

Consultation in Brisbane 9 October 2019

On behalf of the National Coalition on Child Safety and Wellbeing, Families Australia led this consultation on the successor plan for the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020 (National Framework). Families Australia is working closely with SNAICC – National Voice for our Children and the Family Matters Campaign, the Commonwealth Department of Social Services and respective State and Territory governments on the successor plan to the National Framework. The session was attended by around 50 participants including Senior Officials from State and Federal governments, executives and representatives from the non-government sector, academics and parents.

This was the third jurisdictional consultation on the successor plan. Previous consultations have been held in Hobart (March 2019) and Adelaide (August 2019). A consultation was also held with delegates at the Child Aware Conference in May 2019.

Participants in Brisbane placed a very strong emphasis on the successor national plan driving systems change across all levels of government, service sectors, practice and in communities. There was a very clear message about the need for a different approach to that adopted in 2007 and relevant to the context of today. There was a strong preference for a long-term, bipartisan child and family wellbeing plan endorsed by COAG that builds on the current National Framework and is appropriately resourced. The successor plan should also:

- Shift the focus of investment towards prevention and early intervention to divert children, young people and families away from tertiary level responses.
- Leverage, but not duplicate effort that is occurring elsewhere at national, state and territory or community levels. This includes the investment occurring as a result of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.
- Consider the use of short, medium and long-term targets against key indicators to track progress incrementally over the life of the successor plan, developed in consultation with the sector, regularly reviewed and reported against.
- Have an architecture that allows for adaptation and adjustments over the life of the plan to accommodate for emerging issues.
- Include a robust governance structure including Community Services Ministers, a formalised Children and Families Secretaries Group and a formal, tripartite working group to oversee implementation.
 - The tripartite approach to governance under the National Framework is recognised as a key strength that must be sustained.
- Have a strong and sustained focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families that complements other strategies such as the Family Matters Campaign, the *Our Way Strategy* and Changing Tracks Actions Plan, and Closing the Gap.
- Embed new commissioning and long term funding arrangements that:
 - allow funds to be used flexibly to meet local needs while achieving agreed outcomes;
 - enable integrated, cross sectoral responses for children, young people and families, particularly those with complex needs, to keep them out of child protection systems.
- Embed the concept of a recovery phase for children, young people and parents exposed to trauma in service delivery. Ensure services continue to allow clients a period of consolidation once goals have been achieved.

The attached table synthesises the outcomes against all discussion questions. It identifies the key elements participants put forward as most likely to produce the best outcomes and that balance child and family wellbeing with the need to protect children. Key elements have been grouped by Families Australia under some possible, broad areas of policy focus.

Many insightful and powerful contributions were made by participants in Brisbane. A number of these have been collated by Families Australia and are also attached.

Policy focus	Key elements most likely to produce the best outcomes and balance child and family wellbeing with safety	What will success look like?
1. Systems	<p>A new national child and family wellbeing plan that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is endorsed by COAG and has bi-partisan support; • Takes a long term view with regular review points and a robust, collaborative evaluation plan; • Includes a clear vision of success; • Builds on past achievements under the National Framework but takes a new approach to increase focus on economic, social and physical wellbeing; • Has a strong focus on cross-sectoral prevention and early intervention; • Is inclusive of all children and families but prioritises those with highest needs; • Is underpinned by a clear program logic, includes short and long-term wellbeing indicators and targets (co-designed) and an accountability framework for all partners; • Includes communities as a key partner through devolved decision-making, accountability and the implementation of solutions; • Leverages existing resources, policy frameworks, action plans and initiatives both nationally and at state and local levels - including the recommendations of the Royal Commission - to maximise impact. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All partners are working collaboratively towards an agreed, shared vision (definition of success), achievable and measurable targets and key outcomes that will deliver the greatest impact. ▪ Robust governance arrangements are in place at all levels with clear roles, responsibilities and accountabilities across governments, non-government and corporate sectors with communities playing a key role. ▪ The new plan complements but does not duplicate effort already occurring across jurisdictions. ▪ There is an increase in investments to prevention and early support services with downstream savings over time in the statutory child protection system. ▪ All service sectors are included and are working collaboratively - health, housing, education, early childhood, social services. ▪ Language is positively framed - move away from a paternalistic approach ('intervention', 'protection' and 'assessment') and a deficit model to a wellbeing, strengths-based, developmental approach. ▪ Communities are playing a greater role in supporting children, young people and families.
	<p>Better coordination across governments, service sectors and community organisations and less restrictive funding frameworks for services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ True place-based, community led approaches and service delivery. ▪ Collaborative instead of competitive commissioning. ▪ Flexible, longer term funding models that are outcomes based. ▪ A reduction in siloed approaches to service delivery and funding. ▪ Positive shift in indicators towards child and family wellbeing over the longer term.
	<p>Proportionate responses including cross-sectoral 'pools of funding' for those with the most complex needs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This would require streamlined funding agreements across portfolios and a common program logic. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Children, young people and families access services that are timely, holistic and meet their needs across all life domains. ▪ More equitable outcomes for children and families across all demographics. ▪ A reduction in the current annual rate of increase in numbers of children going into alternative care.

