



AFTER THE NATIONAL FRAMEWORK:

Building the National Child and Family Wellbeing Plan Beyond 2020

**Consultation with the Family Inclusion Network (FIN) Townsville
and ACT for Kids Townsville
11 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 actively encouraged participation by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in all consultations. The session was attended by around 15 participants including officials from the Queensland Government and members and representatives of FIN Townsville and Act for Kids Townsville.

This was the fifth jurisdictional consultation on the successor plan. Previous consultations have been held in Hobart (March 2019), Adelaide (August 2019) and Brisbane on 9 October 2019. A public consultation was held in Townsville on 10 October 2019. Delegates at the Child Aware Conference in May 2019 were also consulted on the successor plan.

Participants from FIN and Act for Kids emphasised the importance of local services operating in the best interests of the child and working together to address the multiple drivers of child abuse and neglect, child removal and poor outcomes for children, young people and families. Experiences with the child protection system and Family Court were also discussed extensively and ideas about how experiences could be improved were offered by participants.

Key elements identified as part of the successor plan included:

- The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- Localised decision-making that includes the voices of children, young people and parents/families.
- More flexible and longer funding cycles so that services are not disrupted and new programs or initiatives that are showing promise can continue for families.
- An integrated service system that addresses underlying issues as well as the presenting issues for children, young people and families.
- A strategy to improve access to services for children, young people and families across all services including health and mental health, drug and alcohol, counselling and parenting support. Families should not have to work hard to access the services they need, when they need them.
- More support for parents to keep children well and safe at home or to address issues so that children who have been removed can be returned safely and permanently.
- Joining up domestic and family violence policy with policy for children's wellbeing and safety as the two are so strongly connected.
- Children are actively involved in developing the vision.

Many insightful and powerful contributions were made by participants in response to the consultation questions. These have been collated and are summarised under each question in the attachment.

1. What should be our vision for Australia's children include?

All children in Australia have a happy, healthy, supportive childhood.

Children have a voice and are believed, listened to and respected.

Children have the best education possible and education is free including tertiary education.

Communities are structured to support families - transport, affordable and safe housing, responding to poverty, better income support arrangements.

Freedom – to be safe, creative and valued by the community.

Children are included in decisions that affect them.

An ecologically sound future.

Children have access to all the services they need when they need them and for as long as they need them.

A child friendly, integrated service system with child friendly language and information.

All children are allowed to be who they want to be and supported at home, at school and by the community.

A focus on prevention including universal education programs for children such as respectful relationships, information about domestic and family violence and personal safety, starting in the early years and continuing to high school.

2. What are the main barriers to making Australia a nation where all children grow up safe and well?

'Accessibility of services particularly in rural and remote areas – availability, waiting lists, lack of transport and time and financial costs for parents who have to travel.'

'We need more services for children, young people and parents impacted by substance abuse that also address underlying mental health issues.'

'Parents need advocates to help them navigate child protection and justice systems.'

'Services are fragmented and operate as silos with parents having to go to multiple services to have their needs met.'

'10 session Medicare funded mental health services are not sufficient and they are not integrated with broader supports.'

'Children, parents and families don't always know about what is out there to help them. It needs to be promoted and shared more.'

'We need more resources for children and young people about domestic and family violence including where to seek help. Information needs to be available in schools.'

'Services are not available for children and young people on probation to help them address the issues that led them to offend and they often end up homeless and keep offending.'

'There needs to be greater transparency in decision making that impacts birth parents and children in child protection systems.'

'Unstable housing, poverty, drug and alcohol abuse, domestic and family violence, unresolved trauma.'

'Inadequate and culturally inappropriate support from child protection services for refugee families.'

'Gender bias – women are feeling judged. Checklists used by child protection workers for access or reunification are sexist.'

'Some Family Court processes where statements can be made without the support of evidence leading to detrimental outcomes for some women.'

'Children are still not being believed when disclosing sexual assault.'

'Lack of trust in systems including child protection and Family Court that discourages help seeking.'

'Funding cycles that don't give certainty to services, workers and clients and pilot programs that show promise but don't get re-funded. Families are being let down.'

'Aerosol sniffing is an emerging issue that is destroying our children and young people and there aren't enough services out there to address it.'

3. What initiatives are showing promise in overcoming these barriers?

'ACT for Kids trial program for children disclosing sexual assault – child focused approach, needs based, cross portfolio including health, education and police.'

'Townsville Aboriginal and Islander Health Service Lighthouse Program that is providing safe houses for children and young people including those who are disengaged from education and disconnected from culture.'

Maternal and child health nurses who take a holistic view, are supportive and work with other services to make referrals.

Giving children, young people and parents a voice in policy, program and service delivery.

Respectful relationships education in schools and programs such as Love Bites and e-safety training.

Children's safe houses including respite, services for children living on the streets.

Child Advocacy Centres® like the one in Western Australia should be everywhere.

Services working collaboratively and locally to address local issues.

The E-Safety Commissioner and e-safety training.

What should be the key elements of national policy for child and family wellbeing and safety beyond 2020?

'A child rights approach with consequences for not upholding these rights.'

'Services must work together more collectively and pool resources in smaller areas. The work of David Tobis in the US is a good model.'

'National service standards to ensure accessibility for people in rural and remote areas, including online services where appropriate.'

'More support for women and children experiencing domestic and family violence so they feel safe to report, are protected and not re-traumatised by Family Court and Children's Court processes.'

'Changing the way child protection services work with parents so that they are more supportive, build trust and help parents to engage more fully.'

'Children and young people are consulted in all decisions that affect them and their views are equally weighted with those of adults.'

'Culturally appropriate and sensitive services that are not judgemental or punitive in their approach – including for refugee families.'

'A focus on mothers with newborn babies including young mothers to help with parenting, mental health and adjustment and other issues such as unstable housing, DV, drug and alcohol issues.'

'More support for birth parents to have their children returned – include support for all the reasons that children were removed in the first place including unintentional neglect.'

'An integrated service model that puts children and families at the centre and that deals holistically with all issues.'

'Trauma informed approaches that recognise and help to address the impacts of trauma on relationships, parenting, workforce participation.'

'Domestic violence training for child protection workers so that the advice given to women does not adversely impact them in legal or family court processes.'

'Support for grandparent carers who are keeping children out of the child protection system.'

'Specialist, longer term domestic violence counselling that is difficult to access in regional and remote areas.'

'Accountability for implementation and outcomes at all levels, including service providers.'

'Services for perpetrators of violence against women and children.'

'Funding arrangements for services that give them certainty and gives children, young people and families continuity.'

'Long term support for children who have experienced trauma, abuse or neglect to break the cycle.'