

Third three-year action plan, 2015–2018

Driving Change: Intervening Early

National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–2020





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Third three-year action plan, 2015–2018

Driving Change: Intervening Early

National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–2020

Foreword

Our children are our country's greatest resource. We need to work together to ensure each child is safe, gets the best possible start in life, and has opportunities to realise their full potential.

The key message of the *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–2020* (the National Framework) is 'protecting Australia's children is everyone's responsibility.' The National Framework focuses on addressing complex problems which require joined up, concentrated effort from Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments, and the non-government services sector. This joint commitment does not change the fundamental responsibilities of the different levels of government in this area.

The Commonwealth Government provides leadership on issues of interest to Australian families and children. It also supports families and children through income support payments, access to universal services such as child care, and specific programmes which seek to strengthen family relationships and parenting skills. State and Territory Governments retain responsibility for statutory child protection and the important work undertaken at the local level to step in where individual children are at risk of harm. They also deliver universal services such as health and education, which play a critical role in determining long term outcomes for children. Non-government organisations deliver services (including on behalf of governments), contribute to the development of policy, programmes and the evidence base and actively promote child safety, protection, rights and wellbeing. Non-government organisations and researchers are represented by the National Coalition of Organisations Committed to the Safety and Wellbeing of Australia's Children. The goal of all parties is to ensure that children grow up to become resilient, independent and productive members of society.

The Third Action Plan 2015–18 (Third Action Plan) will place strong emphasis on prevention and early intervention. There is also a clear focus on targeting assistance to those communities that have most contact with the child protection system. In particular, we will focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities in view of the unacceptably wide disparities that exist between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in safety and wellbeing.

Endorsed by:

The Hon Christian Porter MP, Minister for Social Services, Commonwealth

The Hon Brad Hazzard MP, Minister for Family and Community Services, Social Housing, New South Wales

The Hon Jenny Mikakos MP, Minister for Families and Children, Youth Affairs, Victoria

The Hon Shannon Fentiman MP, Minister for Communities, Women and Youth, Child Safety, Multicultural Affairs, Queensland

The Hon Susan Close MP, Minister for Education and Child Development, South Australia

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The Hon Jacquie Petrusma MP, Minister for Human Services, Women, Tasmania

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The Hon Johan Elferink MLA, Attorney-General, Minister for Justice, Children and Families, Health, Disability Services, Mental Health Services, Correctional Services, Northern Territory

contents

SUMMARY OF STRATEGIES AND AREAS FOR ACTION IN THE THIRD ACTION PLAN	4
THE NATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR PROTECTING AUSTRALIA'S CHILDREN	6
WHAT IS THE FOCUS OF THE THIRD ACTION PLAN?	7
Cross-cutting focus area: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families	7
Strategy 1: Early intervention with a focus on the early years, particularly the first 1000 days for a child	8
Strategy 2: Helping young people in out-of-home care to thrive into adulthood	10
Strategy 3: Organisations responding better to children and young people to keep them safe	12
IMPLEMENTING THE THIRD ACTION PLAN	14
Governance	14
Reporting	15
Continuing existing work through the Third Action Plan	15
HOW CAN PEOPLE FIND OUT MORE?	16

Summary of Strategies and Areas for Action in the Third Action Plan

THIRD ACTION PLAN STRATEGIES	AREAS FOR ACTION
<p>Cross-cutting focus area – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families</p> <p>Sustained attention will be given to improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to reduce the number needing child protection services.</p>	<p>States and Territories commit to continuing to fully implement the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (ATSICPP).</p> <p>Action: All parties agree to ensure the five domains of the ATSICPP (prevention, partnership, placement, participation and connection) are applied to the implementation of strategies and actions identified in the Third Action Plan.</p> <p>Action: A new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander working group will be established to provide advice and expertise on the implementation of actions and strategies, and report to the National Forum for Protecting Australia's Children on progress and outcomes, to ensure a sustained focus on results.</p>
<p>Strategy 1: Early intervention with a focus on the early years, particularly the first 1000 days for a child</p> <p>Actions will focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and support families to address factors that contribute to vulnerability (such as mental health, domestic and family violence, substance misuse, homelessness and disability).</p>	<p>1.1 Increase community awareness of the importance of child development and parenting, and normalise families asking for help.</p> <p>Action: Commonwealth to initiate community awareness raising activities focused on effective parenting practices and strategies to enhance safe and supportive environments in the early years, at both national and local levels.</p> <p>1.2 Improve access to evidence based family support services, especially for expectant, new and vulnerable parents where alcohol and other drug, mental health, and domestic and family violence issues combine.</p> <p>Action: Identify locations with high incidences of domestic and family violence and improve resource co-ordination of services and activities to better meet the needs of vulnerable expectant parents and parents of young children.</p> <p>Action: Commonwealth to develop and trial an effective model of services and support focused on the first 1000 days to better support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities.</p> <p>1.3 Implement joined up responses for families with young children, across agencies and sectors, with a focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.</p> <p>Action: Examine place-based models to identify critical success factors to inform future work.</p> <p>Action: Commonwealth to support integration of child care, maternal and child health, and family support services in a number of disadvantaged Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, through the Community Child Care Fund.</p>