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	A strong focus on building the capacity and skills of parents, including those whose children have been removed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Parents know about and access programs, services and resources. ▪ Parents have capacity to face adversity and thrive. ▪ There is an evidence base in relation to parent-focused interventions including programs that contribute the most to parental effectiveness and can be replicated when scaled up. ▪ Normalisation of help seeking by parents - reduced stigma and adversarial responses. ▪ Re-frames the way we talk about children and parents/parenting.
	Refocus investment into foundational support for families – universal services such as health, education, stable housing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Universal services are readily available in all locations, are accessed by children, young people and families and responsive to individual needs. ▪ Universal services are inclusive and take a holistic approach. ▪ Universal services act as effective soft entry points to further support with clear, effective referral pathways as required.
	Address the structural drivers impacting on child development and family wellbeing such as poverty, domestic and family violence, unemployment, unstable housing/homelessness, addiction and substance abuse.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improvements in measures of child development eg. AEDC ▪ Improvements in child health measures. ▪ Improvements in school attendance and educational attainment eg. NAPLAN ▪ Reduction in rates of child neglect and emotional abuse. ▪ Positive performance against indicators/ measures of child and family wellbeing. ▪ Increased social cohesion.
	Build the capacity of the system to focus cross – sectoral support at key transition points across the life course starting at the First 1000 days and beyond including ECEC, school readiness, middle years and transition to high school, transition to higher education and employment, parenting.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Smoother transitions for children and families/carers across the life course. ▪ Smoother, more effective transitions from alternative care for young people that extend beyond the age of 18 years. ▪ Improved measures of wellbeing across all domains.
	Integrated service delivery settings eg. school settings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ More equitable, easier access to services for families.
	A focus on emerging issues impacting the wellbeing of children, young people and families such as cyber safety, climate change.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ An agile successor plan that can accommodate new issues that emerge over time.
	A broad-based awareness raising/education component targeted at the Australian community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Clearly articulated role for the broader community in supporting families and children in all their diversity. ▪ Increased community ‘buy-in’ to the plan - high level of community engagement. ▪ Communication strategy that includes primary health care, child care centres, workplaces.

