

Consultation in Melbourne 17 February 2020

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 60 participants including Senior Officials from the Commonwealth and Victorian governments, executives and representatives from the non-government sector and research and academic representatives.

This was the twelfth 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), Darwin (21-22 November 2019) and Canberra (28 November 2019). Delegates at the Child Aware Conference in May 2019 were also consulted on the successor plan.

Participants in Melbourne emphasised the importance of continuing Commonwealth Government leadership in a national approach to build child and family wellbeing and improve safety outcomes. Continuing the gains made under the National Framework was identified as a priority, with a stronger focus on facilitating system level change in order to shift the curve for children, young people and families experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, vulnerability. Participants called for a long-term, bipartisan and whole of government commitment to the successor plan including new investment in prevention and early support services to divert children, young people and families away from child protection systems. Addressing the 'adult problems that cause children's pain' through child inclusive approaches across policy settings and organisational contexts was seen as key.

The importance of a rights-based approach, consistent with Australia's obligations under international conventions and agreements including the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child, UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the UN Sustainable Development Goals was also highlighted by participants in Melbourne. As has been the case in other consultations, addressing the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families in child protection and justice systems and embedding robust policy development, implementation and accountability mechanisms that join up and leverage across national policy agendas emerged as key themes. A uniform national data set, including data linkage, was also seen as a critical element.

The successor plan should also:

- be developed through a process that embeds the practicality of implementation and a robust evaluation as part of the design.
- be underpinned by a public health approach to help drive the necessary investment in universal and targeted prevention and early support services. This will also help to establish a clear delineation in roles between the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments in the service system.
- be supported by tripartite governance mechanisms that ensure accountability at all levels, including at the practice level.
- include an agreed set of principles to ensure actions and investment decisions cross portfolio boundaries.
- ensure the voices of children, young people and families are included in an ongoing way in all aspects – design, approaches to implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

- adopt a life-course approach that recognises the importance of investment in the early years including the First Thousand days, the middle years, adolescence and transitions to adulthood. A life-course approach will also ensure the needs of children and young people are considered in the context of families.
- addresses structural issues driving adverse outcomes for children, young people and families including poverty and housing insecurity.
- build on the momentum and successes achieved under the National Framework and maintain a focus on the needs of children, young people and families experiencing high levels of vulnerability and disadvantage including those in child protection systems and out-of-home care (OOHC).
- include achievable and measurable outcomes, short-term and long-term indicators of success and a strong focus on quantitative and qualitative data and evidence. Where research and/or data gaps exist, ensure these are clearly identified and addressed over the life of the successor plan.

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 Melbourne. 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 national, whole-of-government, long-term plan for the wellbeing and safety of children, young people and families. This plan must be ambitious and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ be overseen by an area within Government that ensures strong national support, accountability and high visibility. ▪ emphasise prevention and early support as integral to the broader continuum of responses available to children and families across the family life-course. ▪ stronger focus on support instead of ‘intervention’. ▪ leverage and connect, but not duplicate, effort occurring under other Commonwealth, State and Territory Government strategies and plans focusing on improving outcomes for children, young people, families and communities. This includes work underway to implement the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. ▪ drive a relational approach to policy development and implementation including child health and development and child care, mental health, alcohol and other drug, family violence, housing and homelessness, welfare support. ▪ include unambiguous, shared goals and outcome measures as part of a national, high level outcomes framework. ▪ require an annual Report Card or similar to be delivered to Parliament as part of the reporting framework. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ reporting against a common outcomes framework across all jurisdictions and for service providers working with children, young people and families. ▪ include a limited number of core priorities and actions that cross portfolio boundaries. Longer term action plans to achieve goals. ▪ adopt a broad conceptual framework including the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and Convention on the Rights of Indigenous People, and a public health approach. ▪ be underpinned by a solid, accessible evidence base relevant to the Australian context. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increased investment in, and efficacy of prevention and early support services and strategies leading to a shift of resources away from OOHC over time. ▪ 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 around shared outcomes. ○ Mitigation and removal of perverse and detrimental outcomes from policy decisions impacting children, families and communities, particularly those experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, high levels of disadvantage. ○ Policy owners have a sense of ‘relationship’ with families and children and are held accountable for the impact of their policies on them. ○ Effective interfaces between systems such as the National Disability Insurance Scheme so that systems are working together and families receive seamless services. ▪ 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. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Different silos are brought together. ○ Jurisdictional cohesion in areas of commonality and clarity about the interactions between Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments. ○ Commonwealth programs are clearly linked to prevention and early support priorities under the successor plan to help divert children and families away from child protection systems which are the responsibility of State and Territory Governments. ○ Child and family inclusive systems across the service spectrum. Examples include Odyssey House and Micah Projects. ▪ State and Territory Governments continue to work with the Commonwealth and: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ there is a reduction in rates of substantiations and child removal; ○ child protection systems and processes continue to improve and demonstrate positive long-term outcomes; ○ opportunities to harmonise child protection legislation across jurisdictions are explored. ▪ The public health approach to wellbeing and safety guides actions and investments under the successor plan. ▪ The rights of children and families are embedded in decision-making and service delivery across all sectors, including family law and the children’s court. ▪ Greater focus on implementation and outcomes with all parties held accountable over the duration of the successor plan. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Policy architecture is adaptable and responsive to emerging issues such as bullying, online grooming and sexual abuse.

