

**NATIONAL COALITION ON CHILD SAFETY
AND WELLBEING**

ANNUAL MEETING

**ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION ON
CHILD WELLBEING AND SAFETY BEYOND 2020**

MAY 2018

FamiliesAustralia

About Families Australia

Families Australia is a national, peak, not-for-profit organisation that strives to improve the wellbeing of Australian families, especially those experiencing the greatest vulnerability and marginalisation. Families Australia does this by providing policy advice to, and working with, the Australian Government and Parliament on behalf of more than 800 member organisations around Australia.

Since 2007, Families Australia has coordinated the National Coalition on Child Safety and Wellbeing, a consortium of around 200 non-government community service organisations and researchers from across Australia who work closely with the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments to help devise and implement the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020.

Acknowledgements

Families Australia wishes to acknowledge and pay respect to the traditional owners of the lands on which the meeting was conducted. We thank the Families Australia Board and National Coalition Steering Group for their leadership and support. It was an immense privilege to hear such a vast array of experience, wisdom and passionate commitment—thanks go to every participant for their contributions. Families Australia extends its sincere appreciation to the Commonwealth Department of Social Services and all State and Territory Governments for their support of Child Aware policy discussions.

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Introduction

Families Australia, supported by the Commonwealth Department of Social Services (DSS), held a Child Aware event to further a national consultation process for a multi-decade national policy agenda on child wellbeing and safety. Families Australia hosted the forum entitled *Brave new world: Where to from 2020?* on Thursday 29 March 2018 at the Department of Social Services' National Office in Canberra.

Approximately 100 delegates attended, drawn from the membership of the National Coalition on Child Safety and Wellbeing (National Coalition), Commonwealth agencies (Departments of Social Services, Health and Prime Minister and Cabinet) as well as State and Territory Government officials from NSW, NT and SA.

The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009 – 2020 (National Framework) is due to conclude in 2020. As a result and throughout 2017, rolling discussions occurred between DSS, the National Forum for Child Safety and Wellbeing and the National Coalition, about the fourth and final action plan of the National Framework and the commencement of a consultation process for the future, beyond 2020. The 2018 Child Aware event, provided an opportunity to identify and foreshadow national policy ideas to move the agenda forward, particularly toward a deeper focus on child wellbeing and family strengthening.

Event aims & process

The aim of the Policy Think Space was to explore and propose innovative ways to advance national policy on child wellbeing and safety in the decades beyond 2020. The Child Aware event comprised three segments: keynote speakers, Policy Think Space roundtables, and an opportunity to participate in a short policy pitch called the XPRESS Podium.

Entitled ***Beyond 2020: Influencing the future national agenda for children and their families***, the roundtables culminated in six XPRESS Podium policy pitches.

In opening remarks, Dr Brian Babington, CEO, Families Australia and National Coalition Convenor spoke about the future national policy agenda as one that recognises the National Framework as the foundation of a bolder national initiative on child wellbeing and family strengthening that might, for example, give even stronger emphasis to early prevention and family support, with top priority being accorded to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

The futures forum commenced with three keynote speakers: Ms Megan Mitchell, National Children's Commissioner, Adjunct Professor Muriel Bamblett AM, CEO, Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency and Mr Simon Schrapel AM, CE, UnitingCommunities SA. Video and Powerpoint presentations are available [here](#).

The policy pitch provided each group with the opportunity to challenge the status quo and help move the national policy conversation forward and to advance solutions focussed national policy ideas that cut across traditional policy and portfolio boundaries. In preparing for the XPRESS Podium presentation, delegates at each table were invited to decide which of their ideas fitted the criteria

best and select their policy pitch presenter. This session was facilitated by Ms Annette Michaux, Director, Parenting Research Centre.

Discussion guides were circulated and members of the National Coalition Steering Group or Families Australia Board facilitated roundtable discussions that were recorded by representatives of DSS and transcribed by Families Australia staff.

Each roundtable was encouraged to address three questions:

1. What do we want to achieve?
2. What might be the critical impact or outcome of this national policy?
3. How will this policy solution be achieved?

The policy pitch summaries that follow represent an initial bringing together of policy ideas to advance child wellbeing and safety in Australia in the decades beyond 2020. These ideas will require further refinement and consultation that will be undertaken by Families Australia in consultation with DSS.

XPRESS Podium: Policy Pitch Summaries

Roundtable #1 pitch: Making a REAL difference for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children

The presenter stated that their roundtable emphasised the following:

- Achieving national realisation of all elements of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (ATSICPP).
- Achieving accountability for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

What do we want to achieve?

- A level playing field where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families are happy, well, safe, and culturally connected.
- Self-determination and community voice.

What might be the critical impact or outcome for this national policy?

- Addressing disadvantage, systemic racism, over-representation, and improved health, wellbeing, self-determination.
- Increased participation of children and families in decisions that affect them.

How will this policy be achieved?

- Legislative levers enacted to create an environment for active efforts.
- Identification of success indicators.
- Accountability to National, State and Territory ATSI Children's Commissioners who have clear powers.
- Demonstrable effort to fully implement the ATSICPP with a concomitant transition of authority.

