

## **Consultation in Darwin 21-22 November 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 55 participants including Senior Officials from State and Federal governments, executives and representatives from the non-government sector and research and academic representatives.

This was the tenth jurisdictional consultation on the successor plan and included a separate, targeted discussion with members of the Territory Families Youth Advisory Group. Previous consultations have been held in Hobart (March 2019), Adelaide (August 2019), Brisbane (9 October 2019) Townsville (10 and 11 October 2019), Northern Rivers NSW (15 October 2019), Sydney (1 November 2019) and Perth (7 November 2019). Delegates at the Child Aware Conference in May 2019 were also consulted on the successor plan.

Participants in Darwin emphasised the importance of the successor plan being a 'generational' plan that pieces together all the initiatives, strategies and frameworks across governments and aligns outcomes for children, young people and families currently sitting across portfolio boundaries. The need for better integrated and coordinated services across Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments was identified as a key priority, given the significant overlap and fragmentation that currently exists across children and family programs. Stronger implementation and accountability mechanisms and more rigorous evaluation and reporting requirements were also seen as critical to success. Participants highlighted the importance of allowing implementation activity to be contextualised to the jurisdictional, regional and community levels and to 'enable' community led responses. Involving children, young people, families and broader communities in all aspects of the successor plan was also seen as critical – in the development of the overarching, national policy; in co-design at a regional level to ensure contextual relevance and appropriateness (given the diverse needs of regional and remote communities across Australia); in driving local implementation; and in identifying local outcomes that can be different for different places. Participants called for a rights-based approach, focussed around prevention and early support and structured around the social determinants of health and wellbeing (social determinants). Another particular emphasis was the need to reduce the impact of alcohol, noting the rates of alcohol-fuelled violence in some communities, the lifelong impacts of Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder and the intersections between alcohol abuse and the child protection and justice systems. Early support and education using public health approaches was seen as a critical strategy here.

The successor plan should also:

- Be a bipartisan, long term approach with a clear scope, agreed definitions, indicators of success and achievable and measurable outcomes.
- Provide an overarching, national policy framework for children, young people and families that uses a common language and coordinates investment and efforts across all levels of government and with non-government organisations. Responsibilities must be clearly identified.
- Include a strong focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families, particularly in remote areas, with outcomes driven by First Nations Peoples.
- Focus on prevention and early support as key to changing trajectories for families and children, particularly those with high or complex needs.

- Recognise safety as one element of a broader policy supporting positive outcomes for children, young people and families.
- Recognise and leverage existing initiatives and actions. Use a child development approach starting before birth and extending to parenthood and nest this within an ecological model that incorporates family, service providers and 'community' in its broadest sense.
- Be informed by evidence about what works, where and for whom.
- Utilise longitudinal data sets and surveys, and data linkage to monitor long-term outcomes such as educational engagement and attainment, vocational training and employment, community participation.

