



Intercountry Adoption Family Support Service consultations

Summary of the online submissions to DSS Engage

June 2020



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Part One

Overview

Complementing existing services, the Australian Government funds the Intercountry Adoption Family Support Service (ICAFSS) for intercountry adoptees (adoptees), their families and prospective adoptive parents. The ICAFSS is managed by the Department of Social Services (the department) and is delivered by Relationship Matters: Relationship Counselling, Mediation and Education Services.

The ICAFSS is a free, national service that provides post-adoption support for adoptees and families formed by intercountry adoption, including adoptions by expatriate Australians. The ICAFSS also provides support to individuals and couples before and during the intercountry adoption process. A detailed breakdown of the activities that the ICAFSS is currently designed and funded to provide is at [Additional Information](#).

The government has heard calls from the intercountry adoption sector for greater involvement in service design and development. This consultation on the ICAFSS has responded to these calls, to provide an opportunity for those with lived experience of intercountry adoption to be actively involved in the design of the services they access.

This summary aims to capture the voices and ideas of the intercountry adoption community in the redesign of the ICAFSS to ensure that our service continues to meet the needs of the community and is offered in the most appropriate way possible.

Further details on the department's role in intercountry adoption in Australia is at [Additional Information](#).

Methodology

In February and March 2020, the Department of Social Services (the department) published an online discussion paper titled *Capturing the voices of the intercountry adoption community in the redesign of the Intercountry Adoption Family Support Service*, which can be found at DSS Engage under [Discussion Paper](#). The Discussion Paper questions are also listed under [Additional Information](#).

Young and adult adoptees, intercountry adoptive parents (adoptive parents), prospective adoptive parents, advocacy groups, service providers, allied health professionals and academics were encouraged to provide submissions. The department received 35 written submissions to the online consultation, representing responses from 1 young adoptee, 10 adult adoptees, 11 adoptive parents, 1 prospective adoptive parent, 4 service providers, 3 advocacy and support groups, 2 academics and 3 participants who did not identify their background.

In addition to this online consultation, the department held a series of targeted consultation workshops, small group discussions and phone interviews with the intercountry adoption community across Australia, including those who live in regional and remote areas. An independent summary of the key themes that emerged from these

targeted consultations, facilitated and written by Ian Watson of Gilimbaa, is also available at DSS Engage under [Summary of Consultations](#).

The department would like to thank everyone who provided a submission to the online consultations for their ideas, time and honesty. Your input will contribute significantly to the redesign of the ICAFSS, as well as a broader understanding of the needs of the intercountry adoption community.

The department respects the confidentiality of everyone who provided a submission to the online consultation process. The department has only published submissions where the author has agreed to do so, either by name and organisation or anonymously. Direct quotes are used in this paper to showcase the experiences and ideas of consultation participants as well as give context to the key observations. Quotes have only been taken from submissions where the author provided approval to publish.

Report Structure

This summary provides an overview of the views shared through written submissions to the ICAFSS consultation, which align with views expressed in the targeted consultation workshops, small group discussions and phone interviews. The summary does not detail all feedback received, but highlights themes that emerge from the consultation and where appropriate draws links with available intercountry adoption literature and research.

This report is divided into three parts:

Part One – Overview of the ICAFSS, consultation methodology, report structure, key principles for redesign and key observations.

Part Two – Key themes that inform specific ideas for the ICAFSS redesign and discussion on measures of success and capturing outcomes.

Part Three – Additional information includes - background on intercountry adoption in Australia, the discussion paper questions, stakeholder groupings, consolidated ideas for the ICAFSS redesign and the frequency of issues represented in the submissions.

While this paper endeavours to reflect all key themes and observations gathered from the online submissions, not all ideas suggested are within scope for the ICAFSS redesign.

At the close of each section in [Part Two](#), the ideas raised are provided in a summary table detailing what is in scope for the ICAFSS redesign and what is out of scope.