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2. Cultural responsiveness – cross cutting theme	A priority focus on the wellbeing and safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Co-design with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, families, service providers and communities. ▪ National application of all five elements of the Aboriginal Child Placement Principles in policy, research and practice.
	Recognise and address inherent racism in mainstream services, that is services that are not Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specified.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Organisations adopt an agreed set of principles to support cultural safety. ▪ Principles are developed by appropriate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives. ▪ Mainstream services are culturally safe and responsive. ▪ Training in culturally appropriate practices and principles for all organisations involved in mainstream services
	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led responses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ An increase in the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led services. ▪ A reduction in the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in alternative care. ▪ Fewer Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children being removed from family, kin and country.
	Address the intergenerational transfer of trauma and adversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Long term support including a period of ‘recovery’ is provided to children, young people and families to help overcome the impacts of intergenerational trauma and break the cycle of disadvantage/vulnerability.
	Embed an understanding of cultural needs/perspectives across all parts of the system, from policy through to practice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All parts of the system are culturally safe and responsive.
	Facilitate cultural change so that society more broadly values children, parents and families.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ‘Protecting children is everyone’s business’ is evident in the community. ▪ Empathic and compassionate responses. ▪ Broader community engagement in supporting children and families.
	Address the intergenerational transfer of trauma and adversity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Long term support that includes a period of ‘recovery’ is provided to children, young people and families to help overcome the impacts of intergenerational trauma and break the cycle of disadvantage/vulnerability.
3. Participation	Enable children, young people, parents and communities to participate fully in the formulation and evaluation of the new plan and the roll-out in communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The new plan gives voice to children, young people, parents and communities. ▪ The new plan is responsive to the needs of children, young people, parents and communities.
	Include communities in accountability mechanisms.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Communities are engaged and playing an active role in implementing and evaluating the plan.
	Provide opportunities for success to be shared across systems, services, workforce and communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Systems, services, workforce and communities actively promote broader capacity building by sharing success. ▪ Communities of practice.

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4. Practice/ Workforce	Support workers to move away from punitive, risk averse approaches and help normalise help seeking for parents, carers and families.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Risk mentality no longer a key driver in decision-making/practice. ▪ Innovation is encouraged and success is shared. ▪ There is an increase in the number of referrals to targeted and intensive support services and a reduction in the number of referrals to child protection services.
	Trauma-informed, accredited training rolled out across all sectors working with families and children.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Services are accredited as trauma-informed. ▪ Children, young people and families can access support services.
	Broaden the pool of foster/kinship carers by providing greater support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ More working adults foster children. ▪ Foster carers report feeling supported and valued in their role. ▪ There is a coordinated support system for kinship carers that includes clear lines of responsibility. ▪ Children in kinship care are kept out of the formal alternative care system.
	Practice/workforce is part of the accountability framework.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Actions under the new plan are fully implemented at practice level. ▪ Practitioners are actively engaged in implementation and achieving outcomes. Practice is evidence-based and innovative outcomes are supported.
	A focus on workforce recruitment and retention and capacity building for resilience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increase in attraction and retention rates. ▪ A resilient workforce that is valued for its contributions.
5. Child/ young people focus	Include the voices of children and young people in policy, program and service delivery design, performance monitoring and evaluation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Real consultation with children and young people. ▪ Children and young people are involved in decisions that affect them ▪ Improved outcomes that reflect the participation of children and young people. ▪ A child focused plan that aligns with the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations.
	Child rights are embedded in the new plan.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All children are educated about their rights. ▪ Children’s rights are upheld in policy, programs and practice. ▪ Broad awareness of child rights, including by employers
	Organisations are supported to embed National Principles for Child Safe Organisations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Principles are effectively embedded in all organisations. ▪ Organisations are safe for children. ▪ Reduction in child maltreatment in organisations.
	Nationally consistent application of the <i>National Standards for Out-of-Home Care</i> .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Children and young people in alternative care receive high quality care no matter where they live.

'National policy and program is only one strand to strengthen families and improve outcomes for children. Local communities and community level actions also have a significant role to play.'

'The causes of disadvantage that feed into child neglect need to be addressed without parents feeling like they are being attacked. Working with, not powering over.'

'The importance of recovery as part of the process following trauma needs to be recognised. Support services for children, young people and families need to continue through this period.'

'Improve access to services for children, young people and families experiencing vulnerability. Children and young people are often ignored in universal services and don't get services until they age into the adult system.'

'A key goal of whatever we do must be to partner – across governments, with the non-government sector, with communities and with families.'

'Elevate the voices of young people as well as children into the successor plan.'

'A strong cultural lens and a genuine partnership to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families in child protection and justice systems.'

'I would like to see the successor plan include a national vision, some high level principles, some key themes and a small number of signature items that bind these themes together. For example, the First 1000 days.'

'The Family Court and the Children's Court are very adversarial systems that need to be joined up and work together in the best interest of the child.'

'The successor plan must be adequately resourced. There is scope to look at how existing resources and initiatives supporting children, young people and families could be better leveraged and coordinated.'