonisation of child safe organisations through the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations

In February 2019, the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations (the National Principles) were endorsed by the Prime Minister and all state and territory First Ministers. The National Principles give effect to the child-safe standards that were recommended by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and draw attention to broader child wellbeing issues. The National Office for Child Safety (the National Office) has been working with state and territory governments to progress towards a nationally harmonised approach to child-safe organisations, based on the National Principles.

The National Principles are supported by a range of resources designed to help organisations of all shapes and sizes to build child-safe practices and cultures. The suite of supporting resources continues to expand in response to the needs of the sector. More information about the National Principles and supporting resources can be found on the [National Office for Child Safety website](#).

The National Office also engages with sectors that interact with children through the Child Safe Sectors Leadership Group. The Leadership Group facilitates sector peak bodies and non-government organisations with large national footprints coming together to receive updates on and inform the work of the National Office, including in relation to the National Principles, and to share child safety related information with each other.

Work to implement and promote the National Principles, including work to agree a nationally harmonised approach, will continue under the *National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse (2021–2030)*.

Child safety in Australian Government agencies

In 2019, the Australian Government introduced the Commonwealth Child Safe Framework. The framework is a whole-of-government policy that sets minimum standards for creating and maintaining child-safe cultures and practices. The framework is mandatory for all Commonwealth non-corporate entities and strongly encouraged for other entity types. The framework requires agencies to:

- undertake risk assessments annually in relation to activities of the agency, to identify the level of responsibility for, and contact with, children, evaluate risks to child safety, and put in place appropriate strategies to manage identified risks
- establish and maintain a system of training and compliance, to make staff aware of, and compliant with, the framework and relevant legislation, including Working with Children Checks / Vulnerable People Checks, and mandatory reporting requirements

- adopt and implement the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations
- publish an annual statement of compliance with the Framework including an overview of the agency’s child safety risk assessment.

Under the Framework, agencies are also strongly encouraged to extend child safety requirements to third parties they fund.

More information about the framework is available on the [National Office for Child Safety website](#).

The National Office will continue supporting Commonwealth agencies to implement the framework under the *National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse (2021–2030)*.

National Office for Child Safety: Non-government annual reporting on child safety

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse recommended that all governments, major non-government organisations and peak bodies that work with children report on their implementation of the Royal Commission’s recommendations for five years following its Final Report.

Since 2018, the National Office has facilitated this annual progress reporting, improving transparency and accountability in non-government organisations’ child safety practices. While the initial list of organisations invited to report was limited to the 11 organisations recommended by the Royal Commission to report at a minimum,

each year the National Office has expanded the number of organisations it invites to report. In 2020, 69 organisations were invited to report, including organisations showing leadership and good practice in their child safety efforts.

Non-government organisation annual reports are available on the [National Office for Child Safety website](#).

Non-government organisation reporting as recommended by the Royal Commission will end in 2022. A new non-government reporting framework will be developed and implemented under the *National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse (2021–2030)*.

Australian Capital Territory: Listening to the voices of children and young people

In 2020–21, the ACT undertook a collaborative project between the Community Services Directorate's Family Safety Hub and the ACT Children and Young People Commissioner to hear from children and young people who have experienced violence in their family. The project directly sought the views of children and young people, as their voices are often missing in policy and service design.

Two core principles underpinned the ACT Listening and Learning project. An essential focus was making sure it was as safe as possible for young people who wanted to participate, and making sure control remained with young people themselves.

An expert reference group guided the project design and implementation. This group included experts in ethical research, domestic and family violence, child protection and young people's participation.

Over 20 young people were consulted as 'sounding boards' to set the priorities for the project. They advised on the design of the methodology to help ensure it was safe and relevant for young people. The sounding boards said the consultations would need plenty of time, and that there must be a

range of ways for young people to engage and the ability to opt out at any time. The young people also said that the space itself, as well as the process, must be safe, and that young people's stories and information must be respected and safeguarded. Young people themselves must be respected and not judged or blamed at any time for the things they may say. Most importantly, they told us the consultations must lead to real change.

In small group sessions, individual interviews and one large session, 70 young people had their say about domestic and family violence. Of these young people, 35 told of their personal experiences living with violence at home. The insights are now informing a co-design process led by the Family Safety Hub. The co-design will find ways to provide the supports and services young people need, not what adults think they need. The result of the co-design could be a new service, a change to an existing system, updated legislation, or a completely new idea. Young people shared their own ideas for what would make things better, and those ideas are where the ACT has started to progress reform.

New South Wales: Developing a mandatory child safe scheme

The Office of the Children’s Guardian is leading the development of a regulatory scheme to support implementation of the Child Safe Standards in child-related organisations in NSW. The scheme is based on feedback received from extensive consultations undertaken in 2019. Further consultation with government partners on a revised approach to regulating child-safe standards occurred in 2020. The legislation that will underpin the scheme was introduced to NSW Parliament in May 2021.