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A harmonised outcomes framework with measures that are realistic, achievable and sensitive to change. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Existing frameworks to inform development. ○ Reduced complexity for service providers. ▪ Data and evidence (including prevalence data) is comprehensive, accessible and available to all stakeholders in the successor plan, including practitioners and communities. ▪ Political cycles across jurisdictions do not adversely impact the successor plan. ▪ Positive shifts across an agreed set of indicators over time, including positive indicators such as educational engagement and training, employment, financial security and secure housing.
	<p>Practical strategies and actions that will overcome the barriers to children and families receiving holistic, timely responses that meet needs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Funding agreements are longer term (5+ years) and more flexible to support holistic, joined up approaches. ▪ Place-based approaches and locally led solutions. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ capacity building initiatives within organisations and communities to support the broader roll out of these approaches. ○ co-location of services where appropriate and possible such as health, education and family support. ○ active in-reach to families who are not engaging with support services – via universal services. ▪ There are mechanisms at all levels that authorise cross portfolio/cross disciplinary collaboration around the child and family and these are used. ▪ Policy decisions across portfolio areas including income support and employment complement one another and inform program and practice so that all parts of the system work together to deliver positive outcomes for children and families. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Consider the recommendations of the Senate Committee Inquiry into ParentsNext as one example. ▪ Child impact assessments for new policy and program decisions. ▪ Supports are attached to the child/family and move with them through the service system. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ e.g. wrap around services, case management, support packages. ▪ International examples such as Scotland’s <i>Getting it Right for Every Child</i> (GIRFEC) are considered as part of the development process.
	<p>A robust and practical implementation and evaluation plan is developed alongside the policy process. This needs to be informed by evidence relevant to the Australian context.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The implementation and evaluation plan is developed in consultation with all key stakeholders including children, young people, families and communities. ▪ Policy is developed that is practical and implementable. ▪ A clear, realistic time frame for implementation and evaluation is agreed up front. ▪ Responsibilities around implementation are clearly identified and agreed. ▪ Implementation occurs at all levels across policy and program, organisation and practice. ▪ Short-term and long-term goals and indicators that are clearer and fixed.

