

## **Consultation in Townsville 10 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 40 participants including Senior Officials from State and Federal governments, executives and representatives from the non-government sector and parent and carer representatives.

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

Participants in Townsville emphasised the successor national plan must prioritise investments for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and children to reduce their over-representation in child protection and justice systems and called for a dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Strategy and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Commissioner. They also highlighted the particular needs and challenges for children, families and communities in rural and remote locations and the barriers to culturally safe and accessible services. Addressing some of the inequities associated with Centrelink benefits for women escaping domestic violence and parents whose children are removed were also seen as a priority.

The successor plan should also:

- Be underpinned by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- Include a vision developed in consultation with, and from contributions of, children and young people.
- Focus on prevention and early support to keep children happy and thriving in their families and communities and connected to culture.
- Recognise the importance of local, place-based approaches to meet the needs of children and families in communities.
- Allow for localised decision-making and longer and more flexible funding cycles so that services and workers can get traction with less staff turnover.
- Address the intersections between domestic and family violence, child protection and family law to support outcomes that are in the best interest of the child. Greater alignment is required between the Commonwealth payments system, state systems such as housing, Commonwealth and state funded support services, Family Law System, state domestic and family violence and child safety systems.
- Embed accountability for implementation and outcomes at all levels including service providers, workers and communities.
- Recognise and respond to the need for healing to address intergenerational trauma and break the cycle of intergenerational disadvantage.

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 balanced 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 Townsville. 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"> <li>• Takes a holistic view and includes actions to address underlying factors impacting child and family wellbeing such as poverty, unstable housing, domestic and family violence, mental health issues and drug and alcohol abuse;</li> <li>• Has a strong focus on cross-sectoral prevention and early support;</li> <li>• Puts families and children at the centre of funding and decision-making;</li> <li>• Is appropriately resourced and has a strong, cross-sectoral accountability framework that includes all levels of government, service providers, workers and communities;</li> <li>• Includes a dedicated strategy to address the specific needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, noting the significant impacts of intergenerational trauma;</li> <li>• Is developed in partnership with families, children, young people and workers;</li> <li>• Is underpinned by a community development approach and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The successor plan connects to national plans, initiatives and strategies such as the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children, National Children’s Mental Health Plan, Family Law Reform, National Disability Insurance Scheme, First 1000 Days, Family Matters Campaign and Closing the Gap.</li> <li>▪ All governments, non-government organisations, service providers and workers are held accountable for implementation and outcomes with communities playing a key role. All parties ‘stay true’ to the ‘promises’ written into the successor plan.</li> <li>▪ There is a shift to prevention and early support services.</li> <li>▪ All service sectors are included and are working collaboratively - health, education, early childhood, community services.</li> <li>▪ Fewer children entering alternative care.</li> <li>▪ Reduction in the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in child protection and justice systems.</li> <li>▪ Children are in alternative care for shorter periods and are not separated from their siblings.</li> <li>▪ Children who have been removed are reunified in safe environments.</li> <li>▪ Increase in school engagement and attendance rates.</li> <li>▪ Decrease in rates of offending/incarceration.</li> <li>▪ Language is positively framed around supporting and empowering parents and families and the rights of the child.</li> <li>▪ Communities are playing a greater role in supporting families.</li> </ul>
	<p>More flexible, longer term funding arrangements and shared program logic models.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Collaborative commissioning – less competition for funds occurring at local levels.</li> <li>▪ Programs and services can focus on the family as a whole and supports are ‘packaged’ to meet needs.</li> <li>▪ A reduction in siloed approaches to service delivery and funding.</li> <li>▪ Families are able to navigate the system more easily with more families receiving effective support.</li> <li>▪ A more stable workforce.</li> <li>▪ The ability to shift priorities, try new approaches or change what isn’t working.</li> </ul>
	<p>Universal services that are culturally safe and available to everyone regardless of location.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Families seek help early.</li> <li>▪ Families are less fearful when seeking help – not discouraged because of shame or guilt.</li> </ul>

Policy focus	Key elements most likely to produce the best outcomes and balance child and family wellbeing with safety	What will success look like?
	A national strategy to strengthen parenting.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Parents know how to access education and support at multiple points in time such as through the First 1000 Days, at key developmental milestones and other age-related transition points.</li> <li>▪ Early education of children to support their effectiveness as parents later in life starts at school.</li> <li>▪ Resources and support are available in different forms to maximize access, including face-to-face, telephone and online.</li> <li>▪ Parents are prepared for parenting and supported to develop the skills to raise happy, healthy children.</li> <li>▪ A change in the way society more broadly talks about parenting – normalise challenges and difficulties and reinforce seeking help as a positive thing to do.</li> <li>▪ Empower parents and reduce social stigma.</li> </ul>
	Local data and research are used to inform local policy, investments and best practice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Services are responsive to local needs and there is evidence that they are achieving outcomes.</li> <li>▪ A more effective use of resources as investment is directed into approaches that work and diverted away from those that don't.</li> <li>▪ Services can be adapted in response to emerging data and evidence.</li> <li>▪ A more agile service system meeting local needs.</li> </ul>
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"> <li>▪ A dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's strategy that is true to the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, families and communities.</li> <li>▪ An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Commissioner.</li> <li>▪ A reduction in the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in child protection and justice systems.</li> <li>▪ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children growing up safe and cared for in families and culture.</li> </ul>
	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led responses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families receive culturally safe services and culturally appropriate support.</li> <li>▪ Healing happens and the intergenerational cycle of disadvantage is broken.</li> <li>▪ Strategies have been implemented to reduce the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families in child protection systems are showing promise.</li> <li>▪ An increase in the numbers of children and young people reporting satisfaction with levels of cultural connection in survey data.</li> <li>▪ Greater stability in families.</li> </ul>