While the scheme will not formally commence until 2022, efforts to implement

and prepare organisations for the Child Safe Standards have commenced. The Guide to the Child Safe Standards was released in June 2020. It supports organisations to develop and implement strategies to keep children safe and can be found on the [Office of the Children’s Guardian website](#).

A resource on [children’s participation and empowerment](#) was also released in early 2021. A number of resources and training materials are also available on the [Office of the Children’s Guardian website](#).

South Australia: Working with Children Checks

A new nationally consistent screening scheme for employees and volunteers has been established in response to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

On 1 July 2019, stronger, more transparent and effective screening laws came into effect under the *Child Safety (Prohibited Persons) Act 2016*. The new laws mean that anyone working or volunteering with children must have a Working with Children Check (WWCC). The checks are valid for five years, transferable between jobs and align South Australia with new national standards.

These changes replaced a number of different clearances, such as a child-related employment screening, and allow individuals to apply for a WWCC themselves, instead

of the previous system where only an employer or volunteer organisation could initiate a screening request. The legislative amendments embed free volunteer screening checks for all South Australians into law, making it more accessible for organisations employing people who volunteer with children and young people.

In 2020, systems were further improved through the development of a system-to-system interface between the Department for Child Protection (DCP) and the Department of Human Services (DHS) to access up-to-date WWCC status information directly from the DHS Screening Unit.

More information can be found on the [SA Government website](#).

Western Australia: Child Safe Organisations

In February 2019, the Western Australian Government, as part of the Council of Australian Governments, endorsed the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations.

In 2020, a whole-of-government risk assessment was completed with key government agencies, including the Departments of Communities, Health, Justice, Education and Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries. Work is underway to develop and implement treatment plans to address the risks and strengthen good practice.

The Western Australian Work Plan to Implement National Principles provides a high-level, strategic overview of the actions required by government agencies to create child-safe organisations through cross-government, coordinated implementation of the National Principles. Agencies have been implementing actions in the work plan, which was reviewed and updated in May 2020.

The Department of Communities has also undertaken consultation with community services organisations on their readiness and capacity to implement and progress towards implementing the National Principles in their governance and functions. In February 2020, an online survey was developed and distributed with support from key peak bodies, the Western Australian Council of Social Services and the Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia, and key government agencies, including the Department of Local Government, Sports

and Cultural Industries. There were 266 respondents to the survey from across the community services sector.

The second phase of this consultation was delayed in 2020 as a result of measures taken in response to COVID–19. Survey findings are now being tested and explored through focus groups – to be completed in July 2021 – to gain further understanding of the sector’s capacity, progress and future support needs. This information will be critical to help inform the most efficient way to implement the National Principles across such a broad range of institutions.

Contract managers have a key role in implementation by interacting regularly with services and identifying and addressing child safety issues. The Department of Communities continues to work with the Department of Finance to develop guidelines for contract managers on how to ascertain compliance with the National Principles and how this information will be collated and stored.

The requirement to comply with the National Principles has commenced, with the inclusion of these provisions in some child-related community services and commercial services contracts issued by the Department of Communities.

The Department of Communities is working closely with the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries and key stakeholders from the Western Australian local government sector on the integration of child safety officers. Consultation was undertaken

throughout 2020–21, with findings to inform a state policy position and implementation guide.

The Department of the Premier and Cabinet is leading work to develop a system of

independent oversight that improves child safety in organisations. Public comments were invited through an online survey on the design of the system between November 2020 and February 2021.

All Australian governments: Connect for Safety

Connecting the resources of state and territory governments is vital to ensuring a consistent approach to help protect vulnerable Australian children no matter where they live.

Connect for Safety was developed as part of the National Child Protection Information Sharing Solution Project under Strategy 3 of the Third Action Plan pursuant to the *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–2020*. It addresses barriers to information sharing across or between jurisdictions and responds in part to recommendations (8.6, 8.7 and 8.8) of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse on improving information sharing across sectors.

The Australian Government has invested \$4.25 million to assist the NSW Department of Communities and Justice and IT contractor Objective to develop Connect for Safety, a world-leading data-matching platform.

The Connect for Safety platform is the result of a four-year project, commencing in 2018–19, involving the Commonwealth and all states and territories to develop a secure technology solution that provides the capacity for all jurisdictions to promptly

search and match child protection data nationally. The search capability helps jurisdictions to make timely and targeted contact with the relevant state or territory to request information to promote the safety and wellbeing of children.

Historically, there has been no nationally consistent approach for sharing inter-jurisdictional child protection information, nor any system-based solutions to enable this. Following a number of deaths of children in state care protection and the subsequent reviews and inquiries into child safety, there was an identified need for better information sharing between governments. Through the Business Research and Innovation Initiative (BRII), the Australian Government asked subject matter experts to submit innovative ideas and ways to *share information nationally to ensure child safety*. The competitive round and subsequent proof-of-concept stages shaped what we know as Connect for Safety. The strong commitment from all states and territories to develop the platform has resulted in an outcome that will ensure no data or information-sharing limitations will impact child protection agencies' ability to support vulnerable children and their families, no matter where they live or travel to next.