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 Darwin. 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, long-term, bi-partisan, national child and family wellbeing policy that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• takes a whole of government, outcomes-based approach to the safety and wellbeing of children, young people, families and communities;</li> <li>• includes a clear implementation plan that maps to outcomes across policy, program and service delivery levels;</li> <li>• leverages other relevant strategies and plans focusing on better outcomes for children, young people, families and communities eg. National Children’s Mental Health Strategy, National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children, Family Law reviews, (proposed) National Framework for Child Safety, National Alcohol Strategy, National Partnership Agreements. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Need to address the drivers of child maltreatment and trauma such as domestic and family violence, mental health, homelessness, poverty, drug and alcohol abuse as well as improve responses;</li> </ul> </li> <li>• continues to reference the public health approach while also bringing in the principles of primary health care, and social determinants as drivers of wellbeing and safety;</li> <li>• has a strong focus on prevention and early support as part of the broader continuum of responses available to children and families across the family life course;</li> <li>• is framed around agreed, positive outcomes for children, young people and families that are supported by evidence: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ ‘healthy and connected’</li> <li>○ ‘safe and supported’</li> <li>○ ‘learning and participating’</li> <li>○ ‘contributing to the community’.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• includes child safety as one important element of a broader approach to wellbeing;</li> <li>• clearly identifies the roles of different levels of government including local government in supporting positive wellbeing and safety outcomes for children, young people and families;</li> <li>• enables communities to work locally and/or regionally to deliver agreed outcomes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ All relevant parts of the system supporting children, young people, families and communities are actively engaged and all policy levers are used to drive wellbeing and safety outcomes.</li> <li>▪ Local level initiatives, innovation and contextually appropriate solutions.</li> <li>▪ Strong implementation and accountability mechanisms.</li> <li>▪ The successor plan binds together other relevant national plans, strategies and frameworks to maximize effort using a common narrative.</li> <li>▪ Investment and focus goes beyond child safety and child protection.</li> <li>▪ Political cycles at national or state and territory levels do not adversely impact the successor plan.</li> <li>▪ The public health approach continues to inform the successor plan and is well understood, accepted and actively engages all stakeholders across the continuum of support.</li> <li>▪ Equity, access, empowerment, community self-determination and intersectoral collaboration (the principles of primary health care).</li> <li>▪ Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments and their agencies are working together to deliver the continuum of services for children, young people and families in a coordinated, systematic and efficient way.</li> <li>▪ Qualitative and quantitative data, including linked national data sets, is used more effectively to inform progress against outcomes and inform changes to policy, program and/or service delivery over time. Broader than just child protection data. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Longitudinal data is used to demonstrate longer term outcomes such as educational attainment, employment, relationships etc.</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Local government is playing an active role in the successor plan, including development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.</li> <li>▪ Community resources increase and are sustained over time.</li> <li>▪ Child protection issues do not overwhelm the successor plan.</li> <li>▪ Positive shifts across an agreed set of indicators informed by the social determinants.</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?
	Break down policy, funding and service delivery silos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Policy decisions complement one another and work together to deliver better outcomes for children, young people, families and communities.</li> <li>▪ Areas requiring priority investment are negotiated with local as well as jurisdictional level stakeholders and meet community need eg. investment to reduce Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder and overcrowding, particularly in remote communities.</li> <li>▪ Decisions have fewer, adverse ‘unintended consequences’ impacting the wellbeing and safety of children, young people, families and communities.</li> <li>▪ Holistic services are easily accessible.</li> <li>▪ Funding decisions and investment priorities are more coordinated and collaborative and provide certainty for communities.</li> <li>▪ There is a broader service response to the needs of children, young people and families eg. maternal and child health is a key stakeholder in the successor plan.</li> <li>▪ Governments regain the trust of communities.</li> <li>▪ A continuum of services is available to children, young people and families, and child protection intervention is truly a last resort.</li> </ul>
	Empower families to be central agents in the wellbeing and safety of their children by leveraging across all sectors, services and supports.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Effective parenting and strong parental relationships.</li> <li>▪ Families seek support early, including relationship support.</li> <li>▪ Reduced stigma – early help-seeking is normalised, actively encouraged and rewarded.</li> <li>▪ Fewer families engaged in family law proceedings and family courts.</li> <li>▪ Family-led decision-making where it is safe and appropriate and that is in the best interest of children.</li> <li>▪ Increase in school attendance, engagement and learning.</li> <li>▪ Increase in child development and health outcomes.</li> <li>▪ Fewer children, young people and families require intensive or crisis responses and experience long-term adverse outcomes.</li> </ul>
	Focus on strengths, not deficits.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Positive framing and language around children, parenting and families.</li> <li>▪ Indicators of change are positively framed eg. positive health and education indicators.</li> <li>▪ Positive family functioning measurable against indicators and outcomes.</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?
	Engage schools as active partners in the successor plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Schools are included in local community efforts to improve the health, safety and wellbeing of children and young people.</li> <li>▪ Schools have access to appropriate resources and can facilitate access to support. Issues such as domestic and family violence, substance abuse and mental health of children and young people are identified early and support is provided.</li> <li>▪ Reduced stigma within the school community for children, young people and families experiencing vulnerability.</li> <li>▪ Innovative models that are evidence-based are scaled up and learnings are shared across jurisdictions eg. Clontarf and Stars programs.</li> </ul>
	Local communities are critical partners in decision-making and accountability mechanisms.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Programs and services are tailored to the needs of the local community.</li> <li>▪ Decision-making is made at the community level by relevant community representatives who are stakeholders in the lives of children, young people and families and are actively involved in driving change.</li> <li>▪ Communities are functioning well - measured against indicators and outcomes.</li> <li>▪ Social inclusion - as measured by existing indicators and evidence.</li> </ul>
	An integrated service system that is built around the needs of children, young people and families.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Less complex system for families to navigate.</li> <li>▪ Greater engagement by children, young people and families in support services, as needed.</li> <li>▪ Support is provided earlier and is more tailored.</li> <li>▪ Services are available for children, young people and families in remote locations.</li> </ul>