The department may separately consider ideas that are out of scope for the ICAFSS redesign, but which may align with national policy priorities, or can be communicated to state and territory central authorities (STCAs) for consideration.

Key principles for redesign

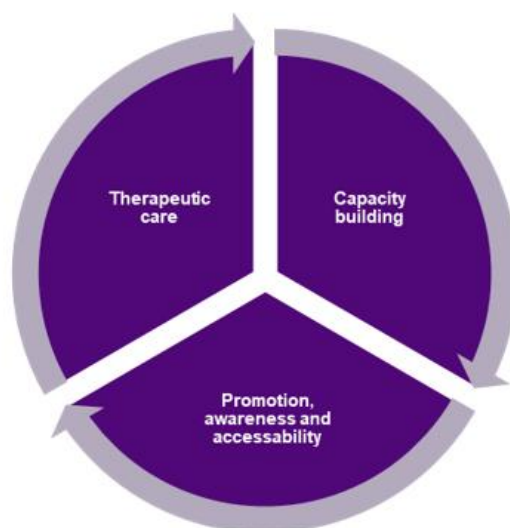
As set out in the discussion paper, the following key principles must underpin the redesign of the ICAFSS:

- The redesign is being considered within an annual operating budget of \$900,000.
- The service must comply with the Australian Government’s authority to spend public funds in the context of the [Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act](#) and the specific schedule of the [Financial Framework \(Supplementary Powers\) Regulations 1997](#), which gives the Commonwealth supplementary powers to fund intercountry adoption activities.
- The service must be accessible to anyone who may face barriers to receiving assistance.
- Review or expansion of the Australian Government’s adoption arrangements with overseas countries is not in scope.

