

Fourth Action Plan 2018–2020

Supporting families, communities and organisations to keep children safe

National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–2020



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All illustrations kindly donated by children, including some children living in care

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Foreword

The *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–2020* (National Framework) provides the critical foundation for governments and non-government organisations to work together to achieve our shared vision that Australia's children and young people are safe and well.

The first three action plans under the National Framework delivered some key achievements, including the appointment of the National Children's Commissioner, the development of National Standards for out-of-home care, and the delivery of projects to improve service responses for vulnerable families and promote better understanding of child wellbeing.

We know however, that more needs to be done. All governments are committed to continuing to work together to improve the safety and wellbeing of Australia's children and young people.

We recognise that the best way to protect children is to prevent child abuse and neglect from occurring in the first place. Findings of the *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse* and the *Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory* have highlighted the need to strengthen the ability of families, organisations and communities to keep children safe.

The Fourth Action Plan is the next step in this important journey.

The Fourth Action Plan places the best interests of each and every child, whose lives we impact, at its heart.

The Plan will:

- deliver place-based initiatives nationally to ensure there is a more collaborative and integrated approach to early intervention and prevention
- support children in out-of-home care by improving permanency outcomes
- support the implementation of the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations
- continue to deliver key activities from the Third Action Plan.

There will be a strong focus on improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families throughout implementation of all Fourth Action Plan initiatives, and in particular, an increased, joint effort toward ensuring that all five elements of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle are upheld.

While the Fourth Action Plan is the last instalment of the National Framework, we see this as a beginning of the work that is yet to come. The Fourth Action Plan will continue to build the foundations and evidence base that will enable us to continue to improve outcomes for Australia's children and young people beyond 2020. We will build on and embed the important reform work under the National Framework to date, and continue to work toward providing a safe, nurturing environment for all children and young people.

Summary of Priority Areas and Actions in the 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	Actions
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.	Action 1.1 Actively implement legislation, policy and/or practice to ensure compliance with the five elements of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle.
	Action 1.2 Identify and share models that have been shown to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in decision-making processes for children and families at risk of entering, or in contact with, child protection systems.
	Action 1.3 Develop a nationally consistent approach to measuring the application of the five elements of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle.
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.	Action 1.4 Develop national principles to support the investment, expansion and development of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander managed services to deliver family support and child protection services.
	Action 1.5 Develop a nationally consistent and comparable approach to report on state and territory government support for Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander managed services to deliver family support and child protection services.

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

Objective	Actions
Children grow up in thriving families and communities and develop into healthy, connected, nurturing and productive adults and parents.	Action 2.1 Jointly invest in 10 disadvantaged communities across Australia to implement a place based, collective impact initiative that focuses on interrupting the cycle of childhood vulnerability and poverty.
Young people are supported to transition from out-of-home care into adulthood.	Action 2.2 Continue efforts to develop and strengthen support for young people transitioning from out-of-home care into adulthood and improve priority access to support services.
Best practice knowledge is developed on addressing the drivers of entry into child protection systems.	Action 2.3 Undertake research into what works to address key 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	Actions
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.	Action 3.1 Develop a national data reporting and evaluation framework to measure permanency outcomes.
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.	Action 3.2 Further promote: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) timely and consistent decision-making for permanency b) better permanency options, including consistent processes for family reunification to be explored and resolved as part of permanency planning.
There are sufficient permanent carers with the right skills and support to provide safe and stable care to children.	Action 3.3 Develop an approach to recruitment, training and support of more permanent carers, including improving workforce capability to support carers, by Commonwealth and state and territory governments.

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

Objective	Actions
Organisational cultures that foster child safety and wellbeing are embedded across organisations engaging with children and young people.	Action 4.1 Support the promotion of the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations, subject to agreement by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG).
State and territory child protection agencies have adequate information to identify potential risks to children and better support children.	Action 4.2 Building on the work of the Child Protection Information Sharing Project, the states and territories will improve protocols and procedures to share child protection related information between jurisdictions, including information on the support needs of children and families in child protection systems.
Other Activities	
A range of research and data development activities, as well as Third Action Plan actions will continue under the Fourth Action Plan. See pages 26–29 for more details.	



The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children

While most children in Australia are healthy, happy and safe there are still many children who experience disadvantage, abuse and neglect.

- During 2016–17, 168,352 (30.8 per 1,000) Australian children received child protection services, which represents an increase of approximately 25 per cent over the past five years.
- In 2016–17, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were seven times as likely to have received child protection services as non-Indigenous children.
- In 2016–17, the national recurrent expenditure on child protection and out-of-home care services was \$4.3 billion, a real increase of \$327.3 million, or 8 per cent, from 2015–16.

The rise in rates of children receiving child protection services highlights the need for all governments to strengthen prevention and early intervention service systems and better address the drivers of neglect and abuse. At the same time, we must also improve our responses for children who are in contact with child protection systems and ensure they have safe and stable care in a timely manner.

The *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–2020* (National Framework) was endorsed by the COAG 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 researchers to ensure Australia's children and young people are safe and well.

The National Framework sets out six supporting outcomes to achieve this goal:

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.

