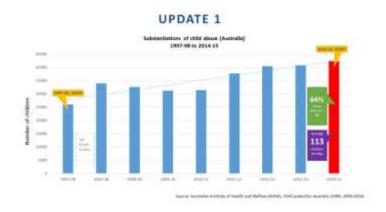
### THE NATIONAL CAMPAIGN ON CHILD SAFETY AND WELLBEING: PROGRESS AND NEXT STEPS

Dr Brian Babington CEO, Families Australia FRSA Conference, Canberra, 1 December 2016

I begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the lands on which we meet and by paying respect to their elders, both past and present. I'd like to talk about the problem we face on child protection and current national policy responses. I want to suggest that we are fast approaching a key historic moment when we can make a major step ahead in efforts to protect children. I would like to leave you with some ideas for the future.



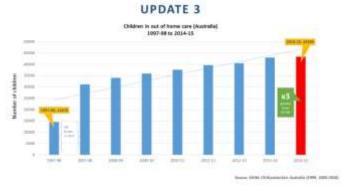
Let's look, first, at the national picture on child maltreatment. A review of the data tells us some worrying things.

Using data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, we can see that the number of substantiated child abuse cases has risen by 64% over the past 17 years, or from around 26,000 in 1998 to over 42,000 in 2015. And, there has been a 31% increase in rates of substantiated child abuse in the past six years alone. On average, in 2015, an abuse substantiation was recorded for 113 children every day of the year.

I would add that these figures need to be treated with caution. It may be that these figures represent a greater propensity toward reporting of case of abuse due to intensified media and community attention than in past decades. Data collected for these reports also draws together data from States and Territories that is collected on differing methodological bases. In other words, we do not know with absolute clarity enough about the actual numbers.



With those caveats in mind, we can see that the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (shown in blue) increased from around 3,000 in 1998 to around 17,000 in 2015...or from 17% of all children in this category in 1998 to double that figure to reach at 35% last year.



We see around 15,000 children in out-of-home care in 1998, which rises to over 43,000 in 2015. That means there has been a trebling in the number of children in out-of-home care across Australia in less than two decades.

#### **UPDATE 4**

#### Annual cost

- 2014-15: \$4.3 billion on child protection (5.8% up on 2013-14)
- · Out-of-home care services 56.2% or \$2.4 billion

#### Long-term cost

- \$6.8 billion pa for child sexual, emotional and physical abuse alone (Kezelman et al., 2016)
- Lifetime costs of services to each young people leaving care in Victoria av. \$738,000 (Raman et al., 2005)

Another dimension is the financial cost. Recently, the Productivity Commission's *Report on Government Services* examined how much was spent in 2014-15 on providing services to children who had experienced, or who were at risk of experiencing, child abuse and neglect.

Nationally, around \$4.3 billion was expended on child protection, out-of-home care services, family support services and intensive family support services in 2014-15. That represented a 5.8% increase compared with the previous year. Of total national expenditure, out-of-home care services represented 56.2% or \$2.4 billion.

The long-term costs of child abuse and neglect are also significant. A study by Kezelman et al. (2015) that claimed that the cost to the Australian taxpayer of unresolved child trauma was at least \$6.8 billion per annum for child sexual, emotional and physical abuse alone. Raman et al. (2005) estimated the total lifetime costs of providing services to each young people leaving care in Victoria alone would average around \$738,000.

#### WHERE HAVE WE BEEN?

- · Three phases
- · Phases 1 & 2 problem recognition & systems improvement
- Need transformative Phase 3

So, what have we done to tackle these issues and what should we do? I'd like to talk, first, about the journey we've been taking over the last two decades. In broad terms, I see three phases. I believe that we've been in what I term 'Phase 1' since the 1990s, and a bit of 'Phase 2' since the late 2000s. Because we are not yet turning

the problem around, we need to think about cultural and systems transformation. Fortunately, there are signs in the political and social authorising environment that a major step-change may be possible. Let me explain.

## DEVELOPING THE NATIONAL APPROACH 1990s-2009 Phase 1 Problem recognition 8: political action - Calls from 1900s 8: research - Senate reports 2004 8: 2005 - Installand Conference 2006

Phase 1 involved initial problem recognition and political action which commenced in the 1990s. I won't go into history. Suffice to say that a main driver for a national approach was year-on-year worsening of rates of child abuse at least since the early 1990s when more consolidated national record keeping began.

Adopting the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020 was a landmark achievement as it represented a coming-together for the first time of Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments and the NGO and research sectors. It is Australia's first-ever national plan of action to be endorsed by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) to reduce child abuse and neglect and to improve child wellbeing. Nothing like this existed before 2009.

