



**Families**Australia  
**Annual Report**  
**2023-2024**

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Families Australia gratefully acknowledges the ongoing support of our members and the Australian Government.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Families Australia celebrates more than 65,000 years of custodianship and connection to lands and waters of First Nations people.

We acknowledge Traditional Owners and Custodians of Country throughout Australia and pay our respects to Elders and Ancestors.

For millennia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have been nurturing children and young people through lore, kinship systems and the powerful cultural role of Elders.

The wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families is fundamental to the health and prosperity of this country.

Families Australia's purpose is to improve the wellbeing of all families.

To achieve this, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities must be at the forefront of policy and community conversations on strengthening all families.

## VISION

*Australian families, in all their diversity, enjoy the greatest possible wellbeing.*



## MISSION

To improve the wellbeing of all Australian families, especially those experiencing vulnerability and being excluded from being able to fully participate in our community.

## STRATEGIC INTENT

By 2025 Families Australia will be the leading and highly respected authority advising Government on child, youth, and family wellbeing, supported by diverse and active partnerships, robust business practices and an engaged community.



## OUR VALUES

- ☀ Inclusive
- ☀ Practical
- ☀ Collaborative
- ☀ Ethical

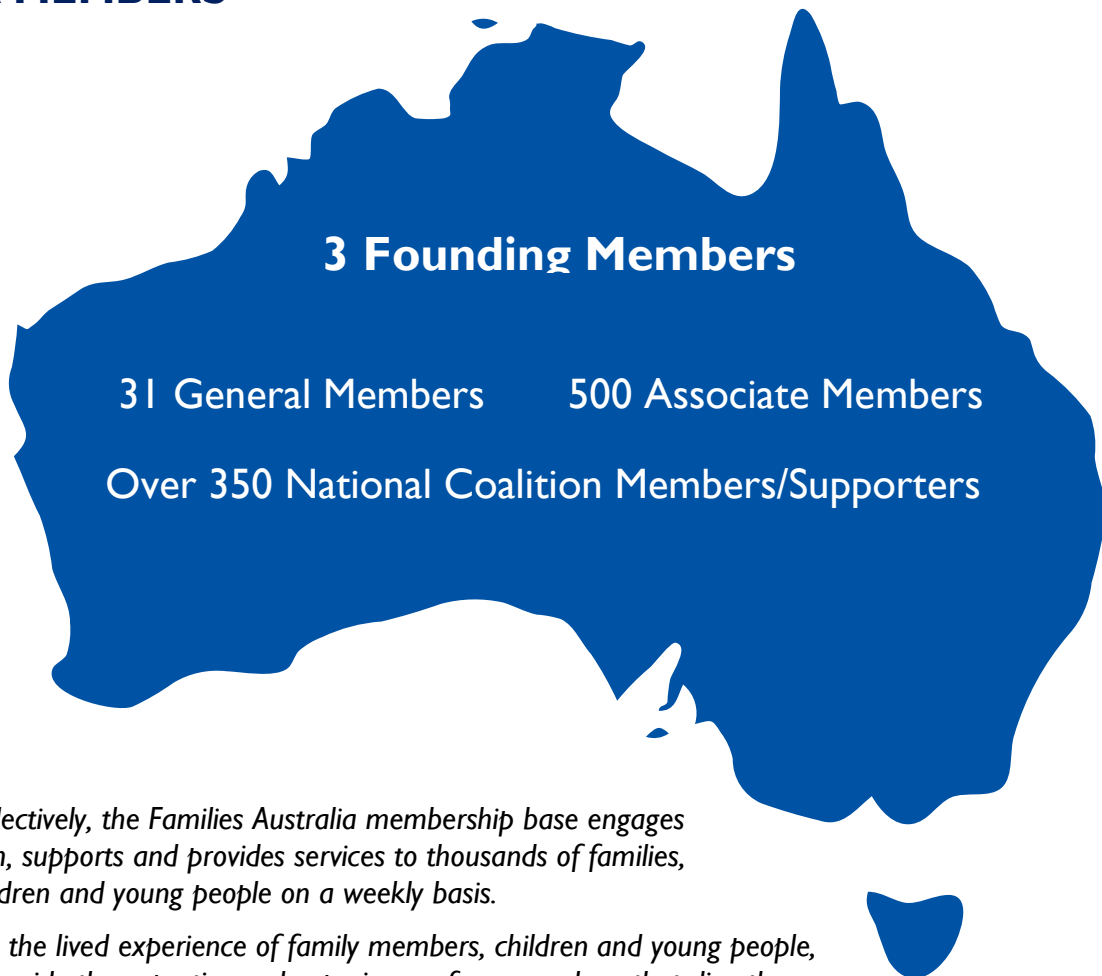
## OUR ORGANISATION

Established in 2001, Families Australia is a national, member-based, not-for-profit peak body that is committed to enhancing the wellbeing of all families, especially those experiencing the greatest vulnerability.