2. Cultural responsiveness – cross cutting theme	Prioritise actions to eliminate the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in child protection and justice systems by addressing the drivers and improving responses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The successor plan includes priorities to complement and strengthen national and jurisdictional level plans, strategies, frameworks and initiatives.</li> <li>▪ Increase in the number and capability of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) responding to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, families and communities.</li> <li>▪ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families are engaging with ACCOs for early support and diverted away from child protection and justice systems.</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?
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Local solutions are led and driven by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and services are available in remote locations, not just urban areas.</li> <li>▪ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families are not over-represented in child protection and justice systems.</li> <li>▪ Increased numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are meeting developmental milestones and extra support is received by those who need it.</li> <li>▪ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people have a secure and stable base to engage with education and participate productively in their communities.</li> </ul>
	Implement all five elements of the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle (ATSICPP) across all jurisdictions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ All five elements of the ATSICPP guides policy, legislation and practice across all Australian governments.</li> <li>▪ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people retain a strong identity and connection to family, community and culture.</li> <li>▪ Key human rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families are protected.</li> </ul>
	Prioritise actions to address intergenerational trauma and promote healing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Services and policy responses ensure evidence-based, long-term support is provided to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families to help break the cycle of intergenerational trauma.</li> <li>▪ A reduction over time in the number of children, young people and families with complex needs requiring tertiary level services across multiple sectors, including health and justice.</li> <li>▪ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families receive culturally safe services and culturally appropriate support.</li> </ul>
	Prioritise actions over the long-term to facilitate family restoration.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The need for long-term support is recognised, authorised and enabled through funding and program mechanisms.</li> <li>▪ Families whose children are removed continue to receive support so that children can be returned where it is safe to do so.</li> <li>▪ Young people transitioning from alternative care to independent adulthood receive support through leaving care plans to reconnect with family where it is safe to do so.</li> <li>▪ Fewer Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people are removed from family.</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?
	Tailor elements of the successor plan for First Nations Peoples.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Respect for, and use of, First languages.</li> <li>▪ Includes cultural elements and is culture-centred.</li> <li>▪ Identity is a key outcome for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families.</li> <li>▪ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have ownership of actions under the successor plan.</li> <li>▪ Place-based, community led solutions and strong governance mechanisms that support effective implementation by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.</li> </ul>
	Address racism.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Stronger education about, and action to support diversity.</li> <li>▪ Diversity seen as a positive aspect of Australian society.</li> <li>▪ Children, young people and families have access to services that are culturally appropriate, sensitive and safe.</li> <li>▪ Reduction in social exclusion and social isolation for children, young people and families from diverse backgrounds.</li> </ul>
3. Participation	Children, young people and families from a diverse range of backgrounds are consulted and engaged in the development and implementation of the successor plan.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The new plan includes the voices of children, young people and families from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds and those with disability.</li> </ul>
	Representatives of all key stakeholders including children, young people and families have an ongoing, active role in governance mechanisms for the successor plan – national through to community level.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The successor plan is responsive to the voices and contributions of children, young people and families.</li> <li>▪ There is broad ownership of the successor plan.</li> <li>▪ Stronger focus on implementation and monitoring of outcomes.</li> <li>▪ The successor plan is an active approach – not a ‘set and forget’ one.</li> </ul>
4. Practice/ Workforce	Ongoing workforce development and training to build capacity and capability in priority areas eg. First 1000 days, child development including brain development and impacts of adverse childhood experiences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ An agile workforce across all sectors including education.</li> <li>▪ Services that can be delivered over longer periods to meet complex needs.</li> <li>▪ Services that meet agreed definition of ‘trauma-informed’. (AIFS)</li> <li>▪ Parents are empowered and supported to be effective parents, including those experiencing family separation or breakdown.</li> <li>▪ The best interest of the child are is the centre of professional decisions.</li> </ul>
	A skilled workforce that is able to use evidence to guide practice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Information about ‘what works’ is shared through multiple avenues and is easily accessible for workers.</li> <li>▪ Programs and approaches that work are scaled up and workers are trained and supported in their implementation.</li> <li>▪ Co-design of programs and approaches with workers.</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?
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Training about intergenerational trauma and trauma-informed practice is prioritised, including for school teachers and support staff.</li> </ul>
	A national policy for the 'care' workforce.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Clear ownership of workforce policy similar to education and health.</li> <li>▪ Increased availability of skilled workers.</li> <li>▪ Service providers aren't competing with one another just to sustain skilled workers.</li> </ul>
5. Child/ young people focus	A focus on the early years followed up with investments in middle years/pre-teens, adolescence and transitioning to independent adulthood.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Indicators of child development are positive and Australia benchmarks well in international comparisons.</li> <li>▪ Indicators of positive transitions – primary school to high school; high school to education and training, or employment.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Work readiness and employment outcomes.</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ A child/young people focus is central in program design and delivery.</li> </ul>
	Successor plan is underpinned by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Children are empowered to exercise their rights and be heard.</li> <li>▪ Children's rights are considered in all decisions that affect them.</li> </ul>
	Engage the media around reporting of child maltreatment. Actions to encourage reporting of positive stories about children and young people.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Reporting is respectful of children, young people and families and the child protection system.</li> </ul>