Policy focus	Key elements most likely to produce the best outcomes and balance child and family wellbeing with safety	What will success look like?
	Embed an understanding of cultural needs/perspectives across all parts of the system, from policy through to practice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Data and service standards show all parts of the system are culturally safe and responsive.</li> </ul>
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"> <li>▪ The new plan gives voice to children, young people, parents and communities.</li> <li>▪ The new plan is responsive to the needs of children, young people, parents and communities.</li> </ul>
	Include communities in accountability mechanisms.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Communities are engaged and playing an active role in implementing and evaluating the plan.</li> </ul>
	Provide opportunities for success to be shared across systems, services, workforce and communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Systems, services, workforce and communities actively promote broader capacity building by sharing success.</li> <li>▪ Communities of practice.</li> </ul>
4. Practice/ Workforce	Case workers are able to take a holistic view when working with families.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Families are empowered to define what wellbeing means for them and services are structured to support that.</li> <li>▪ Fewer referrals to other services.</li> <li>▪ Less fragmentation across service providers.</li> <li>▪ Improved access and greater flexibility for families.</li> <li>▪ Extended families are engaged including grandparents.</li> </ul>
	Workforce education and training and new practice frameworks that are evidence based to improve child and family centred practice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A more skilled workforce.</li> <li>▪ Workers are able to effectively work with children and families despite the increasing complexity of issues.</li> </ul>
	Practice/workforce is accountable under the successor plan.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Workers are actively engaged in implementation and achieving outcomes.</li> </ul>
	A focus on workforce recruitment and retention.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Increase in attraction and retention rates.</li> <li>▪ Ongoing support for workers when required when dealing with increasing complex issues affecting children and families.</li> <li>▪ More stability for children and families and stronger relationships that build trust.</li> <li>▪ Better outcomes for families and children.</li> </ul>
5. Child/ young people focus	The voices of children and young people are heard and inform policy, program and service delivery design.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Policy, programs and services meet the needs of children and young people.</li> <li>▪ Better outcomes for children and young people who are safe and well with family and more engaged in education and training.</li> <li>▪ Children and young people are involved in decisions that affect them.</li> <li>▪ Centrelink decisions are made in the best interest of the child – there is support for women escaping violence so that they can keep their children, and parents whose children are removed have adequate financial support to enable their children to be safely returned to their care.</li> </ul>

*'We are selling hope to families. Practitioners can elicit change for families but we must get national agreement around the fundamentals.'*

*'Our voices get changed and watered down and the words aren't our words and they don't look familiar to us.'*

*'There are so many road blocks that impact the wellbeing and safety of older children in alternative care arrangements and they are losing hope. We have to keep this group a priority in the successor plan. They are our next generation.'*

*'Involve the sector more heavily in the implementation of the successor plan and include actions that can be led locally by the sector.'*

*'Policy is there for people – the human end is paramount and policy must reflect values and humanity.'*

*'The sector is under-resourced with more families entering and presenting with more complex needs. Yet so much of our time is spent battling systems and dealing with red tape. If we could redirect that effort towards supporting our children, young people and families that would be a very significant achievement.'*

*'Grants processes are competitive so no one wants to talk to one another and share information. They advantage larger players, disadvantage small, local services and increase the complexity of the service system for children and families.'*

*'The lack of stable accommodation for young people transitioning to independent adulthood from alternative care is impacting outcomes and there are increasing numbers of pregnant women in this cohort.'*

*'The Centrelink payments system works against some families. Parents whose children are removed get transferred onto Newstart, leading to further disadvantage and making it harder for parents to work with us to get their children returned. Particularly people in rural and remote communities who have to travel to see us and their children. We are driving these people further into poverty at a time when we are supposed to be supporting them.'*

*'Our language is often negative and can be culturally offensive. We must change this narrative if we want everyone to see themselves as part of the successor plan.'*

*'Mental health services are overwhelmed and almost non-existent for children under 12 who need counselling. We need to support children in the middle years.'*

*'Income management has some merits in some communities and could be considered to help reduce drug and alcohol abuse and child removal.'*