The First Action Plan 2009–2012 laid a firm foundation for the National Framework by improving how governments and the non-government sector work together to achieve the best results for children and young people. This included the appointment of the first National Children's Commissioner in March 2013, the implementation of *National Standards for out-of-home care*, and the implementation of the Building Capacity Building Bridges project, which improved the way adult services, such as mental health, drug and alcohol and family violence services, recognised the needs of children.

The Second Action Plan 2012–2015 was developed with a critical focus on building the evidence base, including through data initiatives such as the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare work with states and territories on the Child Protection National Minimum Data Set and the National Survey of Children in Out-of-Home Care.

The Second Action Plan also had a key emphasis on promoting Child Aware Approaches and projects that aimed to engage civil society in child aware initiatives and promote a better understanding of the relationship between child abuse and neglect and domestic and family violence, mental illness and sexual abuse.

The Third Action Plan 2015–2018 had a strong focus on prevention and early intervention and targeting assistance to those communities that have the most contact with child protection systems. Key activities of the Third Action Plan included commencement of the Building Capacity in Australian Parents trial, which aims to build parenting skills and strengths-based parenting behaviours; commencement of Connected Beginnings; and commencement of the Towards Independent Adulthood trial, which is a trial of an intensive case management model for young people leaving out-of-home care. These trials will continue to be implemented under the Fourth Action Plan. The National Principles for Child Safe Organisations were also developed under the Third Action Plan and will drive implementation of a child safe culture, across all sectors working with children and young people, as part of the Fourth Action Plan. The experiences and views of children and young people were also canvassed under the Third Action Plan through consultations by CREATE Foundation. Talking with Young People about the National Framework, Outcomes of conversations with young people about the *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–2020* is available online.

The Fourth Action Plan is the last plan under the current framework and will continue to focus on early intervention and improved outcomes for children in out-of-home care and organisational settings.





What is the focus of the Fourth Action Plan?

The Fourth Action Plan aims to help families and communities deliver better futures for their children. This will be achieved through four priority areas:

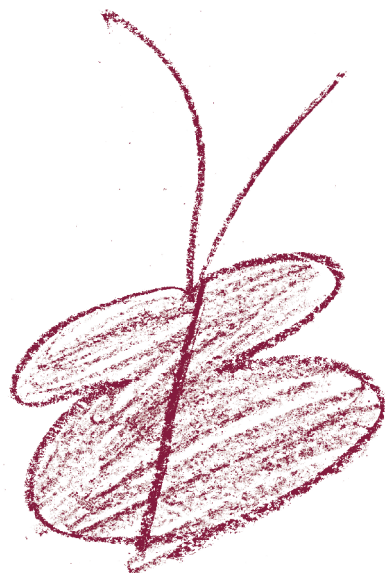
1. Improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children at risk of entering, or in contact with, child protection systems
2. Improving prevention and early intervention through joint service planning and investment
3. Improving outcomes for children in out-of-home care by enhancing placement stability through reunification and other permanent care options
4. Improving organisations' and governments' ability to keep children and young people safe from abuse.

A central focus of the Fourth Action Plan is on strengthening responses for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, in recognition of the significantly higher rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in contact with child protection systems.

The Fourth Action Plan will continue to deliver on priorities agreed to by *Commonwealth, state and territory Community Services Ministers*, through focusing on reducing children's entry into child protection systems by strengthening prevention and early intervention initiatives, providing greater permanency and stability for children in out-of-home care and promoting principles and practices for child safe organisations.

Importantly, through the Fourth Action Plan, we will build the evidence base for the future through targeted research and data development projects.

The recommendations of the *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse* and the *Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory* will also inform the implementation of the Fourth Action Plan. This is particularly the case for Priority Area 4, as promotion of the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations, and improving the sharing of child protection information, are key recommendations of the *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse*. The Australian Government and the Northern Territory Government have responded to the *Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory* and all governments have responded to the recommendations of the *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse*.





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

Increasing rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children receiving child protection services continues to be a key concern for all governments. In 2016–17, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were seven times as likely as non-Indigenous children to have received child protection services. The rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care was ten times the rate for non-Indigenous children.

Governments will work closely with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Working Group to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families who are experiencing vulnerabilities and are at risk of entering, or already in contact with, child protection systems, through targeted actions.

The actions under the other three priority areas will also include a focus on the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. More information about understanding and applying the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle can be found on the website for the national non-government peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, SNAICC – National Voice for Our Children.

Proposed Actions

Objective

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.

1.1

Action 1.1

Actively implement legislation, policy and/or practice to ensure compliance with the five elements of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle.

How will this be achieved?

When working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children or families in the child protection systems, actively demonstrate compliance with the five elements of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle. For example, using family-led decision-making models, diligently mapping a child's kinship system and using culturally appropriate family preservation strategies and services.

National Framework Supporting outcome

Outcome 2 | Outcome 5

1.2

Action 1.2

Identify and share models that have been shown to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in decision-making processes for children and families at risk of entering, or in contact with, child protection systems.

How will this be achieved?

Decision-making processes in child protection systems include risk assessments, family preservation plans and choosing out-of-home care placements. Different models exist to improve a child and a family's ability to be a part of these important decisions, and provide valuable knowledge and supports to improve the safety and wellbeing of the child. For example, some jurisdictions are implementing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family-led decision-making models.