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Continued investment in research, evidence and data. ▪ Implementation and governance mechanisms ensure learnings and successes over time are shared with all stakeholders and the successor plan is adaptive where and when required.
	<p>A national data set and collection system that includes qualitative as well as administrative data.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A comprehensive national data set is developed to track progress and outcomes and is accessible to all stakeholders. It includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Longitudinal, disaggregated, linked and survey/ qualitative data. ○ Data that captures the story of parents and parenting. ○ Data that tracks the wellbeing and outcomes for children and young people. ○ Prevalence data. ▪ Parents/carers, children and young people are consulted in the development of qualitative data.
	<p>Empower parents and families as central agents in the wellbeing and safety of their children.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A clearly articulated strategy is in place to build parental capacity. Parents /carers and kin have access to appropriate tools, information, resources and services. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Outcome measures track change. ○ A literacy and language for parents around child safety and child development. ○ Appropriate recognition, financial and service support for all kinship carers and children in their care. A national policy response to support informal kinship care arrangements. ▪ Families seek support early and help seeking is actively encouraged and ‘normalised’. (Consider incentives to help drive better outcomes for children.) ▪ Child-centred and family-focused service responses that see families as the solution. ▪ The needs of children are seen in the context of families and policy is family-focused. ▪ Higher levels of satisfaction from families as rights are acknowledged and taken into account, including in legal proceedings. ▪ Child level data is considered in the context of family-level data. ▪ Families whose children are removed are supported to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ address issues leading to child removal; ○ work toward reunification where it is safe to do so; ○ actively participate in a clear support pathway that enables a sustainable exit from child protection services. ▪ Effective parenting that is measured and reported on. ▪ A lifecourse approach to policy and programs supporting family formation and relationships, parenting and raising children. The enablers of success are included as critical elements of the successor plan.

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2. Cultural responsiveness – cross cutting theme	<p>A priority focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, families and communities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Leverage and connect with other initiatives and strategies such as the National Partnership on Closing the Gap to be led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, National Indigenous Early Childhood Strategy, SNAICC Family Matters Campaign. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, families, communities and organisations take the lead role in developing actions under the successor plan that will deliver positive outcomes for them. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ For example, a dedicated strategy and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children’s Commissioner has been called for by some peak bodies. ▪ True partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, families, communities, organisations and Leadership that deliver positive change over time. ▪ More Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) are providing culturally safe services to more children, young people, families and communities. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ For example, in Victoria, state guardianship for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children has been transferred to VACCA. ▪ Joined up service delivery approaches across health, education, housing, employment and social services, from universal through to targeted and intensive support. ▪ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families seek early support and that support is culturally safe and appropriate. ▪ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families are not over-represented in child protection and justice systems. ▪ The rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families are respected and protected. ▪ Place-based solutions are led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and ACCOs. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The Commonwealth Government’s <i>Stronger Places, Stronger People</i> program is a place-based collective impact approach that is demonstrating some green shoots.
	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"> ▪ Services are designed in consultation with children, young people and families from refugee and migrant backgrounds and those living with disability. ▪ Children, young people and families have access to services that are culturally appropriate, sensitive and safe. ▪ Specific indicators are developed to measure change and report outcomes. ▪ Cultural change where diversity is seen as a positive aspect of Australian society. ▪ The rights of children, young people and families from refugee and migrant backgrounds and those living with disability are protected. ▪ Investment in community-led solutions, similar to Stronger Places, Stronger People.
	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. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ A reduction in the number of repeat referrals. ▪ 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.

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Women in justice facilities and their children receive specialist support from appropriately trained professionals to support positive parenting and child development.
3. Participation	Clear role for civil society in all aspects of the successor plan.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Civil society is a champion for the successor plan. ▪ Civil society is an equal participant in the successor plan development, implementation, monitoring, reporting and evaluation. ▪ The critical role of civil society is enacted in governance mechanisms.
	The participation of children, young people and families/carers in policy development and at the organisation and service delivery levels.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The successor plan includes the voices of children, young people and families including those 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. ▪ A rights-based approach ensures the participation of children, young people and families in decisions that affect them.
4. Practice/ workforce	A nationally rolled out workforce development strategy across all sectors, including adult-focused services such as mental health and alcohol and other drugs, to build skills and capability in working with children and families.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Child inclusive practice. ▪ Appropriate referrals. ▪ Services are co-designed with practitioners and children and families. ▪ Mainstream services provide culturally safe and appropriate services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families. ▪ Broader roll-out of a family assessment approach such as that used in the QLD Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Wellbeing Services. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Shift away from the current ‘threshold approach’ that is centred on the level of child maltreatment in determining level of care. Move to a response based on a comprehensive understanding of families’ needs.
5. Child/ young people focus	A child inclusive approach across all policy, program and service delivery.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A child/young people focus is central to policy and program design. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Includes Family Law Reform that prioritises the safety and wellbeing of children in processes and decisions. ▪ Service delivery is child and family-centred. ▪ The successor plan addresses the current gap in appropriate, evidence based services for children and young people demonstrating abusive and sexualized behaviours.
	A life-course approach that ensures a focus on all stages of development and transitions to adulthood.	<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 and data collections for these cohorts are addressed.