DEVELOPING THE NATIONAL APPROACH

## Phase 1 Phase 2 Problem recognition 6: System enhancement 6: experiments - Catchin NGCs 6 research - Senste reports 2004 8: 2005 - National Conference 2006 - Neconal Framework 2009 - Neconal Framework 2009 - Medican Plan 2015-181

I'd put us currently in Phase 2 of the journey. We are now seeking ways to improve existing child protection systems and exploring how we might innovate in terms of prevention and early intervention.

We've done a lot already. We've developed national standards for out-of-home care, improved cross-jurisdictional data sharing, created a national research agenda, and established the office of the National Children's Commissioner. We now see the National Framework being increasingly used as an authority source in policies at all levels of government, in Ministerial statements, at Ministerial and senior officials meetings at Commonwealth, State and Territory Government levels, in reports to Parliament, in the policy manifestos of all major political parties, as well as in the work of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

Through the Child Aware National Initiative, we've developed child aware principles and practices, brought practitioners and policymakers together through annual conferences, and conducted some promising trials on community-led child aware programs through the Child Aware Local Initiative.

We shouldn't underestimate what we've achieved and, arguably, we've done well after six years in setting-up the scaffolding needed for greater long-term gains to be made. I'll return in a moment to what we need to do differently.

#### COALITION ON CHILD SAFETY AND WELLBEING

- · c. 200 organisations and researchers
- · Quarterly National Forum for Protecting Australia's Children
- · Reporting annually to COAG via Ministers



I want to mention that this work has been done through an innovative 'tripartite' partnership between the NGO and research sectors and Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments. The NGO Coalition, which is convened by Families Australia, comprises around 200 organisations, including FRSA, and researchers.

It works with Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments to co-design, implement and monitor the National Framework. The Coalition Steering Group participates in quarterly meetings of the National Forum for Protecting Australia's Children with governments. And, together we monitor progress with the National Framework and report to COAG annually on progress.

#### THIRD ACTION PLAN 2015-18

#### Three National Strategies

- Early intervention focus on early years, especially first thousand days for a child
- Helping young people in OOHC to thrive in adulthood
   Organisations responding better to keep children safe
- Cross-cutting areas
  - 1. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
  - 2. Research



Moving to the present day, the National Framework's Third Action Plan (2015-18) was announced by the Commonwealth Minister for Social Services, the Hon. Christian Porter MP, late last year. It places stronger emphasis than previous plans on prevention and intervening early.

There was also a particular focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities. It contains 17 high-level actions arranged under three new 'National Strategies', namely, 'early intervention with a focus on the early years, particularly the first thousand days for a child', 'helping young people in out-of-home care to thrive in adulthood', and 'organisations responding better to children and young people to keep them safe'.

#### SPECIFICS

#### Key areas

- Apply ATSICPP
- · Support young people leaving care
- Implement OOHC standards
- · Build child-safe organisations



I draw your attention to some of the areas which I think represent important new directions. All governments agreed that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle would be fully applied across all Third Action Plan strategies and actions. More support will be provided to young people exiting the out-of-home care system so they do well in adulthood – this pilot was announced in the May 2016 Commonwealth Budget.

All parties have agreed to the full implementation of the National Standards for Out of Home Care. Finally, the new Action Plan will work to strengthen the capacities of organisations that work with children by identifying resources to support best practice on child safe standards.

#### THE FIRST THOUSAND DAYS FOR A CHILD

- · Build community awareness of importance of child development
- Improve access to family support services for new /expectant/vulnerable parents where issues combine
- Join-up responses for families with young children across agencies and sectors

A major new direction is early intervention with a focus on the early years, especially the first thousand days for a child. Three main initiatives are planned. Some work is already underway. First, the Commonwealth will initiate community awareness raising activities focussed on effective parenting practices and strategies to enhance safe and supportive environments in the early years of life, at both national and local levels – this was announced in the May 2016 Budget.

Second, there will be work around improving access to evidence-based family support services, especially for new and expectant and vulnerable parents where substance misuse, mental ill-health and domestic/family violence combine. Third, more work will be done to join up responses for families with young children across agencies and sectors, with a focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

A project has commenced to identify critical success factors for place-based models, and the Commonwealth will support the integration of child care, maternal and child health, and family support services in a number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities through the Community Child Care Fund.

#### MEASURING PROGRESS

- · Developing targets
- · Program logics
- Progress markers

We will measure progress by exploring ways to develop targets and progress markers including developing program logics for both the National Framework and the Third Action Plan that will show how individual actions under the Plan can contribute to the outcomes of the National Framework.