National Framework Supporting outcome

Outcome 2 | Outcome 5

1.3

Action 1.3

Develop a nationally consistent approach to measuring the application of the five elements of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle.

How will this be achieved?

State and territory governments currently collect data on the application of the Principle in different ways. Governments and non-government organisations will work together to choose useful indicators for each of the five elements of the Principle to report on nationally.

National Framework Supporting outcome

Outcome 2 | Outcome 5

Objective

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, child protection systems.

1.4

Action 1.4

Develop national principles to support the investment, expansion and development of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander managed services to deliver family support and child protection services.

How will this be achieved?

Australian governments have developed and are implementing various support mechanisms and programs to encourage and allow Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to have a greater role and responsibility for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children at risk of entering, or in, child protection systems. This action will leverage off and share the best practice experiences of all jurisdictions to develop and agree principles to support organisations.

National Framework Supporting outcome

Outcome 2 | Outcome 5

1.5

Action 1.5

Develop a nationally consistent and comparable approach to report on state and territory government support for Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander managed services to deliver family support and child protection services.

How will this be achieved?

Governments and non-government organisations will work together to choose useful indicators to report on support for Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations.

National Framework Supporting outcome

Outcome 2 | Outcome 5



Examples of key reforms consistent with this Priority Area

Australian Capital Territory

Our Booris, Our Way is an independent review of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in contact with the child protection system in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), including those in out-of-home care. An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Steering Committee is overseeing the review. An interim report was released on 31 August 2018, with a final report in late 2019.

The review seeks to better understand why children and young people enter care and to develop strategies to reduce the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people entering care, improve their experience and outcomes while in care and examine ways for children to return home safely.

Our Booris, Our Way also serves as a practical vehicle through which the ACT Government can continue to strengthen its commitment to the five elements of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle.

New South Wales

The New South Wales Government has committed to providing more than 900 places per year for intensive family preservation and restoration services aimed at keeping families together. Half of these places will be for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families. Multisystemic Therapy for Child Abuse and Neglect and Functional Family Therapy through Child Welfare are intensive family preservation and restoration models that target causes of harm towards children. These models aim to reduce entries into out-of-home care, increase exits from out-of-home care and respond to trauma and other underlying causes of child abuse and neglect. Since August 2017, these new services have been delivered by healthcare professionals in priority locations across New South Wales.

Northern Territory

Territory Families is delivering a broad family support reform program which includes significant investment in the provision of family support services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families at risk of entering the child protection system and increasing education about and access to support in the community. Key projects include:

- expanding Child Safety Coordination Groups in a range of Aboriginal communities
- funding the Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance NT to co-design an early intervention service for families that can be delivered through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander controlled health services
- growing an NT Social Services Directory in partnership with the Northern Territory Council of Social Services
- developing a community education campaign that will promote early support services, prompt families to ask for help before a crisis and remove the stigma associated with seeking help
- introducing Territory FACES, a call centre and family support referral activity
- supporting the Palmerston Grow Well Live Well collective impact initiative. Grow Well Live Well provides the community with a voice about the needs of families and children in Palmerston and works to ensure services are targeted and coordinated.

This work is being supported by a Child Safety and Wellbeing Framework which details what community and the public can do to prevent child abuse and neglect and a Family Support Investment Strategy. The strategy outlines how out-of-home care can be transitioned to better provide for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families in conjunction with Aboriginal controlled organisations and Aboriginal communities.

Queensland

The *Child Protection Reform Amendment Act 2017* (the Amendment Act) was passed by the Queensland Parliament in November 2017. The Amendment Act makes changes to the *Child Protection Act 1999* that recognise the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination and the rights of families to participate in decision-making to address over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Queensland's child protection system.

The Amendment Act promotes the safe care and connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. This will be undertaken in a number of ways including, adding new principles that recognise the right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to self-determination, and apply the five elements of the Child Placement Principle and requiring a case plan for an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child to include details about how the child will be supported to develop and maintain connections with their family, community and culture.

Tasmania

The Tasmanian Government has committed to a comprehensive reform of services to children called Strong Families, Safe Kids. This program has already delivered a range of reforms, including the engagement of four organisations to trial an Intensive Family Engagement Service in 2018. This service works intensively with families at the brink of entering the child protection system to address risk factors and allow children to remain safely in the family home. The Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre is one of the organisations delivering this program. An additional \$7.5 million has been allocated from 2018–19 to extend these services to more families and identify which evidence-based programs would be most effective for longer-term implementation in Tasmania across all population groups. Two Aboriginal Liaison Officers will be appointed within the Child Safety Service in 2019. The Tasmanian Government is also working with Aboriginal organisations to implement the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle.

Victoria

Victoria has amended the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005*, to include the requirement for all Aboriginal children and young people living in out-of-home care to have a cultural plan. Victoria has developed and implemented a new operational model for cultural planning, supported by additional funding to Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs). The co-designed model provides for all plans to be endorsed by the CEO of an ACCO and in the spirit of self-determination, the state-wide coordinator is based in an ACCO. The model also includes an online portal where information can be shared to assist with cultural planning and the building of children's cultural connections. The program is ongoing from 2018.