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	Attention to the impacts of natural disasters and climate change on children and young people.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Research evidence informs the development of training, resources and services. ▪ Services are delivered that are responsive to the emerging needs of children and young people, such as increased anxiety and trauma. ▪ Climate justice for children and young people. ▪ Decisions about having children are not adversely impacted because of anxiety/trauma arising from natural disasters and climate change.
	A continued focus on the needs of children and young people in OOHC.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ State and Territory Governments work together with the Commonwealth in areas of shared interest such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Raising the leaving care age to 21. ○ Raising age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 14 years. ○ Integrated services to support young people leaving care to engage in and sustain education, training and employment and housing tenure. ▪ Best practice approaches are implemented nationally. ▪ All jurisdictions meet or exceed National Standards. ▪ Interruption of 'transgenerational OOHC'. ▪ Increase in rates of reunification where safe to do so.
	Mechanisms that ensure the voices of children and young people are central to the successor plan.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Children and young people are represented in governance arrangements. ▪ Children and young people participate in service design alongside practitioners. ▪ Children and young people are regularly consulted on progress and outcomes under the successor plan. ▪ Accountability extends to children and young people who have contributed to the successor plan. ▪ There are strong linkages with the National Children's Commissioner and State and Territory Children's Commissioners and Guardians. ▪ The successor plan has a strong focus on young people and links with relevant strategies, plans, Government bodies supporting on young people.

'There is a leadership role for the Commonwealth around children and young people who don't fit into state child protection systems. There are strong intersections with family violence, alcohol and other drugs, mental health, housing and homelessness and income support.'

'Risk factors for child maltreatment often travel together yet responses are diffused across separate systems. These systems need to work seamlessly with families to deliver a holistic response.'

'Many children in informal kinship care are one step away from child protection intervention due to the vulnerability of care arrangements and the lack of needed supports. There is a role for the Commonwealth Government in providing specialised supports for these children and their carers, including financial supports, to keep children out of child protection systems.'

'Implementation of the plan must have much stronger accountability across all levels, including Governments and allow sufficient time to achieve the goals. Promising projects are being lost to the system under the current Framework.'

*'Safety shouldn't be the end goal. The end goal should be safety **and wellbeing**. Wellbeing indicators and approaches are already being adopted by numerous State and Territory Governments and are already included in health and education sectors. We should include wellbeing outcomes in the successor plan.'*

'Systems change is integral to changing trajectories for children, young people, families and communities experiencing, or at risk of experiencing vulnerability. Actions under the successor plan must help build a child inclusive system – across policy, programs, organisations, practice, and at the community level.'

'Climate change is an issue that needs to be included in the policy agenda. It's adverse impacts will drive an increase in demand for services and support for vulnerable children, young people and families and the system must be ready to respond.'

'Investment continues to be dragged into the wrong end of the system while numbers of children, young people and families in child protection systems continue to increase. An appropriately resourced, coordinated prevention and early support strategy is needed to shift the balance.'

'The successor plan provides an opportunity to do things differently for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, families and communities, centred around a whole-of-government partnership, empowerment and self-determination. It's now accepted and openly acknowledged that what we have been doing, including on Closing the Gap, isn't working and a new approach and perspective is required.'

'Poverty is the elephant in the room and a key driver of child maltreatment. The rate of some income support payments and allowances is working against improving outcomes for children and breaking cycles of disadvantage.'

'Prioritising the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, families and communities is a non-negotiable for the successor plan. There is a real opportunity to build on momentum developing in other spaces and work together at the whole-of-government level to drive change.'

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