

IMPROVING WELLBEING AND SAFETY OUTCOMES FOR FAMILIES AND CHILDREN BEYOND 2020

Address by Dr Brian Babington, Chief Executive Officer, Families Australia

Families Australia Child Aware Conference, 17 May 2019, Brisbane

I want to discuss what should come after the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children which ends next year. I will start off with a high speed overview of the National Framework, and then pose some questions for discussion.

NATIONAL FRAMEWORK: KEY HISTORY

Ten years ago, all Australian governments endorsed the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020, Australia's first-ever national plan to improve child safety and wellbeing. The aim is to produce 'a sustained and substantial reduction in child abuse over time'.

The National Framework is based on shifting investments toward early intervention and prevention under a public health model. It is supported by National Coalition on Child Safety and Wellbeing, a grouping of leading not-for-profit and research sector organisations.

PROGRESS

Work done to date includes the first-ever National Standards for Out-of-Home Care, establishing office of the National Children's Commissioner, and National Principles for Child Safe Organisations.

We've just commenced the 4th and final action plan 2018-2020. Key aims include improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children at risk of entering child protection systems, as well as for children in out-of-home care.

CHALLENGES

It's obvious that far more needs to be done: national trends on child safety still going wrong direction.

- The number of children in out-of-home care has more than trebled in the past 20 years, from 14,470 in 1997-98 to 45,756 in 2017-18.
- At June 2017, 17,664 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were in out-of-home care—a rate of 58.7 per 1,000 children, which was 10 times the rate for non-Indigenous children.
- The number of children receiving child protection services rose by about 11% over five years, from 143,000 children in 2013-14 to 157,000 children in 2017-18.
- Total national annual spend on child protection and related family support efforts reached \$5.8 billion nationally in 2017-18 (a real increase of 10% from 2016-17), of which out-of-home care services was majority (59%, or \$3.4 billion).

The National Framework has been helpful in setting up a foundation, but has been chronically under-funded and we've struggled to give preventive approaches the priority we wanted. If you like, it is a good first draft, but we need to do more, differently.

With the National Framework ending next year, government and non-government thinking is commencing on how to grow a national focus on the safety and wellbeing of children and families.

Families Australia's consultations revealed a strong appetite for a more comprehensive strategy to improve child and family wellbeing, while still focusing on child safety and improving child protection responses and systems.

Some governments, including in New Zealand, Tasmania and the Northern Territory, have been developing approaches that focus on improving outcomes for children and families through a lens of family wellbeing.

BEYOND 2020 - WHAT MUST WE DO?

We pose three discussion questions:

1. What are the main barriers to making Australia a nation where all children grow up safe and well?
2. What initiatives are showing promise in overcoming these barriers?
3. What should be the key elements of national policy for child and family wellbeing and safety beyond 2020?