We work to build a nation in which all families, irrespective of their form, enjoy the greatest possible wellbeing. We believe that this objective is advanced by better protecting and valuing children, by celebrating families and supporting the most vulnerable amongst them, and by making genuine and lasting improvements to the wellbeing of First Nations peoples.

We partner with our members, governments, service delivery organisations and researchers to suggest practical and innovative policy solutions to challenges faced by Australian families. We convene the National Coalition on Child Safety and Wellbeing in support of the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children, facilitate National Families Week which celebrates the vital role of families and, in 2024, supported the establishment of the National Foster Care Sustainability Group.

## OUR MEMBERS



*Collectively, the Families Australia membership base engages with, supports and provides services to thousands of families, children and young people on a weekly basis.*

*It is the lived experience of family members, children and young people, alongside the expertise and experience of our members that directly informs the work and activities of Families Australia as your national peak body.*

## OUR BOARD



**Deb Tsorbaris**  
Chair

Nominee of Child and Family Wellbeing Association of Australia



**Phil Doorgachurn**  
Deputy Chair

Individual



**Bev Orr**  
Secretary

Founding Member delegate of Australian Foster and Kinship Care Association



**Catherine Liddle**

Founding Member delegate of SNAICC – National Voice for our Children



**Tom Allsop**

Founding Member delegate of Child and Family Wellbeing Association of Australia



**Lesley Taylor**

Nominee of National Association for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect



**Jo Sadler**

Nominee of Wanslea



**Penny Hood**

Individual



**Dr. Lisa J Griffiths**

Nominee of OzChild



**Tim Moore**

Nominee of Australian Foster and Kinship Care Association

# STRATEGIC PLAN 2022-2025

**Acknowledgement:** Families Australia celebrates more than 60,000 years of ongoing connection to lands, sea country and community of First Nations peoples. We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and extend our respects to Elders past and present.

**Vision:** Australian families, in all their diversity, enjoy the greatest possible wellbeing.

**Mission:** To improve the wellbeing of all Australian families, especially those experiencing vulnerability and being excluded from being able to fully participate in our community.

**Values:** Inclusive, practical, collaborative, ethical.

**Strategic Intent:** In 2025 Families Australia will be the leading and highly respected authority advising Government on child, youth, and family wellbeing, supported by diverse and active partnerships, robust business practices and an engaged community.

Child, Youth & Family Wellbeing	Partnerships	Engagement	A Thriving Organisation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reconciliation with First Nations peoples is advanced and relationships with First Nations people, communities and organisations are strengthened.</li> <li>• ‘The Family’ is recognised and celebrated as the primary building block for society.</li> <li>• The authentic voice and lived experience of children and families inform all policy and program design processes.</li> <li>• Economic policies that improve the economic, health and social outcomes of children and families are core to our advocacy and representations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish new partnership arrangements with members, stakeholders, governments, and philanthropic bodies to form influential and diverse coalitions.</li> <li>• Leverage the collective knowledge and expertise of partners, including member organisations and the National Coalition, to strengthen policy formation and project delivery.</li> <li>• Engage in collaborative decision making and collective action between members and other peak partners to drive reforms.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Realise the potential of our partner networks as advocates, stewards, and champions stakeholders, which includes First Nations people, children, young people and families to affect change.</li> <li>• We are the ‘go to voice’ for comment on issues impacting children, families, and young people.</li> <li>• As a broader and more diverse National Coalition on Child Safety and Wellbeing, we are a respected prominent body that directly influences <i>Safe and Supported</i>.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diversify and grow the revenue base, including expanded Government investment.</li> <li>• Embed a high-performance culture across the organisation.</li> <li>• Impact metrics are embedded across all aspects of the organisation’s work.</li> </ul>



# REFLECTIONS FROM THE CHAIR

## Ms Deb Tsorbaris Families Australia



I acknowledge and pay tribute to Ancestors and Elders of First Nations peoples whose lands and waters on which we are based. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have had a continuing connection to the lands and waters of what is now called Australia for over 65,000 years. I deeply value and honour the ongoing role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders, people and communities in caring for country, maintaining culture and for nurturing families, children and young people across the nation.

I was delighted to be elected as the Families Australia Chair following the 2023 Annual General Meeting. I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the leadership of our national peak body and thankful for the support of my board colleagues, and that of the broader membership.

Over the past 12 months, both the board and staff team have been able to build upon the leadership of our previous Chair, Kath Mandla, and her contribution to the organisation during her multi-year board term. Thank you Kath!

Families Australia has continued to lead, shape and directly engage in key national policy discussions, deliver nationwide events, engage with our members and make strong representations to policy and decision makers. It has been an exciting – and sometimes demanding – time to be leading the organisation as Chair, but always rewarding.

Peak bodies, like Families Australia, play a crucial role in civil society. Particularly so at present with many families struggling under the weight of cost-of-living pressures, housing of any sort remaining unaffordable for most, and significant demand pressures continuing being felt by our member organisations – and service systems– struggling to meet the needs of families, children and young people.