Roundtable #2 pitch: A Future Fund for Children

What do we want to achieve?

- A 20 year future fund for child wellbeing and safety.
- A national Statement of Commitment, agreed by all jurisdictions, to implement holistic prevention-focussed responses for children and families experiencing vulnerability.
- Clear national outcomes associated with this Statement of Commitment underpinned by flexible place-based services and programs that support intergenerational change.

What might be the critical impact or outcome for this national policy?

- All children would have a sense of belonging.
- There would be shared responsibility and responses across government and service sectors.

How will this policy be achieved?

- COAG should endorse such an approach.
 - A national future fund with investment capability should be established.
 - Cooperative national research should support strategic policy and program implementation.
 - There should be an annual report to COAG.
-

Roundtable #3 pitch: Access to a greater quantum of early childhood education

What do we want to achieve?

- Improved universal access to a minimum weekly quantum (30 hours) of early childhood education.
- Recognition that universal services provide soft entry points for families experiencing vulnerability – reducing stigma, leading families to seek out or receive encouragement to access secondary supports.

What might be the critical impact or outcome for this national policy?

- Child-focussed services.
- Reduction in the need for child protection services.

How will this policy be achieved?

- Long-term investments – not trials.
-

Roundtable #4 pitch: Help when and where it is needed

What do we want to achieve?

- Targeted earlier intervention that focuses on families whose children are at risk of entering OOHC.
- Open adoption such as in UK and USA, which have shown significantly reduced rates of break downs.
- Justice reinvestment in geographic areas where there is evidence of interest in community control and where finances can be reinvested.

Roundtable #5 pitch: A well-informed investment model of support for children and families

What do we want to achieve?

- An investment model, fuelled by good data and evidence and that establishes a minimum quantum of investment sufficient to operate over a generational strategy (15-20 years).
- Data linked.
- A future fund to enable transition to social empowerment and community control and enabling local leadership similar to ACCO models in all communities.
- Data disseminated to/for community to support understanding of issues and decision making.

What might be the critical impact or outcome for this national policy?

- Leadership would demonstrate a clear aspiration for all Australian children.
- There would be a demonstrable diversion of expenditure over time from the tertiary system.
- There would be growing investment in communities that improves social, educational and economic outcomes.

How will this policy be achieved?

- There should be a minimum/threshold amount spent on prevention based on understanding that the cost of preventing harm has life-long consequences, including major economic implications.
- There should be greater data linkage to inform investment and translated to empower communities.
- A future fund would support transition to long-term sustained efforts for Australian children.

Roundtable #6 pitch: A Minister for Children

What do we want to achieve?

- A full Minister with capacity to bring together a range of portfolios that contribute to child wellbeing such as social services, education and health and who reports annually to COAG.

What might be the critical impact or outcome for this national policy?

- Children will be recognised as full citizens with rights and responsibilities.

How will this policy be achieved?

- The Minister will have a dedicated children's budget, child impact assessments across a range of portfolios.

Attachment A provides the summaries of each policy pitch and roundtable discussion.

Attachment A

Roundtable #1: Making a REAL difference for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children

Beyond 2020 discussion summary:

- How do we create a level playing field? Equal rights for all children.
- Truth first – transparency is vital.
- Listen to the most marginalised and commit to working in partnership.
- Usually multiple layers of vulnerability – need to be mindful of how these may interact to inhibit improvements in outcomes
- Having to be more accountable makes a huge difference e.g. in child removal, agencies have to spell out what steps they've undertaken prior to child removal.
- By the time removal is about to occur other options are closed.
- We can identify children at risk prior to notification – this is a point at which interventions must start – not wait until tertiary risk levels are reached before activating wrap-around supports.
- We know what the indicators are – the question is how do we stop the indicators of risk progressing:
 - Fund early intervention/prevention;
 - Respond earlier, smarter and faster in the trajectory;
 - we know there is too much stigma attached to seeking help; and
 - make sure Indigenous children are able to get back into culture and kin.
- Where effectiveness happens is where it is practical to start.
- Building blocks of “Family Matters” is a good start – introduces active plans/active effort.
- Accountability mechanisms help hold agencies and organisations – sets the standard.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children’s Commissioners need to have powers to investigate and review against compliance – not just provide advice.
- We need a Plan against which any policy can be measured.
- Jurisdictional differences are a major challenge to achieving better outcomes.
- We should be sharing examples of constructive and helpful policy/ practice and resources
- The economic argument for change is that the cost of the current system is unsustainable.
- Failure is not at the bottom of the system - on the ground – failures take place at the top.

Roundtable #2: A Future Fund for Children

Beyond 2020 discussion summary:

- Need to develop intergenerational practice and principles that identifies family and systems interventions and manages the impact of issues on children’s wellbeing.
- We need a coordinated conversation across States and Territories, sharing the strengths of models or systems and learning from this so that we replicate what works.
- Impact of poverty and inequality on child safety and wellbeing – how can we have a more holistic approach – must bring portfolios together that share interest in social/societal outcomes.
- Identify impact pathways to change the trajectory.