Connect for Safety will ensure that child protection workers have access to the right information, at the right time, in order to effectively identify and protect at-risk children in a holistic and timely manner once a family is known to local authorities.

Connect for Safety uses 'REACH', an information-sharing software developed by Objective (formerly ITree), to allow child protection authorities to identify when a child or an adult of interest is known to authorities in other jurisdictions. It acts as a near real-time alert system and can save time and effort in high-pressure time-critical environments faced by child protection caseworkers every day.

Connect for Safety is the first system-based solution of its kind in Australia, its innovation lying in the fact that it provides a way for states and territories to collaborate and overcome barriers to share sensitive information within their individual legislative and policy obligations for child protection and data governance.

The platform will ultimately be used by statutory child protection workers nationally to achieve better outcomes for vulnerable children and their families. The development of Connect for Safety represents the first time all Australian jurisdictions have partnered to share child protection information in this way.

Connect for Safety is part of the Australian Government's response to supporting

and caring for the considerable number of vulnerable families travelling across jurisdictional borders. It is a product of innovation and adaptability, and delivers real outcomes for children and their families.

Led by the New South Wales Department of Communities and Justice, an inter-jurisdictional Governance Group (IGG) is responsible for overseeing and supporting management, implementation and operation of Connect for Safety. The IGG reports to the relevant working groups under the National Framework, including the Children and Families Secretaries (CAFS) group and the Community Services Ministers forum as required.

Connect for Safety was launched in October 2020, with biographical child protection data provided by New South Wales, Queensland, Western Australia and Victoria. All states and territories were live with Connect for Safety by November 2021. A training program and staged rollout to child protection staff from all jurisdictions will occur from 2020 to 2022.

Target audience

Connect for Safety will aim to improve the safety of vulnerable families travelling across jurisdictional borders, in particular children at risk. This information-sharing software will target the most vulnerable communities, families and children, with a focus on prevention and early intervention.

National Office for Child Safety: Working to develop a national child safety and wellbeing information sharing scheme

In addition to improving the sharing of statutory child protection information between state and territory child protection agencies, the Commonwealth and state and territory governments have also progressed work to improve cross-sector and cross-jurisdictional sharing of information related to broader child safety and wellbeing.

Under the National Framework's Priority Four Child Safety Working Group, the Australian Government National Office for Child Safety and the Victorian Government Department of Education and Training have co-led progress to develop a national child safety and wellbeing information sharing scheme. This work seeks to directly respond to recommendations 8.6 to 8.8 of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

Over 2018 to 2021, this work included:

- a research report commissioned from the University of New South Wales' Social Policy Research Centre on barriers and

responses to interjurisdictional information sharing between government agencies. The report built on Children and Families Secretaries (CAFS) November 2017 endorsement of the *Key Principles for an Interstate Information Sharing Legislative Framework*, and was noted by CAFS out of session in June 2018

- broad consultations with non-government organisations to assess barriers and key issues in existing national information sharing arrangements
- research and discussion papers on possible models and mechanisms
- a national workshop on child safety and wellbeing information sharing in June 2021.

Work to improve national child safety and wellbeing information sharing will continue under the *National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse (2021–2030)*.

New South Wales: Making NSW safer for children with significant legislative reform

NSW has progressed significant legislative reforms to implement the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (Royal Commission). In February 2020, the NSW Government introduced the Evidence Amendment (Tendency and Coincidence)

Bill 2020, which was passed by Parliament on 3 June 2020. NSW was the first state to pass legislation to facilitate greater admissibility of tendency and coincidence evidence, with a particular focus on criminal proceedings for child sexual offences. This represents the NSW Government's

response to recommendations 45, 46, 47, 49, 50 and 51 of the Royal Commission's Criminal Justice Report. These amendments commenced operation on 1 July 2020.

The *Evidence Amendment (Tendency and Coincidence) Act 2020* will enable more evidence about an accused person's sexual interest in children to be considered by the jury in child sexual assault proceedings. The Royal Commission found that the exclusion of this kind of evidence led to cases of 'unwarranted acquittals' in child sexual offence proceedings. It recommended law reform to enable greater admissibility of this evidence in those proceedings.

On 1 March 2020, legislative amendments to the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998* commenced operation, expanding mandatory reporter groups to include all registered psychologists and people in religious ministry. Amendments have also been made to strengthen protections for reporters who make reports in good faith against all civil and criminal liability, reprisals and other detrimental

action. These protections apply to reports or complaints made about child abuse to any institution engaging in child-related work.

The NSW mandatory reporting scheme now includes all groups of individuals the Royal Commission recommended should be mandatory reporters. Commencement of the amendments to strengthen protections for reporters also completes the NSW Government response to Royal Commission recommendation 7.6. Further information is available on the [NSW Government's website](#).