Western Australia

In Western Australia, the 2017 *Children and Community Services Act 2004* statutory review (the Legislative Review) made 70 recommendations, many of which aimed to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families that come into contact with the child protection system. The recommendations included strengthening consultation requirements with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and organisations when placing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in care and when developing cultural support plans and ensuring decisions in cultural support plans are reviewable by the Care Plan Review Panel and the State Administrative Tribunal.

The recommendations of the Legislative Review align with the Department of Communities current review on Permanency Planning. A strong focus of the Permanency Planning review is on improving permanency outcomes, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, by improving adherence to all five elements of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle, which include prevention, partnership, participation, placement and connection. As a result of the Permanency Planning review, a number of sub-projects are currently underway to implement recommendations in the areas of policy and family engagement, and participation in decision making and cultural support planning. This work includes consultation with external organisations including ACCOs, to identify solutions for particular issues.

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

Improving prevention and early intervention systems requires increased coordination and collaboration between the Commonwealth and state and territory governments. It can also benefit from strong collaboration and integration between services.

This priority area focuses on three key activities – investing in place based sites, joint family and children service planning nationally, and improving the evidence base for addressing the drivers of entry into child protection systems.

This Priority Area also supports the work that was initiated under the Third Action Plan to support young people transitioning from out-of-home care into adulthood. Work includes the continuation of the Towards Independent Adulthood (TIA) trial, and the discussion paper “Transition from Out of Home Care to Adulthood: mapping legislation and policy across Australian jurisdictions” developed by the Australian Capital Territory that compares supports available for young people leaving care across Australian jurisdictions. The findings of both the TIA trial and the discussion paper will require consideration by governments in relation to further work to support these young people and improve their life outcomes.



Proposed Actions

Objective

Children grow up in thriving families and communities and develop into healthy, connected, nurturing and productive adults and parents.

2.1

Action 2.1

Jointly invest in 10 disadvantaged communities across Australia to implement a place-based, collective impact initiative that focuses on interrupting the cycle of childhood vulnerability and poverty.

How will this be achieved?

Commonwealth and state and territory governments, in partnership with philanthropy and other stakeholders, will invest in up to 10 change-ready communities. New funding will be directed towards collaboration infrastructure to enable the local community, in partnership with government and other stakeholders, to develop data and evidence-informed roadmaps for action.

Roadmaps will:

- have a whole-of-population, life-course approach with an emphasis on the early years
- be informed by a stocktake of family and children's programs and services at the community level, to ensure better service coordination, reduce duplication and fill service gaps.

Implementation will be driven by a local, sector-neutral backbone team, and outcomes will be evaluated against an initiative-wide monitoring, learning and evaluation framework.

National Framework Supporting outcome

Outcome 1 | Outcome 2
Outcome 4

Objective

Young people are supported to transition from out-of-home care into adulthood.

2.2

Action 2.2

Continue efforts to develop and strengthen support for young people transitioning from out-of-home care into adulthood and improve priority access to support services.

How will this be achieved?

Commonwealth, state, territory and governments agree to build on work to provide young people leaving care with priority access to government services.

National Framework Supporting outcome

Outcome 2 | Outcome 4

Objective

Best practice knowledge is developed on addressing the drivers of entry into child protection systems.

2.3

Action 2.3

Undertake research into what works to address key drivers of entry into child protection systems.

How will this be achieved?

Building on the evidence produced by the prevention and early intervention proof of concept project in South Australia, this action will research what works to improve the service systems that address the current drivers of entry into child protection systems. It would look at factors such as domestic and family violence, financial stress and housing stress, mental health, alcohol and other drugs. This action will draw on evidence and best practice from the Commonwealth, state and territory governments and the non-government sector, including academia.

National Framework Supporting outcome

Outcome 3

Examples of key reforms consistent with this Priority Area

Australian Capital Territory

The ACT Government's Early Intervention by Design project aims to establish a more sustainable, flexible and responsive human service system that identifies vulnerabilities, responds early and effectively targets resources based on need.

The project seeks to increase the capacity for early intervention and improve outcomes across three focus areas:

- Vulnerable children and families with a focus on early childhood
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and children
- Families who have experienced domestic and family violence.

The project will develop a staged approach to long-term system reform and options to enhance early intervention and prevention capacity across health and human services.

Progressing this work across the health and human services directorates aims to establish a coherent service system across health; community services; justice and community safety; and early childhood and education services. It is an opportunity to align government and non-government services to principles of best practice and to introduce common outcomes measures across the ACT.

Queensland

The Queensland Government's unprecedented investment in prevention and early intervention includes priorities to reduce the disproportionate representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the child protection system and make tangible and positive differences in the lives of vulnerable Queensland children, young people and families. Investment includes implementation of the First 1,000 Days Program, finalising the state-wide rollout of Family Wellbeing Services across 20 catchments, the rollout of multiple-agency Domestic and Family Violence High Risk Teams and the Logan Together collective impact initiative.

