

Consultation in Canberra 28 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 80 participants including Senior Officials from the Commonwealth and ACT governments, executives and representatives from the non-government sector and research and academic representatives.

This was the eleventh jurisdictional consultation on the successor plan. 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), Perth (7 November 2019) and Darwin (21-22 November 2019). Delegates at the Child Aware Conference in May 2019 were also consulted on the successor plan.

Participants in Canberra emphasised the importance of a bipartisan, ambitious, long term approach to the wellbeing and safety of children and families that plays a key role in joining up and leveraging across national policy agendas that currently operate in silos. They called for the successor plan to have a clear scope and a strong narrative about the importance of child, youth and family wellbeing in driving broader, high level outcomes around economic, social and community participation. In this context, initiatives that promote community wellbeing - in its broadest sense – must be embedded in the successor plan.

The need to privilege prevention and early support for children, young people and families experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, vulnerability through new investment was identified as a priority. New investment across portfolios and across jurisdictions would necessarily preserve resourcing for tertiary level services where demand remains intractably high. Stronger implementation and accountability mechanisms were also seen as critical to success, including the continuation and strengthening of the tripartite approach to governance introduced under the National Framework.

As has been the case in other consultations, accessible data and outcomes measurement were identified as essential to track progress and monitor change over time using 'well chosen' performance indicators. Participants acknowledged the significant program of work that will be required over the longer term to develop national level indicators and data sources to track progress around wellbeing; investments in prevention and early support; and outcomes. They noted the large volume of work being undertaken at both a national and jurisdictional level linked to wellbeing that could help inform this task. Commonwealth leadership was identified as critical in relation to this issue.

The successor plan should also:

- be endorsed by COAG.
- be underpinned by a public health approach and governance mechanisms that ensure accountability and enable significant collaboration and coordination.
- include mechanisms that encourage investment decisions that cross portfolio boundaries.
- include a robust implementation plan and comprehensive evaluation strategy. A strong reporting framework is also required to identify short, medium and long-term achievements as well as areas requiring additional effort.
- place a strong focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families, as well as those from refugee and migrant backgrounds and those living with disability.

- continue to drive action around the needs of children, young people, families and communities experiencing high degrees of vulnerability and disadvantage, though targeted and intensive support and place-based approaches where appropriate.
- carry through certain priorities from the National Framework that require a continued national focus.
- renew the focus on the needs of young people and those in the 'middle years' – ages 8 -12 – using a life course approach that would also recognise the importance of investment in the early years including the First Thousand/Two Thousand days.
- engage broader, cross sectoral representation in all aspects of the successor plan, including strong representation from community level stakeholders e.g. local government, schools, clubs.
- connect all relevant national plans, frameworks and strategies contributing to child, youth, family and community wellbeing under a broader wellbeing approach.
- be able to adapt to future contextual issues and constraints such as an ageing population; tighter fiscal environment; increasing numbers of children, young people and families from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

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 Canberra. 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"> • 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. • takes a whole of government, outcomes-based approach that includes safety as one important aspect of wellbeing for children, young people, families and communities. • leverages, but does not duplicate effort occurring under, other relevant strategies and plans focusing on improving outcomes for children, young people, families and communities e.g. <i>National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children</i>; (proposed) <i>National Strategy for Child Safety</i>; <i>National Action Plan for the Health of Children and Young People 2020-2030</i> and <i>National Children’s Mental Health Strategy</i>; <i>National Quality Framework</i> and <i>Early Years Learning Framework</i>; <i>Australian Student Wellbeing Framework</i>. • includes a limited number of better coordinated actions to deliver outcomes against a few core priorities (<i>Leeds’ Children and Young People’s Plan 2018-2023</i> is a good example). • is supported by a strong, long-term implementation plan and measurable outcomes. • recognises but does not duplicate State and Territory Government wellbeing frameworks and initiatives. • continues to reference the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the public health approach while also bringing in the social determinants and measurable indicators of wellbeing. • clearly identifies the roles of different levels of government and non-government stakeholders in supporting positive wellbeing and safety outcomes for children, young people and families. • enables communities to deliver local solutions to achieve agreed outcomes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Relevant national plans, strategies and frameworks are linked together as part of the successor plan to maximize effort around shared outcomes. ▪ Policies supporting positive outcomes for children, young people, families and communities across sectors are aligned to drive wellbeing and safety outcomes. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ All policy levers across health, housing, employment, education, social services and income support are used collectively, and shared outcomes are linked. ▪ 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 and efficient way. ▪ Commonwealth, State and Territory Government roles and responsibilities around child safety and protection are clearly articulated in the successor plan. The Commonwealth Government continues to play a leadership role in driving national consistency, data sharing and building the evidence base. ▪ Investment and focus goes beyond child safety and child protection. ▪ The public health approach to wellbeing and safety guides actions and investments under the successor plan. ▪ Local level initiatives, innovation and contextually appropriate solutions are implemented and success is shared. ▪ Strong implementation and accountability mechanisms ensure sustained action and delivery of outcomes. ▪ Political cycles at national or state and territory levels do not adversely impact the successor plan. ▪ National data is accessible and informs progress against outcomes. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Longitudinal, disaggregated, linked and survey data. ▪ Local government is playing an active role in the successor plan, including development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. ▪ Child protection issues do not overwhelm the successor plan. ▪ Positive shifts across an agreed set of indicators over time. ▪ Communities are enabled to support families to care for their children.

