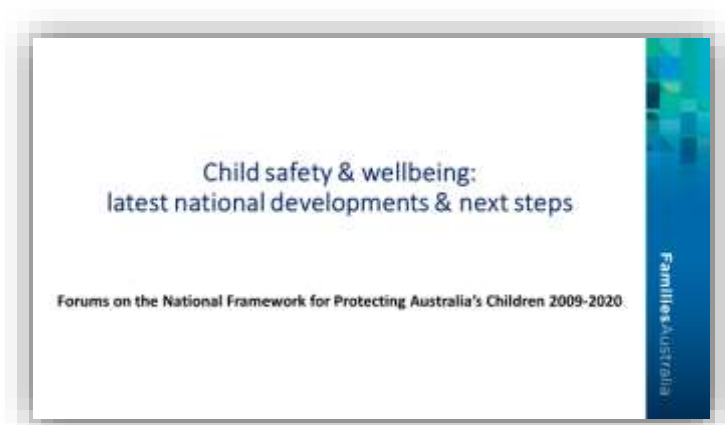


CHILD SAFETY & WELLBEING: LATEST NATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS & NEXT STEPS

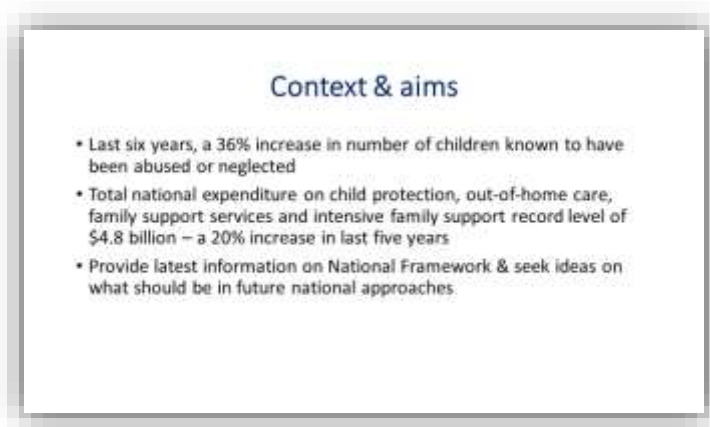
Dr Brian Babington
CEO, Families Australia

Families Australia forum on the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children
2009-2020

Brisbane, 17 March 2017*



Welcome and thank you for joining us to hear what's been happening under the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020 (the 'National Framework') and to contribute your thoughts about ways we can improve child safety and wellbeing in Australia. I begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the lands on which we meet, and pay my respects to their elders, past, present and future.



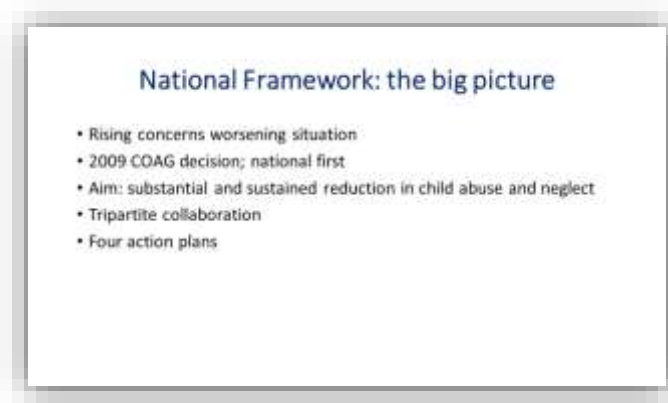
Context

Child abuse and neglect continues to be one Australia's most pressing problems. In the past six years we've seen a 36% increase in the number of children known to have been abused or neglected—from around 31,000 (2009-10) to over 42,000 (2014-15).

Total national expenditure on child protection, out-of-home care, family support services and intensive family support services has reached a record level of \$4.8 billion – that's a 20% increase in the past five years.

The extent and seriousness of child abuse and neglect has also been made clear by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, which will issue its final report later this year.

Given that context, today's forum is about providing you with the latest information on how the National Framework is seeking to respond to these challenges and, importantly, seeking your ideas on what should be in future national policies to effectively tackle child abuse.



Origins and objectives

Let me take a few minutes to give you an overview of the National Framework. The National Framework grew out of rising concerns over Australia's worsening rates of child abuse.

Ten years ago the Commonwealth Government committed to taking leadership in this area and the result was agreement in 2009 by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) to establish the National Framework.

Adopting the National Framework was a landmark achievement as it represented the first time that Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments and the NGO and research sectors had come together on this issue. It is Australia's first-ever national plan of action to reduce child abuse and neglect and improve child wellbeing. Nothing like this existed before 2009.

According to COAG, the National Framework is based on an understanding that 'Australia needs to move from seeing 'protecting children' merely as a response to abuse and neglect to one of promoting the safety and wellbeing of children'. Its aim is to make 'a substantial and sustained reduction in child abuse and neglect in Australia over time'.