The Queensland and Commonwealth Government have been jointly investing in the Logan Together collective impact approach to improving the well-being of children aged 0–8 years since 2016. The Queensland Government, in partnership with the Department of Social Services and Logan Together, is developing a methodology for measuring the success (or otherwise) of place-based approaches. This methodology will be applied in developing a progress report for the Logan Together collective impact approach in 2018.

South Australia

As part of a child protection systems reform agenda South Australia is implementing initiatives which aim to broaden referral pathways to enable earlier intervention and attain better safety and wellbeing outcomes for children and families. Key initiatives include a multi-agency child protection intake model that can offer appropriate responses to families and children at risk; piloting place-based child and family referral networks which provide improved access to services for at risk families with children in the first 1,000 days; appointment of a Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young people who will work with the Commissioner to advocate for the rights, development and wellbeing of all children and young people in South Australia; and establishment of the Early Intervention Research Directorate, facilitating to inform evidence-based service delivery.

Victoria

Victoria is investing \$19.4 million over four years in the Community Partnerships initiative. The Community Partnerships initiative is a new approach to government and the community working together to make a positive difference to the lives of children and families. The initiative will adopt a place-based approach to reduce childhood vulnerability. It will build the capability of families, communities and services to prevent and intervene earlier in the pathway to childhood vulnerability, including through improved accessibility to, and effectiveness of, community, health and social services. The initiative will seek to have an impact on the resilience and social capital of communities; parental and carer capability; the healthy development and learning of children; preventing and reducing child abuse and neglect; and the accessibility, effectiveness and relevance of services provided to support communities.

Western Australia

In Western Australia the Earlier Intervention and Family Support Strategy (EIFS strategy) focuses on addressing the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care and is a coordinated response between the Department of Communities, other state government agencies and the community services sector.

Under the EIFS strategy:

- Family Support Networks provide an integrated assessment and coordination service for families to divert them from the child protection system and support them to develop safe and strong community-based support networks.
- Intensive Case Management Service for up to 12 months is incorporated within the Family Support Networks and will involve high-intensity case management, interventions and practical in-home support.
- The Aboriginal In-Home Support Service is being delivered in the metropolitan area by an ACCO with the support of a number of other ACCOs. The focus is working intensively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to address safety issues, strengthen family functioning and parenting skills and create possibilities for significant change within high-risk families.
- The Intensive Family Support Services is a state-wide service that offers intensive in-home support to families who are at risk of their children entering the out-of-home care system or to support families in reunification. Services will prioritise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. All services are either provided by an ACCO, or in partnership with an ACCO, to ensure culturally appropriate service provision for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

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

All children have the right to grow up in a loving family that is permanent, stable and safe. As at 30 June 2017 there were 47,915 children in out-of-home care – an increase of 18.2 per cent (from 40,549) at 30 June 2013. Of these children in 2017, 32,638 (68 per cent) had been in long-term care (i.e. continuously in care for two or more years), and many had permanency arrangements in place. For example, nearly one-quarter (24 per cent) of these children were in a third-party parental care arrangement (home-based care where parental responsibility has been transferred to the carer), and around 3 in 5 (62 per cent) were on long-term finalised guardianship or custody orders.

In 2016–17, 143 adoptions of children from out-of-home care were finalised in Australia (referred to as ‘known carer’ adoptions).

Research tells us that a sense of security, stability, and permanency are strong predictors of better outcomes for young people after they leave care. This priority area aims to support better permanency options, including consistent processes for family reunification and to reduce state guardianship for children who cannot be safely reunified with their families within a reasonable time. These actions are closely related to those under Priority Area 1. Efforts to improve permanency include ensuring lifelong relationships and a sense of belonging, identity and connection to culture, in line with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle.



Actions

Objective

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.

3.1

Action 3.1

Develop a national data reporting and evaluation framework to measure permanency outcomes.

How will this be achieved?

A holistic data reporting and evaluation framework will be developed, including national reporting on the timeliness of permanency decisions achieved and to explore options for research to inform best practice.

Commonwealth and state and territory governments will agree to develop indicators for reporting data against the agreed 'outcomes statement' for permanency, including placement stability, timeframes for achieving permanency and connection to relationships.

Options for research and longitudinal analysis of outcomes, and sharing of best practice across jurisdictions, will enable a better understanding of permanency outcomes for children and young people and issues impacting on achievement of outcomes.

National Framework Supporting outcome

Outcome 1 | Outcome 4
Outcome 5

Objective

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.

3.2

Action 3.2

Further promote:

- a) timely and consistent decision-making for permanency
- b) better permanency options, including consistent processes for family reunification to be explored and resolved as part of permanency planning.

How will this be achieved?

A review of the legislation, policy and practice on timelines and processes for decision-making in each jurisdiction will be undertaken to build an understanding of the areas of alignment and areas that require further development to create consistency.

Drawing on this review, a nationally consistent framework or approach will be developed to guide decision-making on permanency and will ensure that this occurs in a timely and equitable manner, facilitating greater stability and improving permanency outcomes for all children and young people across Australia.

Permanency care options in each jurisdiction will be reviewed to identify improvements that can be made to processes and policy in each state and territory. This will assist to identify where there is a need for greater consistency in the processes for pursuing reunification and restoration, and best practices in undertaking these processes.