This work also involves the development of a series of program logics that describe the expected outputs and outcomes, and key performance indicators for each action, representing the progress markers for individual actions under the Third Action Plan. Overall progress markers for the Third Action Plan are also being established.

This work is necessary as a project found the current National Framework indicators, which were designed to capture broad changes over time, would not provide the detailed data to measure progress under the Third Action Plan.

# A child protection and wellbeing transformation model for Australia Phase 1 Problem recognition (1990s-c.2011) Phase 2 System enhancement & experiments

All these things are welcome. Yet, if we step back a moment, we clearly need to keep asking what more must we do. I think any reasonable person must conclude that we are far from where we want to be in terms of child safety.

I contend that we need to shift gear — to get a paradigm shift in attitudes and policies. This might be called Phase 3 of a national approach in which we achieve lasting systems and cultural transformation by moving much more strongly to prevention investment underpinning major reductions in child abuse and greater evidence of children being placed more at the centre of community and political thinking and decision making. I think there are some encouraging signs that we may be entering a political and social environment that authorises bolder action.

"'As a nation we have a fundamental responsibility to protect our children,' Mr Turnbull said while announcing the inquiry [into youth detention in the NT]. A failure to do so 'diminishes all of us', he added."

The Age, 28 July 2016

In July this year, Prime Minister Turnbull announced the establishment of the Royal Commission into Detention in the Northern Territory. In doing so, he said that "As a nation we have a fundamental responsibility to protect our children...failure to do so 'diminishes all of us."

"...the Third Action Plan of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022... will see more intense effort on prevention and early intervention, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children...[and] responding to children living with violence."

Communique, COAG National Summit on Reducing Violence against Women and their Children, 28 October 2016

And, at the October 2016 COAG Summit on Reducing Violence Against Women and their Children, the Prime Minister and all First Ministers stressed their strong commitment to tackling violence against women and children. The Third Action Plan under the National Plan of Action to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children 2016-2019 emphasised the need to address violence against children as no previous plan had done.

"We are at an important point in the social history of children in Australia. This Royal Commission represents a one in a lifetime opportunity to acknowledge that we, the entire Australian community, failed to care for so many of our children. A failure that has had often devastating consequences. It also represents an opportunity...to give to children the best that we have to give."

The Hon. Justice McLellan AM, Chair of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 15 August 2016

Finally, the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse has also done a huge amount to awaken the community to child abuse, not just in historical settings but in the present day. The Royal Commission's work, for example, on promoting child-safe organisations has already provided important resources and a real impetus to help us all do better. When the Royal Commission presents its final report in December 2017 the nation and all governments will face important decisions about responding to the issues uncovered by the Royal Commission, particularly in terms of how our society values and cares for its children and young people.

As Justice McLellan recently observed "We are at an important point in the social history of children in Australia" and that we now have "an opportunity...to give children the best that we have to give".

#### TOWARDS PHASE 3

#### National plan of action

- · First Thousand Days a community/political norm
- · Investment strategy

#### **Family Matters**

End over-representation by 2040

What can we do to make the most of this moment? As well as boosting resourcing for existing policy strategies such as the National Framework, we might now begin to think about an overarching multi-decade national plan of action for children and young people. Such a plan could encompass not only child safety but also a comprehensive range of other domains such as mental health, disability and early learning. That would be a great place to prioritise the First Thousand Days for a Child work that is already underway. It would help to concentrate the nation's attention on the importance of the early years across a wide range of domains.

To help drive that national plan, it would be important to carefully work out a multi-generational, multi-sectoral investment strategy, or if you like a business case telling us what is needed from all players to achieve far-reaching reform.

Moreover, I think that we should support SNAICC's Family Matters campaign to end the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care compared with non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children by 2040.

- The distance travelled: significant
- . The approaching pivotal moment?
- . The cost of not doing more & business as usual
- . The case for more collaboration, innovation & agitation

In closing, I think we've come a significant distance in under 20 years to recognise better and take some very important steps to tackle child maltreatment. We are approaching another potentially pivotal moment when bold thinking needs to occur with the aim of transforming rather than just tinkering with old systems.

Unless we re-envision and multiply our efforts to tackle the drivers of child maltreatment—mainly domestic violence, but also substance misuse and mental illness—we'll just applying bandages to the problem. In human and financial terms that's not only unsustainable but it's clearly inhumane. Future generations will not thanks us; indeed, they will probably condemn us, just as we our predecessors are being judged by us for exposing children to abuse inside institutions and other settings. I think that we do have the makings for change. But, it does require collaboration, innovation and agitation to achieve the paradigm shift we so desperately need. Thank you.

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