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	Strategies to overcome the barriers created by policy, funding and service delivery silos.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Funding agreements are longer term (5+ years) and more flexible to support holistic, joined up approaches. ▪ There are mechanisms at all levels to promote collaboration and coordination of policy, funding and service delivery decisions. ▪ Place-based, systems approaches to policy, funding and service delivery decisions. ▪ Policy decisions complement one another and inform program and practice so that all parts of the system work together to deliver better outcomes. ▪ There is a broader service response to the needs of children, young people and families e.g. wrap around services, case management approaches.
	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"> ▪ Policies for families and children are connected and drive integrated program and service delivery responses. ▪ Effective parenting. ▪ Families seek support early and receive holistic responses. ▪ Fewer children, young people and families ‘falling through the cracks’. ▪ Reduced stigma – early help-seeking is normalised, actively encouraged and rewarded. ▪ Family-led decision-making - where it is safe and appropriate - that is in the best interest of children. ▪ Increase in school attendance, engagement and learning. ▪ Increase in child development and health outcomes. ▪ Fewer children, young people and families require intensive or crisis responses (including alternative care arrangements). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Families whose children are removed receive adequate, ongoing support to facilitate reunification where it is safe to do so.
	Focus on strengths, not deficits.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Positive shifts in strengths-based indicators that tell the story of positive change. ▪ Positive family functioning measurable against indicators and outcomes. ▪ Positive community functioning measurable against indicators and outcomes. ▪ Positive framing and language around children, parenting and families.
	Prioritise investment in scaling up what works and contextualising evidence-based approaches.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ‘Green shoots’ emerging under the National Framework are supported to grow. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Approaches and results are shared across communities, jurisdictions, policy and practice. ▪ Evidence-based/evidence informed programs receive long-term funding. ▪ ‘Practice iterations’ to help contextualise programs locally are actively supported.

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	Engage local communities in decision-making.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Programs and services are tailored to the needs of children, young people and families in the local community. ▪ Communities are collecting and sharing information about what works in supporting families to care for children. ▪ Communities are functioning well - measured against indicators and outcomes. ▪ Social inclusion - as measured by existing indicators and evidence.
	An integrated service system that is built around the needs of children, young people and families.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Children are seen within the context of families and carers. ▪ Less complex system for families to navigate. ▪ Support is provided earlier and is more tailored, including for kinship and grandparent carers. ▪ Greater engagement by children, young people and families in support services when needed. ▪ Improved family functioning. ▪ Risk factors for child abuse and neglect are identified early and families are supported to address them. ▪ Fewer children are removed into alternative care arrangements. ▪ Grandparent and kinship carers are better supported, recognising the important role they play in the safety and wellbeing of children, young people and families.
2. Cultural responsiveness – cross cutting theme	A priority focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, families and communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families are not over-represented in child protection and justice systems. ▪ Integrated, cross portfolio policy approaches. ▪ Joined up service delivery approaches across health, education, housing, employment and social services, from universal through to targeted and intensive support. ▪ More Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations are providing culturally safe services to more children, young people, families and communities. ▪ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families seek early support. ▪ Key human rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families are protected. ▪ Community-led, place-based solutions that engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples ‘to pursue their own visions of what makes for a good life, to be healthy, prosperous, and secure’. (National Indigenous Australians Agency - Closing the Gap¹).