National Framework Supporting outcome

Outcome 1 | Outcome 4
Outcome 5

Objective

There are sufficient permanent carers with the right skills and support to provide safe and stable care to children.

3.3

Action 3.3

Develop an approach to recruitment, training and support of more permanent carers, including improving workforce capability to support carers, by Commonwealth and state and territory governments.

How will this be achieved?

Commonwealth and state and territory governments will work together to improve the retention of casework staff and build capacity and skills in the workforce and consider how to improve the financial and non-financial support for carers, including kinship carers, to improve recruitment and retention of carers.

National Framework Supporting outcome

Outcome 1 | Outcome 4
Outcome 5

Examples of key reforms consistent with this Priority Area

New South Wales

New South Wales' Permanency Support Program reforms are some of the most significant changes made to the New South Wales child protection and out-of-home care system. New South Wales is shifting from a place-based service system to one that is child and family centred. The reform has a strong focus on achieving permanency for children within two years.

A new funding and service model incentivises achievement of permanency for children through restoration, guardianship or adoption. Funding packages enable tailored support to meet a child or young person's individual needs. Use of shorter term court orders and more regular case plan reviews will provide greater accountability over achievement of a child's case plan goal.

New South Wales is investing in evidence-based Family Preservation and Restoration services to divert entries to care. A total of 52 new Permanency Coordinator positions have been created to support achievement of permanency for children and young people.

In addition, a new strategy for carer recruitment, retention, development and support underpin the reforms. In the 2017–18 financial year, New South Wales attained a record 129 adoptions from out-of-home care. That number will be exceeded in 2018–19 and will continue to rise, with a target of 1,000 adoptions over the next four years.

Northern Territory

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Out-of-Home Care Strategy

Territory Families has commenced work with Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory and SNAICC – National Voice for Our Children, to develop an out-of-home care system that is safe, culturally appropriate, holistic and trauma-informed. Ongoing actions include:

- planning transition of out-of-home care to non-government sector
- increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in care being supported by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families
- supporting development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander non-government organisations focused on caring for children
- funding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander controlled organisations to recruit and support kinship carers and introducing an out-of-home care accreditation framework.

South Australia

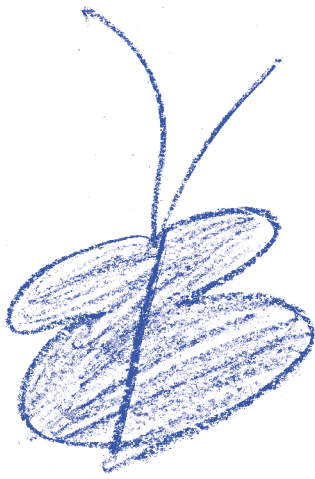
The *Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017* was passed by the South Australian Parliament in July 2017. It supports the reform program already underway through A Fresh Start, the South Australian Government's response to the *Nyland Child Protection Systems Royal Commission*. The legislation fully commences in October 2018 and promotes early intervention, improved access to long term guardianship and permanence and stability for children and young people who have been removed from their parents or guardians. It encourages decisions and actions to be made in a timely manner. Placement principles set out in the legislation provide that:

- children who have been removed should be placed in a safe, nurturing, stable and secure environment
- the preferred option is to place the child with a person with whom they have an existing relationship
- the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle is to be applied for Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children being placed under the legislation
- approved carers are entitled to be, and should be, involved in decision making relating to children and young people in their care.

Placement stability will be further strengthened with the extension of foster and kinship care payments up to 21 years of age. This supports young people to remain in foster or kinship family care through to age 21 if they so choose.

Tasmania

The Tasmanian Government has committed \$900,000 over three years, from 2018–19, to strengthen the permanency of placement process. A Permanency Framework will be developed that focusses on timely decision making, provision of family engagement services to prevent children and young people entering the Child Safety System; ensuring children and young people that enter the Child Safety Service system do so for the shortest time possible; and the ability to secure a permanent solution for children and young people that best meets their needs, now and into the future. This will include the development of better processes and systems for transfer of guardianship and adoption, reinforced with targeted funding.



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

The significance of child safety in organisations has been highlighted through the *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse*, which released its final report in December 2017. Under the Third Action Plan, the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations were developed to provide a consistent approach to creating organisational cultures that foster child safety and wellbeing across all sectors engaging with children and young people.

Promoting the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations within the community services sector, will be a priority under the Fourth Action Plan, while also being an integral component of the response to the *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse*. The National Principles for Child Safe Organisations are intended to promote consistency and a shared understanding across jurisdictions of the core elements of child safe organisations. Each jurisdiction may give effect to these core elements in different ways.

This priority area will also seek to better identify and understand potential risks to children in child protection systems by improving state and territory child protection agencies' ability to share information across borders.

Both actions will consider the specific needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families in their implementation. Additionally, the actions will support *Community Service Ministers'* responses to the *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse*.

Actions

Objective

Organisational cultures that foster child safety and wellbeing are embedded across organisations engaging with children and young people.

4.1

Action 4.1

Support the promotion of the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations, subject to agreement by the COAG.

How will this be achieved?

The National Principles will be promoted across all organisations within the community services sector working with children and young people, in particular the out-of-home care and family support sectors to foster genuine cultural change in organisations to support child safety and wellbeing.