The *Children's Guardian Act 2019* also commenced operation on 1 March 2020. The Act expands the functions of the Children's Guardian by transferring oversight of the Official Community Visitors and Reportable Conduct schemes from the Ombudsman to the Children's Guardian. The Act also expands the Reportable Conduct Scheme to apply to religious bodies, and to conduct outside of work for employees of public authorities (such as local councils), contractors and sub-contractors if they engage in child-related work. Further information is available on the [NSW Government's website](#).

New South Wales: Sharing child protection information with other states and territories

In February 2019 amendments to the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Regulation 2012 commenced operation. The amendments allow NSW prescribed bodies, such as police, schools, health care providers and day care centres, to directly share information with interstate statutory child protection agencies if the

information relates to the safety, welfare or wellbeing of a particular child or young person. This change will improve child protection outcomes by reducing fragmentation of information and delays and inefficiencies in information sharing. Further information is available on the [NSW Government's website](#).

Northern Territory: Strengthening Governance and Systems – Client Management System Alignment system replacement

The Northern Territory Government has invested funds over five years (from 2018) to develop and implement a new client information system and business intelligence data hub for its child protection and youth justice services. The Client Management System Alignment Program will replace

the current Community Care Information System and enable cross-government data integration. The new system will equip workers with timely information to assist vulnerable children and families more effectively.

Northern Territory: Clinical and Professional Practice Directorate

A Clinical and Professional Practice Directorate was established in Territory Families in July 2018 to continue to drive practice improvements and enhanced case management practice, and provide better support and professional development to frontline staff. The directorate comprises senior practice leaders and practice leaders, including Aboriginal officers based in Darwin, Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, Katherine and Nhulunbuy.

The Clinical Governance and Professional Practice Committee provides guidance to the directorate. Work is overseen by a group of local experts with experience in research, best practice and training in youth justice, trauma and rehabilitation, social work and public health. Practice leaders focus on workplace learning to build staff capability through the promotion and

facilitation of group supervision, intensive practice sessions, appreciative inquiries, mentoring/supervision of new practitioners and case mappings. Directorate staff work closely with agency Education and Training staff to revise the induction program and with a policy team in the development of practice guidance.

The directorate has also worked in partnership with the Gender Equality and Violence Reduction teams to introduce domestic violence informed practice, including training in the Safe and Together model. During the first year, the directorate held more than 60 intensive practice sessions across the Northern Territory on a range of topics, including understanding harm, responding to concerns for children in care, collaborative practice and domestic and family violence practice.

Northern Territory: Child safe organisations

The NT Government, as a member of COAG, has agreed to implement the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations. NT Health, the Department of Education and the Department of Territory Families, Housing and Community have commenced the development of agency Child Safe Organisation Policies and associated plans to implement the National Standards across each agency.

There is a strong relationship between the National Principles and existing NT Government investment. From 2016, the NT Government has had a specific focus on improving the health and wellbeing of

young people, aged from birth to 24 years. The Government's focus includes:

- investing in our children, young people and their families to support their healthy development as the hallmark of a smart society
- the right of every child and young person to be raised and live in an environment that supports, promotes and protects their physical, emotional cultural, spiritual and social development
- the entitlement of all children to be protected from harm.

This work is part of the NT Government's implementation of the recommendations of the Royal Commission.

Northern Territory: Education initiatives

Framework for Inclusion: In 2019, the Department of Education launched the Framework for Inclusion, a 10-year program of change designed to improve inclusive education strategies and practices to address the unique needs of vulnerable children and students. The program has a range of projects that will work across the department to improve inclusive practices, working towards outcomes of inclusion, building capacity, targeted support, engagement and an integrated system. It will help identify vulnerable children and young people, and develop the policies, learning and practices to help keep them safe.

Keeping Safe: Child Protection

Curriculum: The Department of Education offers the Keeping Safe: Child Protection Curriculum training to all schools in the Northern Territory. The Keeping Safe: Child Protection Curriculum (KS:CPC) is a respectful relationships and child safety curriculum for children and young people from the age of 3 to Year 12. The KS:CPC provides age and developmentally appropriate strategies to help children and young people keep themselves safe. During this reporting period, the Department of Education has increased the number of corporate advisors who support KS:CPC implementation in schools by 30 and continues to offer training to schools with a focus on building the capacity of schools to deliver relevant curriculum content.

Love Bites and Respectful

Relationships: Through partnership with the National Association for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (NAPCAN), the Department of Education has a commitment to delivering the Love Bites and Love Bites Junior programs. The respectful relationships education programs support students aged 11 to 17 years by supporting young people to gain the skills required to have appropriate and respectful relationships. All staff employed in the School Counselling Service are trained facilitators and support the School Based Police Officers, Health Promoting School Nurses and other school staff that are also trained facilitators.