While there is significant effort still required in a range of policy areas, it is extremely pleasing to know that we maintain a direct and positive impact on improving the experiences and outcomes of families, children and young people. Ultimately, this is our primary goal.

This annual report contains information on a range of activities and events and seeks to highlight some of our efforts over the past 12 months. Alongside the valued contribution of our members and the collective leadership of the board, the Families Australia staff team are to be commended. What a strong and successful year we have had.

There is always some hesitancy in calling out specific items from a long list of achievements, but I feel compelled to do so. The *Changing the Balance* (CTB) sector consultation project undertaken by the organisation was a key piece of work contributing to the development of the Child and Family Investment Strategy, being led by SNAICC.

Families Australia acknowledges that the pace of change in growing the scope and breadth of services and supports being delivered by First Nations organisations to First Nations families, children and young people, has been much slower than many people had hoped for or expected. A view echoed throughout the CTB consultations and interviews.

Reforms being pursued through the Child and Family Investment Strategy will support the self-determination aspirations of First Nations people and deliver better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, families and children. A successful transition will rely on the non-Indigenous NGO sector's openness to change, guided by principled national leadership and a shared commitment to better outcomes for First Nations children, young people and families.

A position that I am proud the organisation is leading advocacy efforts for.

The National Foster Care Sustainability Group was established following the direct representation of a number of Families Australia's members and sector partners to Jamie Crosby our Chief Executive Officer. The group is raising – at the national level - critical concerns and issues being faced by foster carers, the consequences of a decline in the recruitment of new foster carers and an increase in foster/kinship carers leaving the system.

Child Protection and out-of-home care is a complex interplay of individual systems, predominantly falling under 'state business'. However, the Commonwealth has influence and direct responsibility in a number of areas, and a pivotal leadership role in facilitating better support for state-based systems, supporting and valuing foster carers, ultimately improving outcomes for children and young people in care. An important contribution that a peak body, directly supported by its members, can and must make.

Through a diversification of the organisation's income base and resultant revenue growth, we will post a modest surplus for the year ending 30 June 2024. Enabling a slow rebuilding of the level of funds held in reserve while concurrently being able to progress strategic initiatives that will enhance and expand the capacity of the organisation. Implementation of our Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan and the initiation of the modernisation of our website, overhaul of our IT infrastructure and contemporising Families Australia's visual representation and online presence being two examples.

Thank you for your ongoing commitment to supporting all Australian families, children and young people.

**Deb Tsorbaris, Chair.**

## **CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER'S STATEMENT**

**Mr Jamie Crosby, Chief Executive Officer**



It is on the traditional lands and waters of First Nations people that Families Australia, our members and the families, children and young people that we advocate on behalf of, all reside. I extended my respects to the Ancestors and Elders of the Traditional Owners and Custodians of all lands and waters across the country and celebrate the ongoing contribution First Nation peoples and communities make to the health and prosperity of the nation.

The Families Australia staff team, and our members, continue to benefit greatly from the wisdom, insights and expertise of the Families Australia board. The purposeful leadership, active engagement and support of all board and committee members, is the strong foundation from which we operate. It underpins the sound governance environment, our reputation and standing with governments and across the sector, and demonstrably increases the capacity and scope of the organisation's activities.

I extend a deep thanks to SNAICC – National Voice for our Children staff members, members of the First Nations NGO Alliance, state/territory Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commissioners and Advocates, First Nations leaders, community organisations and members that we have worked with throughout the year. Your leadership, commitment to sharing knowledge, active agitation, and steadfast commitment to ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices, aspirations and community generated solutions are heard, acted upon and explicitly inform shared decision-making processes and structures, is recognised and honoured.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, organisations and communities must be at the forefront of policy development, community conversations and formal decision making that support and strengthen all families, communities and young people.

A heartfelt thanks and note of appreciation to the team - Kripa Neupane, Dr Bianca Williams, Bianca Richards and Jessica McQualter. One of the great luxuries I have in my role as Chief Executive is I regularly get to represent and celebrate (*read claim!*) the collective efforts of the whole team.

Thank you for your hard work, diligence, commitment and professionalism to the organisation and to families, children and young people across the country. Families Australia's standing, community presence and utility to our members and stakeholders, and to governments is a credit to you. What an amazingly successful - and sometimes challenging - year we had.

We have delivered the Changing the Balance sector consultation project, establishment the National Foster Care Sustainability Group, were represented the Early Years Strategy Advisory panel, engaged with ACCC Inquiries and Productivity Commission reviews, continued long-term support of the National Coalition for Child Safety and Wellbeing and delivered National Families Week. Families Australia continues to lead and tangibly influence national policy discussions and debates.

The Changing the Balance and the Foster Carer projects have also enabled Families Australia to travel and more frequently be in regions and communities where our members and stakeholders are based. Thank you to our members who hosted and/or supported our events and presence in your communities over the year. Proactively engaging with members in your locations and communities will be a continued focus of our effort over the years ahead.