*'There is a lot of overlap and fragmentation in child and family policy and programs at Commonwealth and State and Territory Government levels that needs to be addressed to make the system more efficient and effective – a cooperative framework and no more “spray and pray approaches”.'*

*'There are significant programs of reform occurring in most jurisdictions and a number of these have been influenced by the increased focus established under the National Framework. The National Framework has also fostered collaboration across jurisdictions in areas of shared responsibility. This momentum shouldn't be lost.'*

*'The successor plan should set out a whole-of-government, national policy for children, young people and families that binds together investments and drives action across all relevant agencies around an agreed set of key outcomes.'*

*'The way we measure outcomes and the way we fund services is not right. This is hampering our ability to do things differently and deliver real change for children and families in our community.'*

*'It's not until you see it that you understand it. To get where we want to be under a successor plan we must address poverty and increase our focus on social inclusion.'*

*'We need to keep a national policy approach to help drive change, particularly in remote communities.'*

*'Who is responsible for children at the Commonwealth level? There is no COAG committee, no national structure providing oversight. This needs to change if we are to make children the national policy priority they should be.'*

*'The six supporting outcomes of the National Framework are still relevant and should help to inform the successor plan.'*

*'There are some green shoots appearing in some jurisdictions including Queensland and the Northern Territory and these need to be recognised, celebrated and amplified in the successor plan.'*

*'We must use evidence and mechanisms that will drive systems change. The system must be outcomes focused, put children, young people and families at the centre and operate around some agreed key principles such as integration, collaboration, communication, facilitation, implementation and evaluation.'*

*'We have so many frameworks we can draw on but they need to be joined up across the silos – shared outcomes and data, complementary strategies, strong accountability mechanisms that cross portfolios and community level implementation.'*

*'The lack of sustainability of programs is a major barrier to achieving long-term outcomes. Funding arrangements are too short, ad hoc, inflexible and not decided in collaboration with communities.'*