¹ Accessed at <https://www.niaa.gov.au/indigenous-affairs/closing-gap>

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	A priority focus on children, young people and families from refugee and migrant backgrounds and those living with disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Children, young people and families have access to services that are culturally appropriate, sensitive and safe. ▪ Reduction in social exclusion and social isolation for children, young people and families from diverse backgrounds. ▪ Stronger education about, and action to support, diversity. ▪ Diversity is seen as a positive aspect of Australian society. ▪ Key human rights of children, young people and families from refugee and migrant backgrounds and those living with disability are protected. ▪ Investment in community-led solutions.
	Prioritise actions to address intergenerational trauma.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 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. ▪ 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. ▪ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families receive culturally safe services and culturally appropriate support.
3. Participation	The voices of children and young people are included in policy, program and service delivery.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Policy, program and service delivery is child-centred and decisions are made in the best interest of the child. ▪ Children and young people are included in all aspects of the successor plan. ▪ Australia's Children's Commissioners and Guardians are active participants in the successor plan and have the resources to actively involve children and young people on an ongoing basis over the life of the successor plan.
	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"> ▪ The successor plan includes the voices of children, young people and families from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds and those living with disability. ▪ The successor plan is culturally responsive to the needs of children, young people and families from migrant and refugee backgrounds.
	All key stakeholders including children, young people and families have an ongoing, active role in governance mechanisms for the successor plan – at the national level through to the community level.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The successor plan is responsive to the voices and contributions of children, young people, families and communities. ▪ Carers – including kinship and grandparent carers – are engaged in the development and implementation of the successor plan. ▪ There is broad ownership of the successor plan. ▪ Stronger focus on implementation at the local level and monitoring of outcomes. ▪ The successor plan uses an 'iterative' approach – research informs policy and policy informs practice/ practice in turn informs research and research informs policy.

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4. Practice/ Workforce	Mechanisms to enable the sharing of evidence-based and evidence-informed practice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Communities of practice and practice networks are developed and supported. ▪ Online and other resources are available for workers to help them translate research into practice. ▪ Information about ‘what works’ is synthesised and easily accessible for workers including through Commonwealth funded research agencies, academic institutions and philanthropic organisations. ▪ Ongoing professional development and workforce training is a priority. ▪ Programs and approaches that work are scaled up and workers are trained and supported in their implementation. ▪ Co-design of programs and approaches with workers as well as children, young people and families. ▪ Workforce understands, and is able to respond effectively to, the impacts of intergenerational trauma and provide trauma-informed practice, as defined in the literature.
5. Child/ young people focus	A child, youth and family lens is applied across all policies and programs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A child/young people focus is central to policy and program design. ▪ Service delivery is child and family centred.
	A focus on the middle years/pre-teens and adolescence as well as the early years and First Thousand Days.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Middle years and adolescence are recognised as key transition points and appropriate support is provided. ▪ Indicators of positive transitions – primary school to high school; high school to education and training, or employment. ▪ Strategies and initiatives supporting children and young people through the middle years and adolescence are leveraged in the successor plan and gaps in services for these cohorts are addressed.
	Successor plan is underpinned by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Children are empowered to exercise their rights and be heard. ▪ Children’s rights are considered in all decisions that affect them.

'The successor plan must help to reduce the Commonwealth-State disconnects and inefficiencies and start to build a much more effective service system that can deliver the outcomes children, young people, families, communities and governments are seeking.'

'We need to see children, young people and families as experts in their own lives and work authentically with them to solve the challenges they are facing.'

'The successor plan must include a strong narrative that tells the story about why the wellbeing of children, young people, families and communities is so important to the future prosperity of this country. It's about investing in one of our key resources – our people.'

'The voices of children and young people must be central to every part of the process for the successor plan.'

'Why aren't we connecting the dots across portfolios? The issues and the outcomes we need are broader than just family services.'

'We need to acknowledge that a program of change requires time, resources and political will, even just to achieve national consistency. The successor plan must be long-term but include key milestones, review points and opportunities for adjustments along the way.'

'Measuring outcomes across safety and wellbeing is not straightforward and not all measures of safety correlate with wellbeing. We may need to consider different outcomes frameworks for different cohorts and short-term as well as long term outcomes.'

'We need a plan that will help to create an environment that supports the wellbeing and safety of children, young people, families and communities, not one that just provides a response.'

'The successor plan must be considered in the context of broader plans including the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children that will come to an end in 2022. Policy agendas need to be joined up.'

'Continue the public health approach but operationalise it well and educate the community about why it's important and what it is aiming to achieve.'

'Families are coming to us with increasingly complex and multifaceted needs. There must be adequate and ongoing investment in training and support for workers as well as mechanisms to allow workers across different sectors and from different funding streams to come together around the clients.'

'Priority areas of the successor plan need to target all children, not just those already in crisis. Otherwise it will be another National Framework that again focusses on the tertiary end of the service system. Investment in prevention and early support is key.'