Pleasingly National Families Week 2024 participant numbers grew again this year; consolidating significant gains made in 2022 and 2023 following the impact of the Covid years. Three successful policy forums were run, member drafting and writing groups were incorporate submission development processes and all policy and service deliverables of our funding agreements were met; in many cases exceeded.

Our Innovate RAP was launched, the Corporate Governance and the Finance & Financial Audit Committees are leading a formal review of our governance process, operational procedures and policies. Our website and IT infrastructure strategic project – now including a brand refresh - was also initiated. It was positive to see the organisation's income base grow, income sources were diversified, and we will post an operational surplus for the financial year. Many achievements and much to be proud of.

*However, significant work lies ahead.....*

Our National Families Week funding agreement expires mid-2025, and our core DSS funding agreement – some 50 percent of our income base – expires mid-2026. Efforts to secure and renew these funding agreements has already commenced. Endeavours to continue to grow and diversify our income base by securing new work – tenders, philanthropic and corporate sector sponsorships, and partnerships with other peak bodies – will continue.

In 2025 a federal election will be held. Harnessing our members' expertise, the lived experience of families, children and young people who access your services and actively contributing to policy development processes and sector initiatives, will be a critical underpinning our work over the year ahead.

As a peak body, Families Australia has a responsibility to contribute to, and lead, sector efforts to ensure all Australian families, children and young people benefit – in an inclusive, safe, equitable and just manner - from the wealth and prosperity of all family, children and young people.

**Jamie Crosby**  
**Chief Executive Officer**

# OUR RECONCILIATION JOURNEY

Families Australia's vision for reconciliation is an Australia that forges unity between First Nations people and other Australians, celebrates the richness and diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, cultures and histories, and enables their aspirations to be met.

Families Australia celebrates more than 65,000 years of custodianship and connection to lands and sea country of First Nations peoples. We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and pay our respects to Elders and Ancestors.

For millennia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have been nurturing children and young people through lore, kinship systems and the powerful cultural role of Elders. The wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families is fundamental to the wellbeing of this country.

Families Australia's purpose is to improve the wellbeing of all families. To achieve this, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities must be at the forefront of policy and community conversations on strengthening all families. We work closely with these organisations and communities in true partnership to realise this vision.



This artwork depicts the connection between Indigenous families and peoples coming from and living in different regions. It shows communicating and building better ways of working with respect and representation beside Families Australia.

We have progressed our reconciliation efforts through a dedicated Reconciliation Working Group and reported on activities of our reconciliation journey through our annual reports for many years. Development of our *Innovate RAP* supports our organisational reconciliation journey and we hope that it will contribute to the reconciliation efforts of our members and the broader community.

Board, members and staff are committed to our reconciliation journey through:

- deepening our knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories; building on existing relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members, organisations and stakeholders
- expanding our partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members and stakeholders in all activities of the organisation
- advocating for the direct involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations in formal decision-making processes that impact upon their communities and families
- contributing to the development and growth of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sector and
- encouraging and supporting our member organisations on their reconciliation journey.

Approved by Reconciliation Australia in late 2023, a copy of the *Families Australia - Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan January 2024 - December 2025* be accessed directly from the [Families Australia website](#).

A huge note of thanks and appreciation is extended to **Ms Mandy Braddick** of **Wojamin Creative**, who lead the design, visuals and presentation of our RAP. Mandy is a South Coast NSW, Wandandian tribe and Gumea language group woman. Mandy is a Graphic Designer and communication specialist with over 12 years' experience working on design, communication, digital and social media projects.

Mandy was also able to link us with Aleesha at Jade Photography and Nikeasha Chapman – two First Nations photographers whose amazing talents and images we were able to draw upon and use throughout the RAP document.



Alessa (Jade Photography) is Gumbaynggirr woman now living and working on Gamilaroi Country (Moree) started her business, and since then has worked with 35 families and been a photographer for multiple events in Western NSW, particularly Moree. Apart from her kids, starting her own business has been the best decision she has made. Aleesha’s passion for photography drives her to do the best work for her clients.

Nikeasha Chapman is a proud Gumea, Yuin, Dharawal woman from the South Coast NSW, now living in Meeanjin (Brisbane). Nikeasha’s passion for photography roots from her love for culture, of art, creativity and storytelling.



Our Innovate RAP is ambitious for an organisation of our size – as it should be. As an organisation, as a peak body and as a community, there is a long way to go in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self - determination and creating a reconciled nation.