THIRD ACTION PLAN STRATEGIES	AREAS FOR ACTION
<p>Strategy 2: Helping young people in out-of-home care to thrive in adulthood</p> <p>Direct actions to break the cycle of disadvantage for these young people, and their future children. Work under this strategy will also contribute to the issues raised in the recommendations from the Senate Inquiry Into Out-of-Home Care.</p>	<p>2.1 Develop and strengthen support for young people in care transitioning to adulthood and improve priority access to support services.</p> <p>Action: Commonwealth to continue to support eligible young people to access services through the Youth Employment Strategy, Growing Jobs and Small Business Package.</p> <p>Action: Commonwealth to trial ways of improving support to young people by better utilising available data, and delivering intensive case management including wrap-around services linking to education, health and housing, working with jurisdictions. All parties to use findings to guide future interventions for young people.</p> <p>Action: Examine 2014 reforms to the Transition to Independent Living Allowance to ensure it continues to target those who need it most and improve efficiency.</p> <p>Action: Evaluate impact of jurisdictions' policy changes to extend statutory responsibility and access to services to young people who exit out-of-home care over the age of 18 years.</p>
<p>Strategy 3: Organisations responding better to children and young people to keep them safe</p> <p>Build on the <i>National Framework: Creating Safe Environments for Children (2005)</i> to enable organisations to incorporate child safety into the way they operate.</p>	<p>3.1 Develop tools and resources to help services to move from a 'reporting' culture to a 'responding' culture to improve child safety and wellbeing.</p> <p>Action: Review and implement the <i>National Framework: Creating Safe Environments for Children – Organisations, Employees and Volunteers (2005)</i>.</p> <p>Action: Strategy working group to produce a work plan to identify resources to support best practice on child safe standards.</p> <p>3.2 Address barriers to information sharing within and across jurisdictions for government and non-government agencies where there are concerns about child wellbeing.</p> <p>Action: Share jurisdictional approaches to develop a best practice model of information exchange.</p>
<p>Cross-cutting focus area – Research and reporting under the Third Action Plan</p> <p>Embed and build on previous achievements, improve the evidence base and report on progress.</p>	<p>Action: Explore capacity to develop targets and progress markers for Third Action Plan to measure progress, and if viable, identify appropriate targets and markers, to assist with reporting, by June 2016.</p> <p>Action: Examine how to continue full implementation of, and give best effect to, the <i>National Standards for out-of-home care</i> in light of the Senate Inquiry Into Out-of-Home Care recommendations.</p> <p>Action: Revitalise the Research Advisory Committee of the National Forum to develop a new research agenda.</p>

The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children

Australia is a wealthy nation that ranks well in comparison with other developed countries on many measures of health and wellbeing. However, evidence indicates that many children and young people face a range of issues including behavioural and emotional problems and mental health issues, living in jobless families, witnessing or experiencing violence in their family, starting school poorly equipped to learn and being homeless. There are also increasing pressures on child protection systems:

- > In 2013–14 there were around 143,000 (1 in 37) children receiving child protection services. Of these, 99,210 were the subject of an investigation, 55,067 were on a care and protection order and 43,000 were in out-of-home care.
- > Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were seven times as likely as non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to be receiving child protection services in general, or to be the subject of substantiated abuse or neglect, and over nine times as likely to be on a care and protection order or in out-of-home care.
- > The rate of children in substantiations, on care and protection orders, and in out-of-home care have all increased since 2009–10.¹

The National Framework was endorsed by the Council of Australian Governments on 30 April 2009. It is an ambitious and long term collaboration and commitment between the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments, the non-government sector and key researchers that focuses on achieving a key goal:

Australia's children and young people are safe and well

The National Framework sets out six supporting outcomes that need to be achieved if Australia's children and young people are to be safe and well. They are:

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. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are supported and safe in their families and communities
6. Child sexual abuse and exploitation is prevented and survivors receive adequate support.