- Need flexible, cross-government approaches to funding to enhance integration and encourage a shared accountability for Australia’s children.
 - We must change cultures across sectors and governments from restrictive and punitive to encouraging and empowering for clientele.
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Roundtable #3: Access to a greater quantum of early childhood education

Beyond 2020 discussion summary:

- Reverse the curve (substantiation rates and numbers of children in OOHC).
 - Be mindful of factors that impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (incl. history).
 - Use social justice/ human rights lens in decision making.
 - Change the way we use funding – fund for best outcomes. This could mean investing in getting children who can go home to be at home and invest differently in those in OOHC systems to encourage flourishing into adulthood.
 - Universal access to early childhood services (kindergarten/pre-school to 30 hours/week), in line with other OECD countries, but guaranteed minimum based on evidence.
 - Enhance intensity of support in the first 1000 days for a child.
 - Strengthen universal service platforms, upskill staff (social work and early childhood).
 - Co-locate universal and targeted services such as preschool with child and family centres.
 - Strengthen the underpinning public health model – focus on universal service platforms.
 - Encourage greater use of ‘soft entry’ access to service systems included building up to targeted supports for children and families when they experience vulnerability.
 - Improve data analytics and linkage; encourage greater use of data mapping to help identify hot spots for focussing funding and services; improve analysis and distribution of AEDC data.
 - Clarify whether intensive C4C sites are showing evidence of improved outcomes – if we know we should be sharing that information on ways to improve access and support for children and families.
 - Effective place-based approaches can break down barriers between funding sources; long-term investments rather than cycles of trialling.
 - Upskill in understanding and valuing children.
-

Roundtable #4: Help when and where it is needed

Beyond 2020 discussion summary:

- Engage across portfolios and sectors in national discussions – leverage broad engagement in solutions.
- Targets for wellbeing and health – don’t focus on child protection targets which drive increased risk and tertiary investment.
- Kids say they want to get out of the system – what are the jurisdictions doing about that?
- Child friendly policy.
- Recognition that bureaucratic systems do not connect well; child protection systems are not demonstrating nuanced decision making about individual children.

- Court processes tend to be tedious – take a long time to resolve issues for children and families – onus should be on proof that everything that can be done to maintain family before removing children, so long as child safety not compromised.
- Same for adoption processes.
- Checks and balances in children’s courts are not there.
- Permanency solutions must be underpinned by enabling principles and with consideration to aspirations for the future including education, health and wellbeing.
- Universal basic income for all families to address the role that poverty can play in adverse childhood experiences.
- Parent focussed early intervention.
- Use the public health approach for issues that bring children in OOHV such as DFV, mental illness and AOD.
- National legislation on protecting children that shifts the focus to child wellbeing.
- Imbalance of power and dynamics across jurisdictions and the Commonwealth is a constant tension against progress.
- Clarify what early intervention means and use it to address intergenerational challenges and break the cycle of harm.
- Wrap supports around the small number of families that generate the most child protection activity – systems have become increasingly bureaucratised, failing to get traction on outcomes instead of outputs.
- Social reinvestment.

Roundtable #5: A well-informed investment model of support for children and families

Beyond 2020 discussion summary:

- ACCO model is reflected in all communities which requires community controlled processes, not impacted by changes in government and that aims to move from funding tertiary to early intervention and prevention.
- Statutory spending standards need to have a set proportion of funds quarantined for early intervention - improve support dosage/quantum for those experiencing vulnerability.
- Create a short-term dedicated fund to enable the transition to early intervention.
- Children in OOHC require a range of supports some of which may be required across the life course. Specialist assistance should be based on prevention and early intervention approaches for these children – they must be actively engaged in decisions about them and their future.
- Prioritise investment approaches, for example NZ.
- Recognition needed that there is a great deal of funding being expended which appears to be not working – needs intensive collaboration and integrated care – need better data and evidence to create powerful arguments.
- Enhance linkage of data sets – don’t recreate – use what we have.
- Recognise the politicised story that emphasises deficits – ideological and morally culpable.
- NSW is starting to develop its understanding and responses to drivers or child protection and risk factors and to identify what should be done differently recognising that there are future

costs for the child/ren and politically for not improving outcomes for children experiencing harm and adversity.

- Issues for government – risk, managing transition to new ways of working and shifting investments – longer-term (15-20 years) to help address political cyclic effects and improve data and research capability relating to programs and therefore affecting children and families.
 - Work on child safe organisations because that is where the political momentum currently exists.
 - Prevention and early intervention needs to community investment and be place-based – we are not giving communities the data and evidence to help them change.
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Roundtable #6: A Minister for Children

Beyond 2020 discussion summary:

- Children recognised as full citizens – human rights – voice counts.
 - Enhanced understanding of child wellbeing in policy and community.
 - Recognition in future policy that should be child rights and family impact assessment should be integral across all policy and program areas, all portfolios and all jurisdictions.
 - Growing recognition of the cost of inaction, that child protection is a national burden that has become more visible – demonstrates strategic failure.
 - Need to create a senior ministry for families and children that has structure, strategy and a functional children’s budget.
-