# HIGHLIGHTS FROM OUR YEAR

## National Families Week 2024

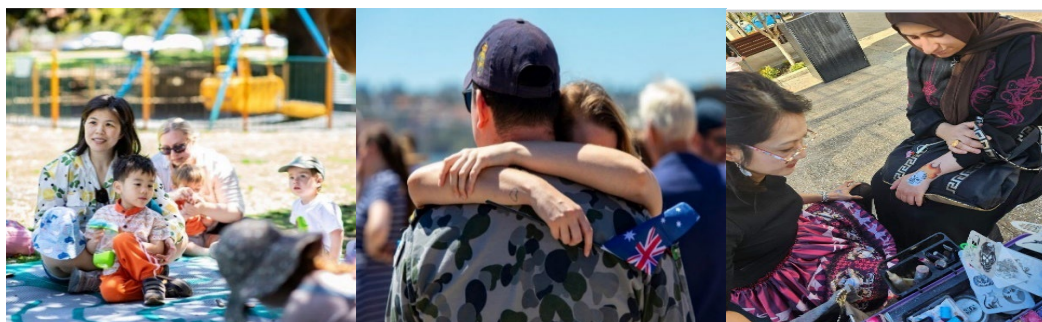


This year National Families Week (NFW) ran from May 13 to May 19, with May 15 designated as the United Nations International Day of Families. This year added an extra layer of significance as it marked the 30th Anniversary of the International Day of Families. In Australia, National Families Week celebrates the crucial role that families play in our communities. The theme of this year's National Families Week was “**Celebrating Family Diversity & Connections.**” Celebrating family diversity involves recognising and embracing the unique circumstances, backgrounds, and dynamics that make each family special. And finding opportunities to connect across differences including those in culture, language, gender, sexuality, ability, and age.

The number of registered activities through the NFW registration process grew with an estimated attendance at NFW events exceeding 65,000 participants. While participation levels were still a little below that of pre-Covid levels, it was pleasing to see that the volume, breadth and diversity of organisations and individuals involved in NFW activities is rebounding.

Some fun facts about NFW 2024:

- 203 registered organisations/individuals across all states and territories held over 450 events and activities across involving some 65,000 participants
- Minister Rishworth provided a video message to launch and promote NFW. The video message was posted and promoted on the Families Australia and NFW websites
- New resources, download materials and promotional items were produced and distributed
- Promotion of the week occurred across multiple platforms including:
  - Social media channels - (Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn)
  - National Families News, stakeholder and member newsletters and bulletins, targeted email campaigns (federal and state/territory government departments, national LGAs, peak organisations)
  - professional organisations, business providers, conferences, events and sector forums in the lead up to NFW and
  - promotion via the Celebrating Families Speaker Series 2024 webinar series.



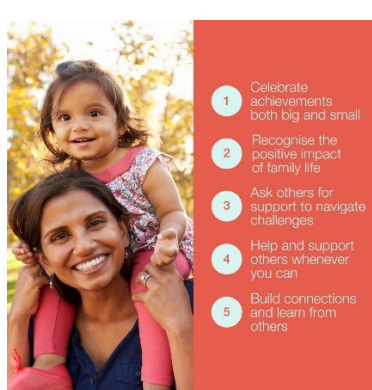
## National Families Week – Celebrating Families Speaker Series

Families Australia hosted a series of lunchtime online webinars from Tuesday 14 to Friday 17 May showcasing stories of diverse families and communities. We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to our speakers for sharing their experiences working with multicultural families and communities:

- Ms Sarah Powell, CEO Pink Hope
- Benny Bol OAM President, Queensland African Communities Council (QACC)
- Kate Bjur, Executive Director Research & Advocacy, PeakCare
- Liz Neville, Acting Director, Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS)

## National Families Week Champions

A new champion for 2024 was recruited – Ms Liz Neville, Acting Director, Australian Institute of Family Studies. NFW champions listed on the website now stand at 13. Continuation of the ‘Champions’ approach in 2025 will be reviewed as part of the 2024 evaluation.



You can visit the [National Families Week website](#) for information on National Families Week 2024 and soon to be released details of the National Families Week 2025 theme and program of events.

## Changing the Balance sector consultation project

### *Supporting a National Child and Family Investment Strategy*

The development of a National Child and Family Investment Strategy (the Strategy) is a key component of Action 2 of the [Safe and Supported: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan 2023-26](#). The Strategy will focus on shifting investment to prevention and early supports that address and prevent the underlying social determinants of child abuse and neglect. It will also drive a shift in proportionate investment for child and family services delivered to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, towards the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisations (ACCO) sector.

Led by SNAICC, partnering with Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak (QATSICPP) and Social Ventures Australia (SVA), extensive research and community consultation has been undertaken over the past 12 months in developing the Strategy. The Strategy is anticipated to be released by early 2025.

As a contributing initiative to the development of the Strategy, Families Australia were engaged by the Department of Social Services (DSS) in late 2023 to undertake a sector research project exploring the potential impact on non-indigenous (NGOs) when proportional levels of future funding for early and tailored child and family supports funding is transferred to ACCOs.

Goals of the Families Australia / National Coalition project included:

- identifying primary organisational and operational challenges to be faced by mainstream NGOs from the transfer of funding allocations to ACCOs; and
- identifying potential issues concerning future funding sustainability for mainstream NGOs in the child and family services sector.