Curriculum development: In 2019–20 and 2020–21, the Department of Education

implemented the Australian Curriculum to make the teaching of health and safety explicit through the learning areas of: Health and Physical Education, Digital Technologies, English, Civics and Citizenship, the Arts and General Capabilities. Teaching children about their bodies and how to keep themselves healthy and safe is key to being able to recognise instances where they need to act or seek help to prevent harm. Resources available as online safety programs are provided through the Australian Curriculum [website](#) and available on many Northern Territory health and education websites for use in schools. Non-government organisations provide additional health and safety education directly to schools to reinforce these messages.

South Australia: Information sharing in education

South Australia has implemented new legislative measures designed to improve information sharing in schools and with key agencies to better protect children and young people in schools from risk of harm or abuse and ensure their safety and wellbeing.

South Australia has progressed amendments to the *Teachers Registration and Standards Act 2004* which will help improve information-sharing arrangements between the Teachers Registration Board of South Australia and other relevant authorities, enabling them to share information about teachers relevant to child safety and workforce mobility. The *Teachers Registration and Standards (Miscellaneous) Amendment Act 2020* took effect from

1 July 2021. Information may be shared where it is considered it will prevent harm to a child or where there are concerns as to whether a person is a fit or proper person to teach. Further, the amendments provide the Registrar with greater powers to suspend the registration of a teacher who poses an unacceptable risk to children.

These changes support the new national Best Practice Framework for Strengthening Child Safety through Teacher Registration. The framework includes principles on the sharing of information among and between regulators about teachers, applicants for teacher registration and formerly registered teachers.

The *Education and Children’s Services Act 2019* came into operation on 1 July 2020 and provides a platform for the exchange of information between schools and school sectors and, in particular, between principals when a student transfers between schools, including information relating to child safety.

Further amendments to the Act, which came into operation on 1 April 2021, will enable the Minister to publish guidelines on the exchange of information between principals. The South Australian government and non-government school sectors will work together to develop the guidelines.

The Department for Education is leading national work, endorsed by the Australian Education Senior Officials Committee in 2020, into modernising the Interstate Student Data Transfer Note and Protocol. Jurisdictions have been consulted and interviewed on the current student transfer system, and a report outlining options and next steps for more streamlined, automated and secure transfer of student records has been distributed to jurisdictions for further discussion and endorsement.

Western Australia: National Reference System

In September 2019, WA was the first state to join the National Reference System. This system facilitates the sharing of Working with Children (WWC) Card results across Australia so that all states and territories can record, maintain and share assessment

outcomes for each person who applies for a WWC Card. State and territory screening agencies issuing WWC cards now know whether a person cannot work with children in any given jurisdiction.

Queensland: Amendments to the Disability Services Act 2006

In 2020–21 Queensland enacted amendments to its Disability Services Act to support the introduction of nationally consistent worker screening for the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), and to streamline and strengthen the legislative framework for disability worker screening in

Queensland. The new legislative framework improves safeguards for children and adults with disability who receive services from NDIS-funded organisations.

Further information: [New legislation to strengthen disability worker checks.](#)

Queensland: Aware. Protective. Safe. Strategy

This strategy, established in 2020–21, strengthens the Queensland Department of Education’s approach to keeping all children and young people safe from

sexual abuse in Queensland schools and early childhood services.

Further information: [Aware. Protective. Safe. Strategy.](#)

Queensland: Home-based Care Register

The Home-Based Care Register allows key government agencies, including the Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs, the Department of Education, the Queensland Police Service and Office of the Public Guardian, to check the blue card status of persons who deliver

foster/kinship care, family day care and stand-alone care as well as the adults who reside in these residences.

Further information: [Register of blue card status of home-based carers launched.](#)

Victoria: Child Safe Standards

All Victorian organisations that provide services or facilities to, or employ or engage children or young people, must comply with Victoria’s Child Safe Standards, which have been in effect since 2017.

In response to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, Victoria committed to review its standards. The [review was completed in 2019](#) and made 15 recommendations to strengthen Victoria’s standards and improve the regulatory framework.

In response to the review’s recommendations, in July 2021, [11 new Child Safe Standards](#) were published, which will come into effect on 1 July 2022. The new standards closely align to the 10 National

Principles for Child Safe Organisations developed under the Third Action Plan of the National Framework, while retaining a focus on child empowerment and a stand-alone standard on Aboriginal cultural safety. The new standards will strengthen child safety, improve Aboriginal cultural safety and empower children and young people.

In addition, in June 2021, the Victorian Parliament passed legislative amendments to strengthen the regulatory framework for the standards. The amendments to the regulatory framework will come into effect on 1 January 2023. Together, the new standards and the improved regulatory framework will make organisations safer for children and young people.

Victoria: Information-sharing initiatives

In 2018, Victoria introduced a range of information-sharing reforms that create an authorising environment for prescribed services, organisations and departments to share relevant information, subject to appropriate checks and balances, to promote the wellbeing and safety of Victorians.

