

Families Australia: submission to the Senate Community Affairs References Committee Inquiry into out of home care (November 2014)

(This is an extract of the full submission. Please contact Families Australia to request a copy of the full version)

Summary

This submission focuses on a number of key areas for consideration in relation to the Inquiry's Terms of Reference. Key to our submission is the need for continued joint commitment by the Australian, State and Territory Governments with the community and academia to further implementation of the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020 (the National Framework), the national plan to tackle child abuse and neglect. The National Framework was endorsed by the COAG in 2009 and provides the architecture for developing consistent, shared long term goals and responsibilities across governments and the non-government sector and broader community. Implementation of the National Framework is through a series of three year action plans.

Also key to our submission is the need for a strategic, cross-sector and multi-disciplinary national early intervention and prevention framework. This framework is critical to addressing the increasing numbers of children and young people in the Child Protection system and out-of-home care. It will be important for this framework to link with the National Framework (child protection) and other relevant national frameworks such as the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022* (COAG 2011).

Families Australia recognises the work necessary by all levels of government and the non-government sector to reduce the number of children and young people entering out-of-home care and to improve the outcomes of those who have entered out-of-home care. Our submission concentrates on key areas where the Australian Government could have the most impact through its policy leadership, payments and programmes.

Recommendations

Families Australia recommends:

- The Australian Government works with State and Territory Governments, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Services, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, to consider the national applicability of the Victorian *Koori Kids* priorities.
- That an independent evaluation (involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership) is administered every two years to assess the implementation and progress of strategies aimed at reducing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children known to the child protection system.

- The Australian Government reviews options for ensuring ongoing and substantive health assessments and interventions for children and young people in out-of-home care, including options to better identify and track the health histories of children and young people in out-of-home care and mechanisms to facilitate access to medical practitioners through Medicare.
- The Australian Government continues to take the lead in progressing the National Report into the Views of Children and Young People in Out-of-home care due for release in 2015.
- The Senate Committee includes the views of children and young people in out-of-home care as part of their consultation process.
- The Australian Government works with State and Territory Governments through the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare to develop and incorporate service provider outcomes data from the community sector into the Child Protection Australia data collection.
- The Australian Government works with State and Territory Governments to ensure full reporting of National Standards for out-of-home care and consideration of external review and benchmarking of implementation.
- The Australian Government considers its role in removing barriers to the development of a nationally consistent professional foster care model.
- The Australian Government leads work on the development of a national early intervention and prevention framework that would focus effort, avoid duplication, coordinate planning and implementation and ensure sharing of information and innovation to reduce child abuse and neglect.
- The Australian Government ensures the original intent of access to Special Child Care Benefit is maintained during its considerations of the findings of the Productivity Commission Inquiry on Childcare and Early Childhood Learning.
- Families Australia also recognises the findings of the *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse* will potentially lead to a body of work and recommends, where relevant, this work be implemented through the National Framework.