Working closely with SNAICC, a Project Advisory Group and DSS, Families Australia undertook the following consultation processes:

- consultation forums attended by over 300 participants from approximately 150 organisations (ACCOs and non-Indigenous NGOs);
- National *Changing the Balance Survey*, with over 60 responses.
- held in-depth organisational interviews and case studies.
- undertook a desktop review of Federal, State and Territory plans for transition arrangements
- hosted a validation workshop was on 3 June 2024 and was attended by 11 sector leaders from 10 organisations including non-Indigenous NGOs and ACCOs.

The project's final report was submitted to DSS in June 2024. The project identified that across the sector, it was broadly acknowledged that the pace of change in recent years has been much slower than many people had hoped – or expected. Greater effort and urgency are needed from both the non-Indigenous NGO sector, and from governments, to speed the pace of this change.

Alongside other sector leaders, Families Australia recognises the *National Child and Family Investment Strategy* is more than a programmatic transition – it is a transformation of the sector. In partnership with the ACCO sector, we share a deep commitment to placing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, families, children and young people at the forefront of the sector's work. We must do things differently to achieve better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, children and young people. Indeed, for all Australian families, children and young people.



As the sector's non-Indigenous national peak body, Families Australia has a key leadership role in conversations across the sector about the coming funding transition. These changes will be profound for many non-Indigenous NGOs, including our members who are currently at a variety of levels of readiness. The change process needs to be navigated wisely and well – with continuous clear communication, transition resourcing for the sector, and strong support for both individual organisations and the sector.

With strong and continuous communications in the change process, advance notice ahead of major transition points, transitional resourcing arrangements, and a strong spirit of goodwill, none of these challenges raised during the CTG consultations are insurmountable.

As national commitments by governments begin being implemented at pace and scale, the non-Indigenous NGO sector has a key responsibility in strong partnership with the ACCO sector, to help drive this transition and maximise its success.

## Establishment of a National Foster Care Sustainability Group

Over the past five years, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) data shows a steady number of children and young people (CYP) entering out-of-home care (OOHC) in Australia.

But what has changed significantly is *where* children are being placed within the system.

The decline in the recruitment of new foster carers and an increase in existing foster carers leaving, is seeing a growing reliance in all jurisdictions on non-family-based (residential) care arrangements. Especially concerning is First Nations children with the increasing overrepresentation.

These trends not only incur significant financial burdens on governments but, most importantly, result in poor outcomes for children and young people, and their families and communities.

Aligned with Families Australia's vision, that *Australian families, in all their diversity, enjoy the greatest possible wellbeing*, we have committed to a key initiative to explore and harness national Commonwealth opportunities aimed at sustaining and enhancing the pivotal role of foster carers within the OOHC system.

While Child Protection predominantly falls under 'state business', the Commonwealth has influence and responsibilities that can play a pivotal leadership role in facilitating better support for foster carers in state-based systems. In April 2024, Families Australia established a *National Foster Care Sustainability Group*, alongside leading sector peers with national reach. Collectively we are working to directly inform and present to the Federal Government a concise set of solutions for action in the next 12 months. These recommendations are designed for the Commonwealth to eliminate existing barriers and empower jurisdictions to enhance their practices.

To read more and find out how you can support this campaign please visit [futureoffostercare.org.au](https://futureoffostercare.org.au)

### The Future of Foster Care 'Roadshow'

Throughout July and August 2024 Families Australia participated in a Future of Foster Care 'roadshow' of coordinated events and panel discussions. These discussions have brought together peak child welfare bodies from Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland and South Australia to explore strategic solutions to the foster carer shortage and highlight the work being undertaken across the country to drive systemic change.



Panellists, including Chief Executive Officer Jamie Crosby, delved into the key issues impacting their jurisdictions, sharing insights and initiatives currently underway, both locally and internationally, to address the pressing issue and overreliance on residential care and alternative care arrangements.

This issue deserves our collective, urgent attention. Together, we can ensure that children, young people, families, and carers receive the support they need, when they need it most.

## National Coalition on Child Safety and Wellbeing



The National Coalition on Child Safety and Wellbeing comprises over 200 members from non - government and research organisations including peak bodies, out-of-home care, child and family support, disability and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations who are committed to advancing the national campaign on child safety and wellbeing in Australia.

### Safe & Supported Working Groups



The implementation of Safe & Supported Action Plans, ([Safe and Supported: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan 2023-2026](#) and [Safe and Supported: First Action Plan 2023-2026](#)) is supported by four working groups.

Each working group focuses on implementing specific actions across the two plans.

The working group focus themes are as follows:

- Workforce
- Accountability and data
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander System leadership; and
- Working together to support children and families (encompassing legal supports, social determinants, early support, OOH, carers and disability).

The National Coalition is represented at each of the respective working groups by two subject matter experts, one drawn from the National Coalition Steering Group and the other from the broader National Coalition membership.