The reforms comprise the Child Information Sharing Scheme, supported by Child Link, and the Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme, supported by the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management (MARAM) Framework.

Child Link is a digital tool that displays key factual information about every child in Victoria, to legally authorised professionals who have a responsibility for child wellbeing and safety (known as Child Link users). Child Link was established under Part 7A of the *Child, Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005* and is a whole-of-Victorian Government initiative led by the Department of Education and Training, in collaboration with the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing and the Department of Health.

Child Link users, who include child protection practitioners, principals and key staff at schools and maternal and child health nurses, once trained, will receive permission to access the tool to use in their

work with children and families. Child Link assists authorised users to identify a child's history and engagement with other services to ascertain where requests for information under the Child Information Sharing Scheme might be directed so practitioners with responsibility for the wellbeing and safety of children improve outcomes through the benefit of relevant information.

Child Link takes information from existing source systems across Victorian government and combines it to create a single entry of aggregated information for every child. Child Link was operationalised on 31 December 2021, with Child Link users being brought on board in a phased approach throughout 2022. All remaining Child Link users will be brought on board in 2023 and 2024.

Child Link seeks to improve outcomes for children and facilitate the Child Information Sharing Scheme to promote the wellbeing and safety of Victorian children. Child Link will help professionals make more informed decisions about the wellbeing, safety and support needs of a child, better identify risks and vulnerabilities and provide the necessary support to prevent any escalation of harm, and provide support earlier by linking together information from across services and schools.

Victoria: Client Incident Management System

In 2018, the then Department of Health and Human Services (now Department of Families, Fairness and Housing) implemented a new end-to-end management system for the reporting and management of client incidents. The system, known as the Client Incident Management System (CIMS), aims to support the safety and wellbeing of Victorian community services clients, including children and young people, by strengthening processes for in-scope funded service providers to respond and manage incidents that occur during service delivery and result in harm to a client.

The CIMS is intended to empower service providers to effectively respond to client incidents, to be accountable for their

actions and to manage the quality of their own services. The CIMS approach is client-centred and focuses on classifying incidents on an assessment of the impact on the client.

The CIMS is a web-based information technology system that supports the reporting, management and workflow of all client incidents, removing the administrative burden and reliance on paper and associated manual processes. Analysis of captured information helps both the service provider and the Victorian Department of Families, Fairness and Housing to identify trends and provide comparisons to minimise risk and guide continuous improvement efforts to support better client experience and outcomes.

Victoria: Responding to children and young people at risk of sexual exploitation

In September 2012, the Victorian Government's Child Protection program and Victoria Police focused efforts in response to the sexual exploitation of children subject to child protection involvement. Supported by the 2015 Keeping Children Safe from Sexual Exploitation strategy, continued collaborative efforts have been made to protect Victoria's vulnerable children, particularly those in out-of-home care, recognising that protecting children from sexual exploitation is a whole-of-government responsibility.

In 2017, the then-Department of Health and Human Services (now Department of Families, Fairness and Housing) Office

of Professional Practice developed a [contemporary evidence guide](#) to further enhance knowledge and advance practice. Four specialist child protection practitioner positions were created to assist in the identification and prevention of children at risk of sexual exploitation. Further positions have since been funded, with 11 currently across the state. 'Sexual Exploitation Practice Leaders' are practitioners who work closely with Victoria Police, community service providers and child protection practitioners. They support the implementation of a range of measures to enhance the visibility of at-risk children,

identify persons of concern or interest and disrupt or stop the identified exploitation. The Sexual Exploitation Practice Leaders support training across the sector and within the child protection program.

Efforts continue to improve knowledge and responses to inform interventions to disrupt and stop sexual exploitation. Work is currently focused on improving Victoria's

data and intelligence systems to guide more precise responses to disrupting sexual exploitation. There are established and ongoing oversight arrangements between the Victorian Department of Families, Fairness and Housing and Victoria Police to support this work to reduce the exploitation of children involved with child protection.

Victoria: Family violence risk assessment

In 2018–19, Victoria's Child Protection service became a prescribed organisation under the Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework (MARAM), a key reform of the Royal Commission into Family Violence to respond to family violence risk. During this period, all child protection practitioners received foundational family violence training. The training program introduced a new practice model, *Tilting our Practice*, which is underpinned by an evidence-based intersectional, trauma and violence-informed approach to addressing family violence. The model has four key elements: child experience, perpetrator accountability, working collaboratively with the affected parent and practitioner safety. In the same period, practitioners received access to an information portal, a joint initiative between the Victorian Department of Families, Fairness and Housing and Victoria Police, which holds historical and current

information about police attendance at family violence incidents. Access to the portal assists practitioners to better assess and manage family violence risk.