Our ability to deliver on the goal and the supporting outcomes requires a fundamental shift from seeing protecting children and young people as a response to child abuse and neglect to one of promoting the safety and wellbeing of children and young people.

The National Framework and the Third Action Plan are part of a number of high profile activities clearly building momentum and highlighting issues of concern for Australian children and young people. There are close links between the Third Action Plan and the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022, the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, and Senate Inquiries into Out-of-Home Care and Grandparents who take Primary Responsibility for Raising their Grandchildren.

1 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) 2015. Child Protection Australia 2013–14. Child welfare series no. 61. Cat. no. CWS 52. Canberra: AIHW

What is the focus of the Third Action Plan?

The best way to reduce the number of children and young people who experience abuse and neglect is to strengthen the abilities of families and communities to care for their children and young people. This requires a much greater focus on prevention and early intervention activities – not only in the early years but at critical points in people's lives. Substantial evidence supports the long term benefits achieved through early investment approaches.

A key focus will be on strengthening the abilities of families and communities that are known to have high levels of contact with the child protection system, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. There is a need to understand the prevalence of abuse and neglect concerning families impacted by disability, families from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds and new and emerging communities, and families dealing with mental health issues, alcohol and other drug misuse or domestic and family violence.

The Third Action Plan is different to previous Action Plans. It focuses efforts by the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments and the non-government sector on a targeted list of actions, building on the findings from the baseline evaluation of the National Framework, as well as the previous two Action Plans. The recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse will also inform the implementation of the Third Action Plan.

The three overarching strategies and two cross-cutting focus areas that form the basis of the Third Action Plan have national significance for all stakeholders and prioritise efforts on early intervention and prevention and highlight action on critical areas of children's wellbeing. Signature actions sit under each strategy outlining the immediate work all sectors will undertake. Additional actions will be determined by strategy working groups throughout the course of the Third Action Plan. The focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families cuts across each of the strategies. Governance arrangements under the Third Action Plan recognise the importance of listening to the views of children and young people. More detail on the strategies and action areas is provided below.

Cross-cutting focus area: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families

For tens of thousands of years, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities have provided culturally strong child-rearing practices which contribute to creating safe and nurturing environments for children and young people. These traditions remain a prominent part of communities and cultural care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Specific and sustained attention will be paid to improving the way we work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities to build skills and address underlying issues, aimed at reducing the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people needing child protection services. This will include collaboration with, and support for, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled organisations.

All parties to the National Framework recognise the importance of ensuring that children and young people in out-of-home care remain connected with their family, community and culture. All jurisdictions are committed to continuing to fully implement the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (ATSICPP) with regard to children and young people who come into contact with the child protection system. A new commitment under the Third Action Plan is agreement to adopt a broader definition of the ATSICPP. The intention is to ensure that the five domains of the ATSICPP (prevention, partnership, placement, participation and connection) are applied to the implementation of all strategies and actions identified in the Third Action Plan.

The pathways and actions identified in the research report recently completed by the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care, *Pathways to Safety and Wellbeing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children*, will also inform the implementation of the Third Action Plan over the next three years.

Strategy 1: Early intervention with a focus on the early years, particularly the first 1000 days for a child

This strategy aims to reduce risk for children and young people from conception to adulthood. The first 1000 days for a child are especially influential on their future capabilities and establish the critical role of parents. This strategy will have an overarching focus on early intervention, with attention on this important initial period. It will include building greater community awareness about child wellbeing and the importance of quality, effective parenting to encourage communities to share responsibility for caring for their children and young people and for families to seek help earlier when needed. Actions will have a particular focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, and families dealing with multiple issues including mental health issues, alcohol and other drug misuse, or domestic and family violence.

Areas of action and signature actions

1.1

Action Area 1.1:
Increase community awareness of the importance of child development and parenting, and normalise families asking for help.