## 2024 National Coalition Annual Meeting

The 2024 National Coalition Annual Meeting, held on 25 June 2024, focused on the theme of working together to support the growth of the ACCO sector. Ms Melissa Brown of AMR Consulting provided the keynote presentation: *Ngunngun baraayn ngundakang - Yesterday, today and tomorrow*.

Ms Brown's presentation explored how, moving forward, there will be a role for both non-Indigenous NGOs and the ACCO sector to work together. Exploring key features that allow scope for genuine, authentic partnerships built on integrity, deep trust, listening, key points raised included:

1. The purpose of any partnership needs to be clearly defined
2. Partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous organisations need to have a focus on decision-making and cultural authority
3. Aboriginal staff working for non-Indigenous NGOs have an important role to play in leading partnership work
4. Senior staff in non-Indigenous NGOs need to be committed to the process if partnerships are to be successful
5. Delegated authority from most senior staff is crucial for successful partnerships/transition plans
6. Aboriginal staff are key within the NGO sector. However, there can be challenges in establishing networks and recruiting staff in rural Aboriginal communities for service delivery (in both ACCOs and non-Indigenous NGOs) and
7. Time and space are required to develop the relationships necessary for partnerships.

Ms Brown and Jamie Crosby also discussed how each First Nations community must be allowed space for self-determination. While partnerships can be an important step in the transition process, partnerships are not always the right model for all communities. They noted that self-determination in action meant that some First Nations communities may want a service run by mob, and others may want a say in which service are provided but not necessarily run the service themselves.

Following Ms Brown's presentation, updates on Safe & Supported were respectively provided by Karl Williamson, representative of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership Group and Tarja Saastamoinen, Group Manager, Families Department of Social Services. Both acknowledged and thanked National Coalition members for their work on Safe & Supported, including their ongoing support during the implementation of the action plans and commitment to meaningful partnerships.

## National Coalition Steering Group

A steering group is the principal representative group for the National Coalition. Membership of the steering group has changed over the course of the two National Frameworks to ensure that representation aligns with Action Plan priorities. Current representatives on the steering group:

- Professor Leah Bromfield, Director, Australian Centre for Child Protection, UniSA
- Professor Amy Conley Wright, Research Centre for Children & Families, University of Sydney
- Dr Lauren Lines, Lecturer in Nursing, Flinders University
- Ms Felicity Kime, President and Peer Worker, Family Inclusion Strategies Hunter (FISH)
- Ms Catherine Liddle, CEO, SNAICC National Voice for Our Children
- Ms Annette Michaux, Director, Parenting Research Centre
- Ms Amber Ward, NDIS Practice Lead, Thrive House QLD
- Mr Paul McDonald, CEO Anglicare Victoria
- Chirs Twomey, Leader, Policy & Research, WACOSS and
- Mr Jamie Crosby, Families Australia Chief Executive Officer as Convenor.

## Informing and influencing national policy

Families Australia actively engaged with national priority reform initiatives including:

- Development of the Commonwealth's Early Years Strategy including:
  - representation on the participation on the Early Years Advisory Panel
  - supporting member participation, public consultation forums, making submission to the draft framework & survey and attending the Strategy launch.
- Renewal/review mechanisms of the Families and Community Service Improvement Program Activity and funding arrangements
- The Stronger ACCOs, Stronger Communities initiative
- DSS Families and Children Activity review processes
- A member consultation forum and written submission to the DSS Issues paper: *A stronger, more diverse and independent community sector*
- staff members and member representatives (supported by Families Australia) also participated in multiple consultation sessions of
  - *The Productivity Commission's Early Childhood Education and Care Inquiry process and*
  - *the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission's Childcare Inquiry 2023.*
- Participation in the Attorney-General's Department's Child Safe Sectors Leadership Group meetings.

Our 2023-24 National Policy Survey provided a key avenue for members and stakeholders to highlight key policy concerns and priorities, including:

- Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Families, Children and Young people, including through the growth of the ACCO sector: Many non-indigenous organisations reported working collaboratively towards strengthening relationships with First Nations peoples, communities, and organisations
- The affordability and availability of housing, especially for low-income people, continued to be a major concern and it was the top issue raised by respondents to this year's survey
- Domestic and family violence was also a key theme.

Families Australia also regularly convenes a Policy Network meeting for members organisations. This meeting includes general discussion on topical policy issues and a chance for member organisations to present on their latest policy and advocacy projects.

Our fortnightly National Families News e-newsletter highlights key sector issues by regularly sharing updates on key topics affecting families and communities. The e-newsletters feature articles on current sector challenges, policy changes, and emerging trends. It also includes event announcements, upcoming initiatives, and relevant research findings; 24 editions of National Families News were released in the 12 months to 30 June 2024.

## National Policy Forums

### *YES! To a Voice for Families, Children and Young People*

On 14 October 2023 Australians were asked to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians in the constitution for the first time and give them a say in the policies and challenges that affect their communities by enshrining a Voice to Parliament. As part of our commitment to the Yes Campaign, on Wednesday 27 September 2023 Families Australia invited the sector to join the conversation through a 'YES to a Voice for Families, Children and Young People' online forum.