The Australian Government, through the National Office for Child Safety, will work closely with state and territory governments, including with *Community Services Ministers* and their portfolio departments, to support the promotion of the National Principles in all sectors working with children.

National Framework Supporting outcome

Outcome 1 | Outcome 6

Objective

State and territory child protection agencies have adequate information to identify potential risks to children and better support children.

4.2

Action 4.2

Building on the work of the Child Protection Information Sharing Project, the states and territories will improve protocols and procedures to share child protection related information between jurisdictions, including information on the support needs of children and families in child protection systems.

How will this be achieved?

The inter-jurisdictional Child Protection Information Sharing Project will recommend options for short-term interim improvements in practical areas, as well as options for longer-term systemic reform, possibly including legislative reform.

National Framework Supporting outcome

Outcome 3 | Outcome 4 | Outcome 6

Examples of key reforms consistent with this Priority Area

Northern Territory

The Northern Territory Government is reforming its child protection and youth justice system under its Safe, Thriving and Connected: General Change Implementation Plan. This response builds on improvements already introduced since August 2016 and provides a whole of government approach to consider health care, housing, education, family support, police and justice services.

One initiative is to establish a multi-agency taskforce to oversee the delivery of new policies, programs, practices and campaigns to prevent and respond to the sexual exploitation of children and young people in the Northern Territory.

Victoria

Victoria is implementing the Child Information Sharing Scheme (CIS), which is designed to facilitate a wide range of services and agencies sharing information to promote the wellbeing and safety of children. The scheme will allow information sharing between authorised professionals (including child protection) to promote children's wellbeing and safety. The CIS Scheme will help to improve early identification, intervention and prevention by allowing universal, secondary and tertiary services to work together to form a comprehensive picture of risks and needs for children and young people. The reform is also intended to promote shared responsibility for children's wellbeing and safety across the system.

Western Australia

Western Australia has a voluntary approach to child safe organisations. The Commissioner for Children and Young People (the Commissioner) has enabling legislation to raise awareness, provide capacity building training and resources and consult with children. The Commissioner's office supports organisations to maintain the integrity of the child safe approach while adapting to align with their organisational ethos.

Safe Club 4 Kids, a collaboration between government and community sector agencies, provides training and resources for the sport and recreation industry to create and maintain safe environments for children and young people.

The Department of Communities Better Care, Better Services Standards (the Standards) provide safety and quality standards for children and young people in protection and care. Following a review, the Standards and indicators of compliance align with the Child Safe Standards outlined in the *Royal Commission into Responses to Institutional Child Sexual Abuse Final Report*

How independent oversight of Child Safe Standards could be implemented is being considered in Western Australia, taking into account existing frameworks that exceed the proposed Child Safe Standards.

Further work by the Department of Communities to implement Child Safe Standards within existing structures and mechanisms includes:

- considering how the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations can be embedded
- scoping unregulated and regulated sectors to determine opportunities for capacity building.



Research and data

A key enabling activity under the Fourth Action Plan will be a continued emphasis on research and data to inform reform efforts and build the evidence base. There is also a clear need to better utilise existing data, while identifying and addressing gaps in knowledge. The following research and data collection activities will be undertaken throughout the Fourth Action Plan.

Evaluations

The two trials continuing from the Third Action Plan, the Building Capacity in Australian Parents trial and the Towards Independent Adulthood trial, will conclude during the period of the Fourth Action Plan. The evaluation data from these trials will provide valuable evidence regarding services for vulnerable children, young people and families.

Prevention and early intervention proof of concept project in South Australia

Under the Third Action Plan, the South Australian Government in partnership with the Commonwealth Government commenced work on a proof of concept project to demonstrate how agreed early intervention investment principles could be applied in practice, with a particular focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. The project will consider early intervention pathways and identify opportunities for interventions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families. The results from this initiative will build on actions under Priority Area 2 of the Fourth Action Plan.

Data development

A key focus of the National Framework over the years has been to improve understanding of child and family outcomes and government performance through better data. There is data development work currently being undertaken by the Children and Families Data Network, comprising Commonwealth, state and territory governments, and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

Research

A crucial aspect of prevention and early intervention is to address the drivers of entry into child protection systems (such as domestic violence, financial stress and housing stress, mental health, alcohol and other drugs). While there is a broad understanding of these drivers, more needs to be known about what works to improve service systems to address these drivers and reduce entry into child protection systems. A focus of the Fourth Action Plan will be to gain a better understanding of these drivers and prevention systems, in order to build the evidence base for responses to child safety and wellbeing after the National Framework expires in 2020.

Continuing existing work through the Fourth Action Plan

There are a number of actions under the Third Action Plan 2015–2018 that will continue to be implemented under the Fourth Action Plan, including two key trials.

Building Capacity in Australian Parents trial

The Building Capacity in Australian Parents trial is being delivered in Rockhampton, Ipswich and Toowoomba. The trial sends text messages, tailored to the child's developmental stage, to parents of children in the first 1,000 days (pregnancy to age two) providing parenting information and local service links. Throughout the trial period, a tailored training package will be delivered to local workers, volunteers, professionals and community leaders to build their knowledge in the importance of parenting during a child's first 1,000 days of life and increase their confidence to identify and support the needs of parents through a 'strengths-based' approach. The trial will undergo an implementation review and a randomised control evaluation, which will provide information on the effectiveness of using text messages to provide parents with parental information and support.

