

Consultation in Hobart, 25 March 2019

What more *must* we do in national policy terms to make Australia a nation where all children grow up safe and well?

- Structural issues include:
 - many children and families living in poverty
 - the effects of policies and 'rules' on the wellbeing of children and families
 - the need for equitable and flexible policy and payment provisions such as:
 - consistent kinship care policies, especially around access to payments and services to remove inequities such as those between formal vs informal care arrangements and children with different visa conditions
 - adequate recognition and resourcing of informal care arrangements
 - the need for national consistency in laws and definitions across jurisdictions.
- We need to improve relationships between vulnerable families and communities and systems so that:
 - families are able to trust systems
 - there is better information sharing between systems and services
 - services and communities are enabled to maximise wellbeing.
- Child safety is a sub-set of child and family wellbeing, so we need to acknowledge that:
 - there is not a dichotomy between child protection and wellbeing
 - wellbeing is complex, but includes a range of features that can be enhanced with adequate and appropriate supports
 - we must balance a public health approach to improve outcomes for all children with the need to improve outcomes for those at serious risk
 - we need better (primary and secondary) care for families at pre-tertiary stage
 - we should aim for success as parents as part of the assessment for support process
 - supporting families can improve safety of children.
- Because we believe the child is at the centre, we must:
 - enable the voices of children and young people to inform policies and programs
 - develop shared language with children and young people
 - better inform everyone about trauma and its ongoing impact on children and parents.

Discussion questions

What should be the key elements of a national policy approach for child and family wellbeing and safety after 2020 when the National Framework comes to an end?

- Structures and policies across jurisdictions and systems need to support safety by:
 - meeting families' basic needs such as housing, food, health and security
 - providing programs and services with longevity and certainty of funding, with a particular focus on:
 - services known to be effective
 - the importance of information sharing and effective collaboration between services and systems
 - the longevity of services and providers being essential to building trust
 - governments and portfolios working collaboratively and funding services around families' needs, not on the basis of siloed policy areas
 - focusing on what supports families to create a safe environment for their children rather than just focusing on the child
 - having national conversations about what we mean by 'safety' and 'wellbeing', acknowledging that we cannot keep all children and young people safe.
- Programs need to be designed and implemented in consultation with children, young people, parents and carers, meaning that:
 - funding supports these consultative processes
 - it is easy to navigate between systems
 - lived experience is incorporated in the development of policies and programs.
- Implementing all levels of a public health model requires:
 - better understanding of how communities can support children and families through different parts of a public health model
 - consideration of whether we are ready (nationally) to move from the current focus (We have not yet successfully implemented prevention and early intervention as widely as planned and the vast majority of funding still goes to tertiary services).
 - services that are accessible, for example, provided in/through schools or other 'soft entry points'
 - prevention and early intervention approaches which include:
 - support from early pregnancy, especially for young people who have been in out-of-home care (OOHC)
 - encouraging help-seeking (which will depend on families having trust in the system)
 - a more strengths-based focus
 - a greater focus on secondary services, including:
 - a focus on the family, including wrap-around services to support reunification and whole-of-family, long-term recovery

- consistent, continuous services to keep families out of tertiary services or support them to move out of and recover from crises.
- Strengthen services and supports within the OOHC system so that:
 - all those in OOHC have access to therapeutic, trauma-informed services (which does not depend on the advocacy of individual parents or carers)
 - services around OOHC provide for the wellbeing of those in OOHC, their families and carers and include:
 - healing (children and young people)
 - support for carers
 - services for parents to address concerns and heal.

Which of these key elements are likely to produce the best outcomes for children and families?

- A National Framework has a focus on the **family** and supports families to be safe and thrive, including:
 - recognising all the domains that feed into wellbeing, such as health, safety, readiness to learn, adequate financial resources and adequate, stable housing.
- We have a better understanding of diversity and what that means for children and families and the particular supports they need, including:
 - a major focus on supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families
 - genuine consultations with communities about what works in their communities.
- We listen to children and young people about their feelings of safety.
- Programs are place-based and co-designed.
- Within child protection and related services, workers seek agreement with families on what ‘the problem’ is and whether the proposed solutions are doable or appropriate.
- Much more effort (and funding) go into secondary services before things are so bad that tertiary services are warranted.
- Better targeting of tertiary services to families with abuse or at high risk requires that
 - services and systems are co-designed with families (including children and young people) to fit their needs
 - Ministerial portfolios hold shared responsibility for child and family wellbeing.

How will we know if the approach is successful?

- Outcomes measures are:
 - clearly linked to overarching strategies
 - built into service delivery
 - reported on nationally, but also include local outcomes
 - show positive progress
 - flexible enough to reflect/allow for local imperatives and needs.
- Nationally developed and aligned indicators of child and family wellbeing show positive progress (Tasmania is using in its wellbeing strategy the 6 domains developed by ARACY).
- Policy and program design reflect genuine representation and participation of children and young people, parents and carers.
- Children and young people report positive outcomes, such as that they are safe, better off or happier.
- Perpetrators are supported to change their behaviours.
- More consultative and collaborative processes are used in removal and reunification.
- Fewer children are in OOHC and there is more early intervention and supported reunification.
- There is regular, ongoing collaboration between, and monitoring by, stakeholders across governments and the service provision and research sectors.

How would we balance child and family wellbeing with the need to protect children?

- Any conceptual basis for 'family wellbeing' needs to put the child at the centre and the definition of 'family' must be broad enough to include all kinds of different arrangements, such as birth family, foster care, informal kinship or other care arrangements.
- We need to understand and acknowledge that we can't protect all children – some will be harmed. THEN we can focus on wellbeing.
- Safety is part of wellbeing. Supporting families can improve safety.