Signature Action 1.1.1:

Commonwealth to initiate community awareness raising activities focused on effective parenting practices and strategies to enhance safe and supportive environments in the early years, at both national and local levels.

1.2

Action Area 1.2:
Improve access to evidence based family support services, especially for expectant, new and vulnerable parents where alcohol and other drug, mental health, and domestic and family violence issues combine.

Signature Action 1.2.1:

Identify locations with high incidences of domestic and family violence and improve resource co-ordination of services and activities to better meet the needs of vulnerable expectant parents and parents of young children.

Signature Action 1.2.2:

Commonwealth to develop and trial an effective model of services and support focused on the first 1000 days to better support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities.

1.3

Action Area 1.3:
Implement joined up responses for families with young children, across agencies and sectors, with a focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Signature Action 1.3.1:

Examine place-based models to identify critical success factors to inform future work.

Signature Action 1.3.2:

Commonwealth to support integration of child care, maternal and child health, and family support services in a number of disadvantaged Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, through the Community Child Care Fund.

Reforms consistent with the Strategy

VIC

Roadmap for Reform: Strong Families, Safe Children

In 2015, the Roadmap for Reform will set the directions and practical steps for long term reform of the system to prevent neglect and abuse, intervene early, keep more families together through crises, and secure better futures for children who cannot live at home. The Roadmap for Reform will consider all services and programmes provided to vulnerable children and families, from universal services available to all children, to more targeted interventions and the statutory child protection system.

QLD

Child and Family Reforms program

Queensland is implementing a wide ranging child and family reform program to improve the effectiveness of the child protection and family support service system, directing attention towards increasing early intervention services to better support families and keep children at home where it is safe to do so. Key components of the reform are: the implementation of a new Strengthening Families Protecting Children Framework for Practice; the rollout of non-government based Family and Child Connect Services and Intensive Family Support Services to support families at risk of entering or re-entering the child protection system; Triple P Parenting Program and services and support to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

ACT

A Step Up for Our Kids

In 2015 the ACT Government announced significant reforms to the out of home care and child protection systems as part of A Step Up for Our Kids (Out of Home Care Strategy 2015–2020). The reforms implement a therapeutic trauma-informed care system; support parents to retain care of their children safely; reduce the rate of children coming into out of home care; and improve outcomes for children and young people in care. Furthermore, high-risk families will receive support to parent their children successfully and the needs of children who come to the attention of child protection services will be identified and addressed as early as possible.

NT

Expand the Families as First Teachers program

The Families as First Teachers (FaFT) program enhances the lifelong education, health and wellbeing outcomes of young remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families through the provision of supported playgroups, with targeted services such as: early childhood and parent education; family programs, and allied health and wellbeing services. FaFT has been operating for five years in 21 very remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and is expanding into an additional 11 remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities over the next three years.

Strategy 2: Helping young people in out-of-home care to thrive into adulthood

This strategy seeks to improve outcomes for young people in out-of-home care, and their future children. It recognises that despite recent reforms, research consistently points to the poor social and economic outcomes of many young people in out-of-home care. Some groups, such as young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, have particularly complex and ongoing needs. A key goal of this strategy is to ensure that services and programmes are culturally and contextually appropriate for young people by engaging with them on issues they consider to be important. This strategy also seeks to provide intensive support and priority access to key services, including housing, to assist these young people transition well into adulthood. For instance, the extension of the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) will help to target disadvantaged youth, with youth homelessness a priority area of the agreement. Work under this strategy will also make a contribution to the issues raised in the recommendations from the Senate Inquiry into Out-of-Home Care.

Areas of action and signature actions

2.1

Action Area 2.1:

Develop and strengthen support for young people in care transitioning to adulthood and improve priority access to support services.

Signature Action 2.1.1:

Commonwealth to continue to support eligible young people to access services through the Youth Employment Strategy, Growing Jobs and Small Business Package.

Signature Action 2.1.2:

Commonwealth to trial ways of improving support to young people by better utilising available data, and delivering intensive case management including wrap around services linking to education, health and housing, working with jurisdictions. All parties to use findings to guide future interventions for young people.

Signature Action 2.1.3:

Examine 2014 reforms to the Transition to Independent Living Allowance to ensure it continues to target those who need it most and improve efficiency.

Signature Action 2.1.4:

Evaluate impact of jurisdictions' policy changes to extend statutory responsibility and access to services to young people who exit out-of-home care over the age of 18 years.