Towards Independent Adulthood trial

Australian and international research consistently demonstrates that young people leaving out-of-home care face higher rates of homelessness, unemployment, reliance on welfare, physical and mental health problems, and contact with the criminal justice system, than young people not in care. The Towards Independent Adulthood trial is being implemented in Western Australia to improve the social and economic outcomes of young people transitioning from out-of-home care to adulthood.

The trial is testing ways of improving support to young people by delivering intensive support including wrap around services linking to education, health and housing. Wanslea Family Services is delivering intensive case management services in metropolitan Perth and the Peel, Wheatbelt and South West regions of Western Australia. The trial commenced in mid-2017 and will run over three years until mid-2020. Following the trial, state and territory governments will be able to use the results to guide future investments for young people leaving out-of-home care.

Research

A key action under the Third Action Plan was to develop research priorities to improve the evidence base. The priorities focus on early intervention and prevention and improving outcomes for children in out-of-home care, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. Under the Fourth Action Plan, these research priorities will be progressed through targeted research projects.

Other continuing activities from the Third Action Plan include the rollout of the Connected Beginnings program, the Transition to Independent Living Allowance, and the National Community Awareness Raising Strategy.



other related national reforms and initiatives

The National Framework and the Fourth Action Plan are part of a number of activities addressing issues of concern for Australian children and young people. There are close links between the Fourth Action Plan and the following initiatives and activities:

- *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse*
- *Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory*
- National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022
- National Disability Strategy 2010–2020
- Closing the Gap Refresh.

Royal Commissions

The Fourth Action Plan has been developed during a time of unprecedented attention on both historical and current issues related to the safety of children and young people. The final reports of both the *Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory* and the *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse* were released in late 2017. A number of actions under the Fourth Action Plan are aligned with the recommendations from the Royal Commissions, including improving compliance with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (Priority Area 1), investment in place-based approaches (Priority Area 2) and the promotion of the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations (Priority Area 4).

Implementation of the government responses to the Royal Commissions will influence these and other actions in the Fourth Action Plan. Government responses to the Royal Commissions will also shape the direction and the model that will follow the National Framework once it concludes in 2020.

National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022

There are strong links between domestic and family violence and the risks of emotional and physical child abuse. The National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022 (National Plan) is a 12-year strategy which brings together Commonwealth, state and territory government efforts, as well as the important work of the non-government sector to achieve a significant and sustained reduction in domestic, family and sexual violence. The strong connection between the National Plan and the National Framework will continue throughout the Fourth Action Plan to strengthen families so that children and young people grow up in a safe household free from domestic and family violence.

National Disability Strategy 2010–2020

The National Disability Strategy 2010–2020 represents a whole-of-government commitment to improve the life outcomes of people with disability, including children and young people, their families and carers. The Strategy considers the needs of children with a disability, particularly in regard to early intervention and education. The ongoing roll out of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), which was launched in 2013, is a key outcome of the National Disability Strategy. The NDIS helps ensure people with permanent and significant disability receive support based on their needs and have a choice and control over this support.

The National Disability Strategy is aligned with the principles of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (CRPD). Article 3 of the CRPD refers to 'respect for the evolving capacities of children with disabilities and respect for the right of children with disabilities to preserve their identities'. The needs of children with a disability will be given priority consideration through the implementation of the actions under the Fourth Action Plan.

Closing the Gap

In December 2007, COAG pledged to close key gaps in outcomes between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous Australians. Ten years on, the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have improved, but more gains need to be made.

A key focus going forward is to work in genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders, organisations and communities. The Fourth Action Plan supports that commitment by focusing on improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children at risk of entering, or in contact with, child protection systems, particularly through collaboration with, and support of, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations.





Implementing the Fourth Action Plan

Governance

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

The tripartite body of the National Forum for Protecting Australia's Children (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 on the National Forum by members of the National Coalition on Child Safety and Wellbeing.

The following government bodies are responsible for implementing and reporting on the Fourth Action Plan activities:

- **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 consists of senior officials from relevant government departments and will support Ministers to implement the Fourth Action Plan. It will ensure whole of government involvement with the National Framework by engaging and partnering with other agencies within jurisdictions and at a national level.
- **The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Working Group** is responsible for ensuring the Fourth Action Plan remains focused on achieving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

Reporting

Implementation of the Fourth Action Plan will continue to be reported regularly. These reports will measure progress over time towards the high-level outcomes that Australia's children are safe and well and against each of the supporting outcomes, using a suite of contextual indicators. These indicators are also reported annually by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. The reports will also focus on key achievements and lessons learned through the duration of the Fourth Action Plan.

The effectiveness of implementation of the individual actions will be measured by tracking and reporting on the progress of each action over time. Children and Families Secretaries will report to Community Services Ministers on progress.

How Can you find out more?

To find out more about the National Framework
and the Fourth Action Plan, go to:

www.dss.gov.au/protectingaustraliaschildren

