



## STATEMENT

### FROM THE FAMILY INCLUSION NETWORK OF AUSTRALIA INC. IN RESPONSE TO CHILD PROTECTION JURISDICTIONS AND COVID19 April 2020

The Family Inclusion Network of Australia (FINA), is a national association of entities that seeks to elevate the voice of parents and family members with children in the out of home care system throughout Australia.

FINA promotes inclusive, respectful and collaborative policies and practices between statutory authorities, families, children and carers, to assist children and families to achieve good life outcomes.

During the pandemic of COVID-19, child protection jurisdictions across Australia are responding with formulaic approaches to policy and practice with little collaboration or consideration of the individual needs of babies, children, young people and their families.

Child protection is an essential service, and best practice is based in 'relational work' – this means face to face contact for children, their families and caregivers is critical.

Relationships between children, and their parents and family members, is essential for children's safety, wellbeing, connection and identity. A rigid policy and practice direction to limit or cease all face to face contact between children and their families, is not based on principles of best interest and may be harmful. Face to face interactions to monitor and safeguard children in care has also been stopped or cut back, as have face to face processes to assess prospective carers. This is not in children's interests. Nor is it consistent with public health guidelines which allow such interactions to continue.

While we find ourselves in a time of an unprecedented public health crisis, we must respond calmly and in children's interests. Limiting or removing face to face interactions has potential to cause more harm than the potential risk of COVID-19. Without contact, many children and young people will experience confusion, fear and additional trauma. For parents and family members, their sense of hope is critically challenged.

FINA is committed to supporting government health directives aligned with best practice principles.

The **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Placement Principles**. These require participation and involvement from families, communities and elders in decision making about children.

**Children's rights and needs to be paramount**. The need to put children's welfare at the forefront of decision making is a core principle of legislation throughout Australia and does not change during COVID-19.

An emphasis on the **prevention of harm to children**, including support to prevent entry to care, and the prevention of harm to children who are already in care.

**Family and community inclusion** in children's lives.

These times demand that we work collaboratively to find creative and new ways of keeping everyone safe, while being connected in meaningful relationships – children and their family's voices must be central.

For more detailed information, follow this link [FINA full statement on COVID](#)