Reforms consistent with the Strategy

WA

Priority access to services for children

The Rapid Response framework facilitates across-government support to prioritise services to children and young people who are, or have been, in the care of the Chief Executive Officer of the Department of Child Protection and Family Support. Highlights of the actions to date include State Training Providers (formerly TAFE) waiving course fees for young people up to 25 years of age and access to priority housing waitlist for young people from 17 years of age, so that no young person will exit care into homelessness.

TAS

Development of a youth at risk strategy

Development and implementation of this strategy will include establishing a dedicated Youth at Risk portfolio with its own Program Director and a range of initiatives aimed at assisting vulnerable youth to reach their full potential.

Strategy 3: Organisations responding better to children and young people to keep them safe

The significance of child safety in organisations has been highlighted through the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. This strategy will drive implementation of a child safe culture across all sectors. This will be informed by engagement with children and young people. Cultural awareness will be an important component of all child safe organisation approaches under the Third Action Plan to ensure activities respect diversity in cultures and child rearing practices and help to foster cultural competency within the organisations. It will reduce the risk of a child being harmed and foster environments that empower children and young people to speak up, and recognise and appropriately respond to threats to children. This strategy will also consider the recommendations of the Royal Commission and actions to support these findings.

Areas of action and signature actions

3.1

Action Area 3.1:

Develop tools and resources to help services to move from a 'reporting' culture to a 'responding' culture to improve child safety and wellbeing

Signature Action 3.1.1:

Review and implement the *National Framework: Creating Safe Environments for Children – Organisations, Employees and Volunteers (2005)*.

Signature Action 3.1.2:

Strategy working group to produce a work plan to identify resources to support best practice on child-safe standards.

3.2

Action Area 3.2:

Address barriers to information sharing to allow easier information exchange within and across jurisdictions for government and non-government agencies where there are concerns about child wellbeing

Signature Action 3.2.1:

Share jurisdictional approaches to develop a best practice model of information exchange.

Reforms consistent with the Strategy

NSW

ChildStory Patchwork App

Patchwork is a secure app that connects anyone working with a child, including NSW caseworkers, government departments and non-government organisations. It establishes a quick and efficient means of collaboration that is very important to improving responses for the child.

VIC

Child safe standards

As part of its response to the Victorian Inquiry into the Handling of Child Abuse by Religious and Other Non-Government Organisations, the Victorian Government is introducing minimum requirements for organisations providing services to children to create and maintain a child safe environment, to be implemented from 2016. The proposed child safe standards aim to improve child safety in all organisations that have a responsibility for children in Victoria, and improve the manner in which these organisations respond to allegations of abuse and misconduct in relation to children.

SA

Information Sharing Guidelines

The 2008 *Information Sharing Guidelines (ISG) for Promoting the Safety and Wellbeing of Children, Young People and their Families* were developed to provide government and non-government service providers with a guide for information sharing, promoting earlier and more effective service coordination in response to risks to the safety and wellbeing of children and young people. In 2014, the ISG were broadened to include information sharing for all vulnerable people. The approach utilised in the now titled *Information Sharing Guidelines for promoting safety and wellbeing* enhances service provider understanding of the vulnerabilities and risk factors that a family group may be experiencing and consequently, interventions that are more likely to be effective.

ACT

Towards child safe, child friendly and child aware health services

ACT Health is developing *Towards Child Safe, Child Friendly and Child Aware Health Services: a Coordinating Framework for ACT Health* to guide and build the capacity of ACT Health to ensure specific consideration is given to children and young people. For children and young people there will be a focus on ensuring health services promote their rights; respond appropriately to their developmental and health needs; promote their participation at every level of healthcare decision making, as appropriate; and create a sense of welcoming, comfort and safety.

Implementing the Third Action Plan

Governance

The Third Action Plan has cooperative and flexible governance arrangements that cut across government and non-government boundaries to achieve the aims of the National Framework.