#### Keynote speakers:

- Ms Tanya Hosch, Executive General Manager of Inclusion and Social Policy at the Australian Football League; and
- Mr Richard Weston, CEO of Maari Ma Health Aboriginal Corporation.

This forum provided an opportunity to gain a better understanding of:

- what was being proposed by the referendum;
- what a successful 'YES' vote outcome would mean for families, children and young people across the country, (especially for First Nations families, children and young people).
- the practical outcomes we might expect, including the impact and opportunities of enshrining a Voice to Parliament; and
- why over 80% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people support the YES vote.

The outcome of the referendum differed to what many First Nations peoples and allies – including Families Australia - advocated for. Our view is that we now need to reflect and listen even more deeply to First Nations peoples and continue to step up our support and advocacy as required. Families Australia steadfastly continues with our support of [The Uluru Statement from the Heart](#) and encourage all members, stakeholders and colleagues to do likewise.

### **Where We Start Matters: Continuing the Conversation**

In partnership with NAPCAN, an online policy forum was held on Wednesday 15 November 2023. The forum continued discussions highlighted through NAPCANs 2023 National Child Protection Week series titled 'Where we start matters'.

As NAPCAN and sector leaders suggest, while great work supporting children and families is already occurring across the sector, it is vital not only to respond to harm, but to stop harm before it occurs.

This policy forum discussed the role of the broader social determinants of the wellbeing affecting Families, Children and Young People. It further considers the importance of prevention in increasing positive outcomes for children and families.



#### Keynote speaker:

- Professor Sharon Bessell, Policy and Governance; Director, Children's Policy Centre; Director, Poverty and Inequality Research Centre (ANU) (pictured top centre)

#### Followed by a panel discussion featuring:

- Rani Kumar, Deputy CEO NAPCAN (pictured top left)
- Toni Wren, Executive Director Anti-Poverty Week (pictured top right)

60 people registered for the forum, representing a range of service providers, non-government organisations, research and academic institutions and representatives from Australian Government departments.

This policy forum addressed a range of issues concerning the social determinants of wellbeing relevant to families, children and young people. Topics and issues canvassed during the forum included:

- Supporting First Nations children to thrive
- Recognising that child abuse and neglect and child poverty are preventable
- The importance of listening to Children and Young People
- Wellbeing approach and child poverty impact statements and
- A Child Poverty Reduction Act.

### **The Future of Foster Care Policy Forum**

On Thursday 20 June Families Australia hosted its final policy forum for the financial year. The topic was the foster carer shortage across Australia. Our most well attended for yet, over 300 people registered for the event, demonstrating there is much interest from our membership base and Families Australia's role in working to address this issue.



#### Keynote speakers:

- Dr Lisa J. Griffiths, OzChild Chief Executive Officer and National Foster Care Sustainability Group Chairperson (pictured left)
- Mr Simon Kuestenmacher, Co-founder and Director of The Demographics Group (pictured right)

Presentations were followed by a panel discussion led by Families Australia Chief Executive Officer, Jamie Crosby. The conversation focused on the changing demographics of foster care in Australia, and the continued disproportionate number of First Nations children in out-of-home care (OOHC).

Speakers discussed challenges in recruiting and retaining foster carers, particularly among millennials and Gen Z, and proposed solutions such as tailored strategies and authentic storytelling. Speakers also highlighted the need for improved supports for foster carers, including financial and professionalised models, to sustain a foster care household and improve outcomes for children and young people. Speakers further emphasised the importance of addressing the systemic issues and engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to improve the current outdated foster care system.

The resulting report presented opportunities for systemic shifts, including key policy recommendations for the Commonwealth Government; improve access to healthcare and therapeutic supports for all children in OOHC, reduce the financial pressure on foster carers, and ensure equitable workplace entitlements.

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## **Families Australia**

### **GENERAL MEMBERS 2024**

54 Reasons	National Employment Services Australia
Anglicare Australia	National Joblink
Australian Foster Care Association	OzChild
Barnardos Australia	Playgroup Australia
Batchelor Institute	Play Australia
Berry Street	Relationships Australia National
Blue Knot Foundation	Research Centre for Children and Families, The University of Sydney
Child and Family Welfare Association of Australia	Settlement Services International
Children and Media Australia	SNAICC - National Voice for our Children
CREATE Foundation	The Benevolent Society
Daniel Morcombe Foundation	The Y Australia
Grandparents Australia	Tresillian Family Care Centres
Healing Foundation	UnitingCare Australia
Junior Adventure Group	Wanslea
Key Assets Australia	yourtown
National Association for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect	

# FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 30 June 2024.

A copy of the audited Financial Statements for the year ended 30 June 2024 (adopted by Members at the 2024 AGM) can be obtained by contacting the Families Australia office via [admin@familiesaustralia.org.au](mailto:admin@familiesaustralia.org.au).



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