In 2019, MARAM victim survivor-focused guidance and tools were released to support child protection and other prescribed workforces to align their practice to the MARAM Framework. During 2020–21 all child protection practitioners received training in the MARAM Framework. Practice change in relation to family violence has been strengthened by implementing strategies to identify behaviours that influence cultural change, changes to policy, development of practice resources and tailoring of MARAM risk assessment tools. A new risk assessment framework, known as SAFER children, that incorporates and aligns with the MARAM Framework has been developed for the child protection workforce. SAFER commenced operation in November 2021.

In 2021 and 2022, MARAM perpetrator-focused guidance and tools were released to further enhance and support child protection and other prescribed workforces whose work brings them into contact with adults using family violence. This set of guidance supplements the victim-focused guidance released in 2019, and draws attention to assessing and managing risk towards child and young people victim survivors when working with the adult perpetrator. An implementation plan for the child protection workforce is currently in development.

In addition, Family Safety Victoria are currently developing additional guidance and tools that focus on direct engagement with children and young people to undertake family violence risk and wellbeing identification, assessment and management. The Child and Young Person-focused MARAM Practice Guides and tools will be released in 2023–24 and will be informed by research undertaken on children and young people's lived experiences and views.

Additional activities under the Fourth Action Plan

This section provides information on additional activities undertaken by jurisdictions during 2018–19, 2019–20 and 2020–21 which have strong alignment with the National Framework.

Australian Capital Territory: Supporting children and their families through COVID–19

The ACT Government had a strong focus on targeted efforts to keep children, young people, and their families safe and supported through COVID–19. On 20 March 2020, the ACT Chief Minister announced an economic survival package to support the ACT community through the public health emergency. The package included a \$7 million Community Support Package, which was administered by the Community Services Directorate (CSD) and designed to support the ACT's non-government community partners to respond to the increased service demand for emergency relief in the region.

The ACT Government also provided a \$1.7 million Supporting Children, Young People and their Families and Carers Package to help ease the financial stress for young carers, foster and kinship carers, and young people. The package also included one-off payments of \$300 per child or young person to eligible kinship and foster carers, to support ongoing wellbeing and ease financial stress resulting from the COVID–19 pandemic.

The Supporting Children, Young People and their Families and Carers Package supported eligible young people preparing to leave kinship or foster care, or those who had already left care during 2020, to assist with living expenses and housing costs, or to connect them with training and employment. The ACT Government provided funding support to young carers to meet additional expenses, maintain wellbeing and support educational participation.

Additional funding helped to continue and expand the capacity of the Safe and Connected Youth project, to respond to increased demand for an integrated service for addressing youth at risk of or experiencing homelessness and to address the complexity of cases resulting from the COVID–19 pandemic. One-off grant payments to non-government services providers assisted with direct service delivery, brokerage, and support for young people and their families whose needs were not being met in the existing service system, or where culturally appropriate responses were not available through mainstream services.

The ACT Government also allocated \$580,000 to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and services during COVID–19. This funding helped to boost the capacity of community-controlled organisations and culturally specific programs to provide services and support throughout the COVID–19 crisis response to 30 June 2021.

CSD developed community services-related amendments to respond to the COVID–19 public health emergency. The *COVID–19 Emergency Response Act 2020* and the *COVID–19 Emergency Response Legislation Amendment Act 2020* made several amendments related to child protection, youth justice and Working with Vulnerable People background checking, to ensure children and young people were safe and frontline workers were properly resourced.

Australian Capital Territory: Supporting independent review of child protection decisions

In 2020–21, the ACT Government progressed reform to improve transparency in the child protection system by working to establish an external review mechanism to review child protection decision-making. The ACT Government worked with the ACT Human Rights Commission and the community to consult on a mechanism for the external merits review of some child protection decisions in the ACT. This work was driven by what the Government was hearing from the community.

In July and September 2020, the ACT Community Services Directorate (CSD) and the ACT Human Rights Commission held two roundtables with ACT stakeholders and colleagues from Queensland and Victoria. The roundtables provided insights into the mechanisms that jurisdictions use to make child protection decisions, and lessons learnt from implementing those models. At the roundtables, ACT stakeholders welcomed

the ACT Government's commitment to improve child protection decision-making processes, including with an external review mechanism. This input provided a valuable foundation for developing a model.

An external merits review project is set to propose options and recommendations for a model to externally review child protection decisions that aligns with internal merits review processes and incorporates family-led, trauma-informed, strengths-based, transparent, and restorative approaches. The ACT Government has approved funding of \$100,000 to devise a model of external merits review appropriate for the ACT. A further \$100,000 will be used concurrently to embed improvements of internal decision-making processes and implement practice reform. An expert consultant will be procured in 2021 to undertake work on developing an external merit review mechanism for the ACT.

Queensland: Our Way Strategy and Action Plan

Our Way: A generational strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families 2017–2037 (Our Way) and supporting action plans have been implemented in partnership with Family Matters Queensland, government agencies and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities throughout Queensland. The strategy aims to eliminate the disproportionate representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the

child protection system within a generation and close the gap in life outcomes between non-Indigenous Australians and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, enabling all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in Queensland to grow up safe and cared for in family, community and culture.