- > **Commonwealth, State and Territory Ministers** for portfolios such as family, community, disability, children and young people, child protection and social welfare are responsible for agreeing to the national strategies and actions and will oversee the progress and overall direction of the National Framework.
- > **The Children and Families Secretaries** group (CAFS) consists of senior officials from relevant government departments and will support Ministers to implement the Third Action Plan. It will ensure whole of government involvement with the National Framework by engaging and partnering with departmental colleagues within jurisdictions and at a national level. CAFS is responsible for the policy directions of the Third Action Plan, including:
 - approving the research agenda linked to the Third Action Plan (including a limited number of strategic research priorities linked to strategy areas under the Plan, and any proposals in relation to progress indicators and targets).
 - considering biannual reports on implementation.
- > **The Commonwealth, State and Territory officials** working group is made up of officials from relevant departments, and is responsible for monitoring and reporting progress to CAFS on the implementation of the Third 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 of Organisations Committed to the Safety and Wellbeing of Australia's Children. This group is responsible for leading the implementation of the Third Action Plan and for achieving the agreed outcomes, with biannual reports to be provided to CAFS for consideration.

Along with these existing governance arrangements, the following groups will be established:

- > **Strategy working groups** responsible for each of the three strategies under the Third Action Plan will provide oversight and drive implementation. The working groups will comprise representatives from the Commonwealth Government, State and Territory Governments, and key non-government organisations, as well as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives. Each working group will be responsible for scoping work on their strategy for consideration by the Commonwealth, State and Territory officials working group. Biannual updates will also be provided to the National Forum to inform that group on progress. In addition, the Strategy working groups will engage with different groups of stakeholders, such as people and organisations representing families with disability, and culturally and linguistically diverse communities, to discuss key issues, and implementation and impact of strategies and actions.
- > **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander working group** is responsible for ensuring the Third Action Plan remains focused on achieving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. This working group will provide advice to the National Forum about the best way of implementing strategies and actions to ensure positive outcomes for this cohort, and report on progress. The working group will be responsible for developing a health check report for the National Forum on actions. It is not intended to be a representative forum, but rather to comprise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with expertise and skills required to ensure the delivery of the Third Action Plan achieves the outcomes sought.

- > **Consultation with Children and Young People** will occur on issues identified by the National Forum. The National Children's Commissioner, in collaboration with State and Territory Children's Commissioners and Guardians, will provide advice about the best way to do this, building on existing structures in jurisdictions.

All jurisdictions will also consider mechanisms to ensure relevant government agencies and community sector organisations have a good understanding of, as well as the opportunity to be involved with the implementation of, the strategies and actions of the Third Action Plan.

Reporting

Implementation of the Third Action Plan will continue to be monitored through annual reports. The reports will measure progress over time towards the high level outcome that Australia's children are safe and well and against each of the supporting outcomes, using a suite of performance indicators.

To enhance existing reporting arrangements, the National Forum will work towards identifying targets as well as progress markers for each of the three strategies under the Third Action Plan by June 2016, with a particular focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. As part of that work, the National Forum will also identify projects that will assist with reporting under the Research Agenda for the Third Action Plan.

Reporting under the National Framework is complemented by a range of other publications that provide information on the safety and wellbeing of children and young people such as the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's report *Child Protection Australia*, the Productivity Commission's report on *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage*, and the National Children's Commissioner's *Children's Rights Report*.

A baseline evaluation of the National Framework was conducted in 2014–15.

Continuing existing work through the Third Action Plan

Significant gains were made through the First Action Plan 2009–2012 and the Second Action Plan 2012–2015. Some of the key achievements include:

- > Development of Australia's first ever *National Standards for out-of-home care* to improve the quality of care for children and young people to ensure that they have the same opportunities as other children and young people.
- > Establishment of the first National Children's Commissioner to promote the rights, wellbeing and development of children and young people in Australia.
- > Implementation of a *National Research Agenda for Protecting Children* to identify research priorities and opportunities, and to increase accessibility to knowledge to inform future policy and service delivery.

This Third Action Plan continues to prioritise these issues. In particular, over the next three years, work will be undertaken on how to give best effect to the National Standards for out-of-home care in light of the recommendations from the Senate Inquiry into Out-of-Home Care.

The existing Research Advisory Committee involving stakeholders, non-government organisations and universities will develop a research agenda as part of the implementation of the Third Action Plan by June 2016. This will propose specific research projects that are linked to the three strategies to the National Forum, which will elevate these to CAFS for endorsement.

How Can people find out more?

To find out more about the National Framework and the Third Action Plan, go to www.dss.gov.au/protectingaustraliaschildren

An Easy Read summary version of the Third Action Plan developed specifically for young people and children can be downloaded from the website, along with further information on the First Action Plan and Second Action Plan.