A key aspect of the National Framework has been its 'tripartite' nature, with policy development and program implementation being undertaken in collaboration between three partners—the Commonwealth Government, State and Territory Governments, and the National Coalition on Child Safety & Wellbeing, which comprises over 200 NGOs and research institutions. These three partners meet quarterly in the National Forum for Protecting Australia's Children to review implementation progress and discuss future directions.

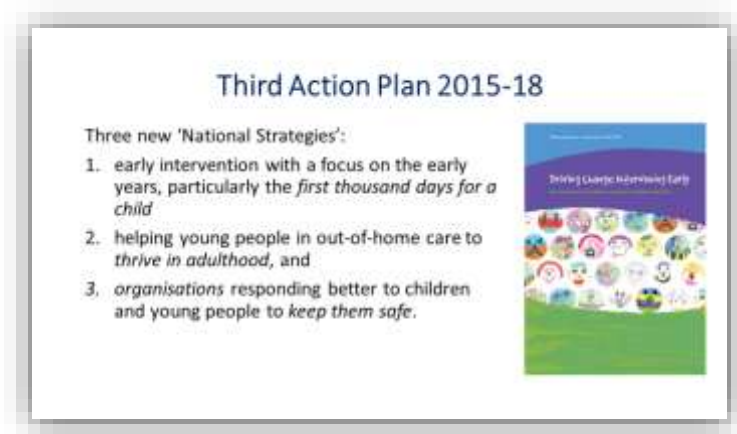
The National Framework is organised in four three-year action plans – we are in the middle of the Third Action Plan at present.



Achievements

In the first two action plans there were some important achievements. Australia's first national standards for out-of-home care were adopted. Thirteen minimum standards were set for the care of children and young people in foster and residential care in addition to standards operating at State and Territory levels. The position of National Children's Commissioner was established and the first National Children's Commissioner was appointed.

The Child Aware Approaches initiative was established. Under it, a 'Good Practice Guide to Child Aware Approaches' was developed and the Child Aware Local Initiative to assist communities develop locally-appropriate child safety and wellbeing plans was implemented. Child Aware Approaches Conferences were started – please consider attending the 5th in Brisbane this May.

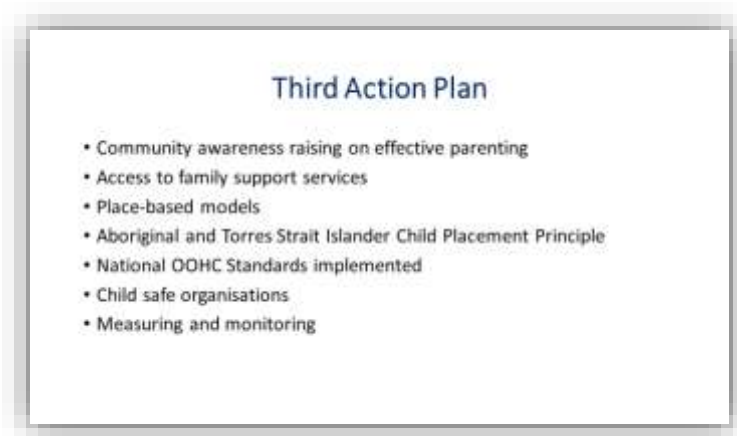


Third Action Plan 2015-18

Moving on to the present-day, I'll touch briefly on the current Third Action Plan which runs from 2015 to 2018. The Third Action Plan was announced by the Commonwealth Minister for Social Services, the Hon. Christian Porter MP, in late 2015.

Responding to the national consultations held in 2014, the Third Action Plan places a much stronger emphasis than previous plans on prevention and intervening early. There is also a particular focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities.

The Third Action Plan contains 17 high-level actions arranged under three new 'National Strategies' on: 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.



Under 'early intervention with a focus on the early years', the Commonwealth is working to initiate community awareness raising activities focussed on effective parenting practices and strategies to enhance safe and supportive environments in the early years of life.

Work has begun 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.

A project has also 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.

All governments have agreed that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle will 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.

We will continue to work toward 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.

Progress on the Third Action Plan will be measured 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.

Overall progress markers for the Third Action Plan are also being established.

What more must we do?

Finally, I would like to turn to remarks by The Hon. Justice Peter McLellan AM, Chair of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.



His challenge was for us to give children the best we can give them. How can we do that? I'd like now to pose two questions for our discussion: Q1: As a nation, what more must we do to improve child safety & wellbeing? Q2: How can we get the Australian community at large to prioritise the safety and wellbeing of children?

* This presentation was used as the basis for Families Australia's policy forums led by Dr Brian Babington in Sydney, Hobart, Melbourne and Brisbane in March 2017.