Further information: [Our Way: A generational strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families](#).

Northern Territory reforms

Following the August 2020 Northern Territory election the former Territory Families agency became part of a new agency, now known as the Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities. For periods before that date, references have been maintained as Territory Families.

Key Northern Territory initiatives during the reporting periods of 2018–19, 2019–20 and 2020–21 have been coordinated under a whole-government program of

reform for children, young people and families, known as the Safe, Thriving and Connected: Generational Change for Children and Families Plan, released in April 2018. The plan responded to the Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory's final report, delivered in 2017.

The plan is available on the department's [website](#).

Tasmanian reforms

Tasmania has made good progress against the focus areas of the Fourth Action Plan through its Strong Families, Safe Kids Reform agenda, engagement with local Aboriginal organisations to improve

performance against the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle, extension of care to 21, and permanency and stability commitments.

Continuing work beyond the framework

Safe and Supported: The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021–2031

Safe and Supported: The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021–2031 has succeeded the first National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–2020, which was endorsed by all Australian governments and introduced in 2009. The Australian Government worked to develop *Safe and Supported* in close collaboration with the states and territories, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders, and the non-government sector more broadly.

Safe and Supported's vision is that 'children and young people in Australia reach their full potential by growing up safe and supported, free from harm and neglect'.

Its goal is to 'make significant and sustained progress in reducing the rates of child abuse and neglect, and its intergenerational impacts'.

Safe and Supported is for all Australian children, young people and families, with a targeted focus on four priority groups that are experiencing disadvantage or are vulnerable to abuse and neglect:

- children and families with multiple and complex needs
- children and young people and/or parents/carers with disability experiencing disadvantage or who are vulnerable

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people experiencing disadvantage or who are vulnerable
- children and young people who have experienced abuse and/or neglect, including children in out-of-home care, and young people leaving out-of-home care and transitioning to adulthood.

Safe and Supported aims to improve outcomes for these groups through actions in four areas:

- a national approach to early intervention and targeted support for children and families experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage
- addressing the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in child protection systems
- improved information sharing, data development and analysis
- strengthening the child and family sector and workforce capability.

Safe and Supported will be supported by two sets of five-year action plans, including separate action plans focusing on improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Term in full
ACAC	Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care
ACCHO	Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation
ACCO	Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation
AFLDM	Aboriginal Family Led Decision Making
AFSS	Aboriginal Family Support Services
AIFS	Australian Institute of Families Studies
AISS	Aboriginal In-Home Support Service
ANFPP	Australian Nurse Family Partnership Program
ARACY	Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth
ARL	Advice and Referral Line
ASQ-TRAK	Talking about Raising Aboriginal Kids
ATSICPP	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle
BDAC	Bendigo and District Aboriginal Cooperative
BRII	Business Research and Innovation Initiative
CAFS	Children and Families Secretaries
CHQ	Children’s Health Queensland
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
CSD	Community Services Directorate
CYPS	Child and Youth Protection Services
DCP	Department for Child Protection
DCYJMA	Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs
DFFH	Department of Families, Fairness and Housing
DHS	Department of Human Services
DSS	Department of Social Services
EIFS	Earlier Intervention and Family Support

Abbreviation	Term in full
EIRD	Early Intervention Research Directorate
EJI	Education Justice Initiative
ETS	Evolve Therapeutic Services
FaFT	Families as First Teachers
FASD	Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder
GDF	Growing Deadly Families
HU5K-PF	Healthy Under 5 Kids Partnering with Families Program
IESP	Inclusive Education Support Program
IFES	Intensive Family Engagement Services
IGG	inter-jurisdictional Governance Group
KEYS	Keep Embracing Your Success
KIDS	Key Integrated Data System
KWY	Kornar Winmil Yunti
MARAM	Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework
MECSH	Maternal Early Childhood Sustained Home-visiting Program
MoAA	Memorandum of Administrative Agreement
MST-CAN®	Multisystemic Therapy for Child Abuse and Neglect
NDIS	National Disability Insurance Scheme
Newpin	New Parent and Infant Network
OOHC	out-of-home care
PIMH	perinatal and infant mental health
PSP	Permanency Support Program
QATSICPP	Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak
SACE	South Australian Certificate of Education
SFSK	Strong Families, Safe Kids

Abbreviation	Term in full
SILS	Supported Independent Living Services
SNAICC	SNAICC – National Voice for our Children
SWIRLS	Social Work Innovation Research Living Space
TCW	Therapeutic Care Worker
TIA	Towards Independent Adulthood
T2i	Transition to Independence
VACCA	Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency
VET	Vocational and Educational Training
the WOF	Wellbeing Outcomes Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in Queensland
WWCC	Working with Children Check

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NATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR
PROTECTING AUSTRALIA'S
CHILDREN 2009-2020