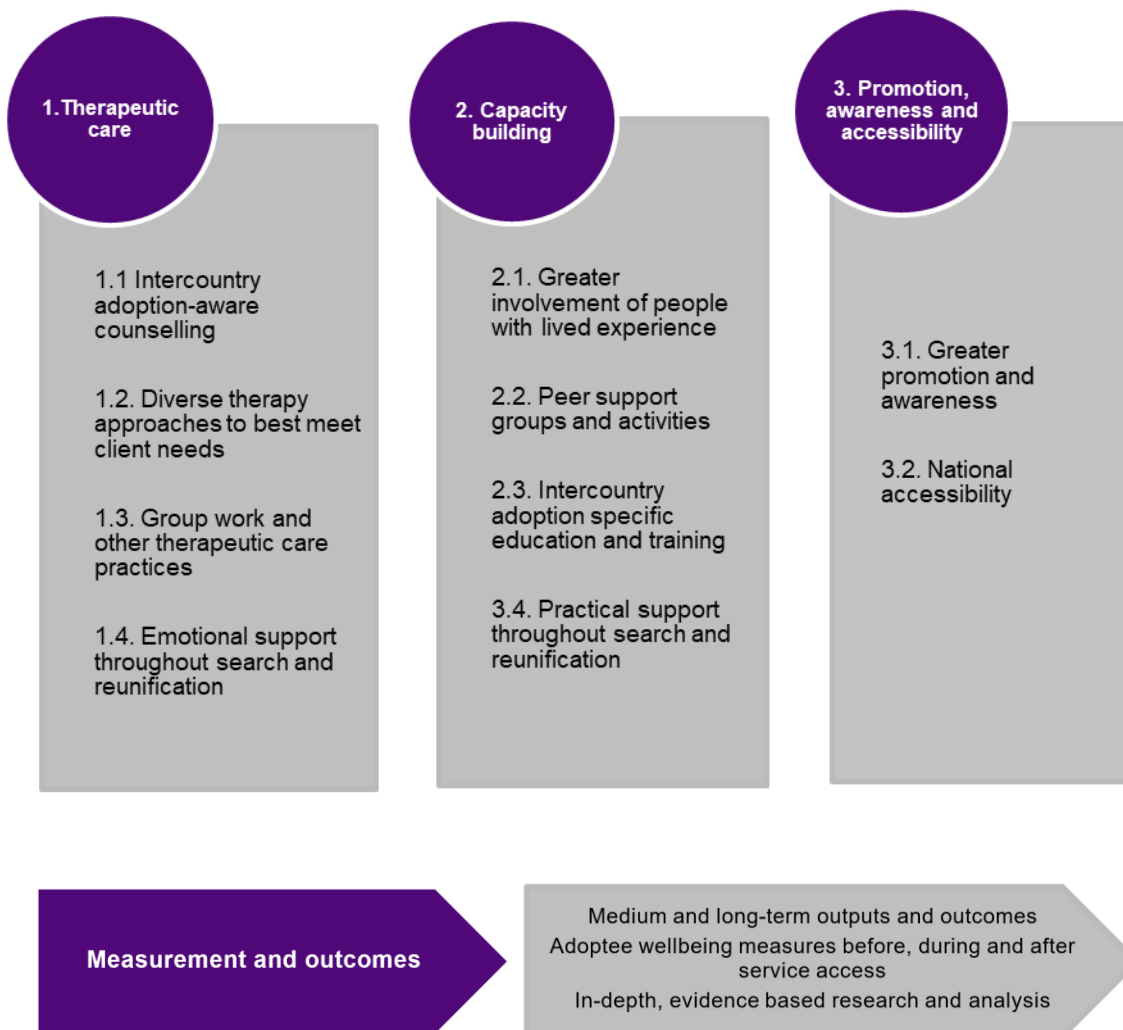
Key Observations

Three key observations can be made about the views and ideas put forward across all consultation activities. These observations reflect the views shared by young and adult adoptees, adoptive parents, prospective adoptive parents, advocacy groups, service providers and academics.

1. **Therapeutic care is a core component of the ICAFSS’ offer** – this includes intercountry adoption-aware counselling, diverse therapeutic approaches to best meet client needs, group work and other therapeutic care practices, and emotional support throughout search and reunification.
2. **Capacity building, involving the participation and input of people with lived experience, is critical to supporting more holistic support across people’s lifetime** – such as access to peer support groups and other community based activities, intercountry adoption-specific education and training, and practical support for search and reunion.
3. **Promotion and awareness of the ICAFSS will result in greater service access and reach** – this includes greater promotion, awareness and national accessibility of the ICAFSS.



Practical ideas and views regarding the redesign of the ICAFSS can achieve settings that are conducive to realising service improvements in these areas emerged across 10 key themes. The key themes are grouped under the key observation headings, and are explored in detail throughout this paper.



Submissions also provided input on ways to better ensure the redesigned ICAFSS meets the needs of the intercountry adoption community, is delivered as intended and produces desired outcomes for adoptees and their families. This is explored in detail in [Section 4: Measurement and outcomes](#).

[Part Two](#) explores these themes, highlighting the views expressed in submissions and practical ideas for consideration in the ICAFSS redesign. Each theme summarises the views raised and, where appropriate, discusses views relevant to regional and remote communities.

Part Two

1. Therapeutic care

A key observation from the online consultations was the expressed need of adoptees and their families to have access to a broad range of therapeutic care. While the submissions acknowledged that counselling support was available, some submissions noted that the type of support offered was narrow, that the type of therapeutic care they required was not available or not available at the time they sought help.

Four key themes relating to therapeutic care emerged from consultation:

1.1 Intercountry adoption-aware counselling – The desire for counselling services that are intercountry adoption-aware, trauma informed and supportive of adoptees exploring their culture and identity.

1.2 Diverse therapeutic approaches to best meet client needs – The desire for more targeted and nuanced support for adoptees and families with different needs and at different life stages, including during teenage years and through transitions to independence and adulthood.

1.3 Group work and other therapeutic care practices – The desire for group work and other forms of therapeutic care to clients.

1.4 Emotional support throughout search and reunion – The desire for emotional support before, during and after searching for origins or reunification.

1.1 Intercountry adoption-aware counselling

A large number of submissions contained an expressed desire for counselling services to continue to be available free of charge. There were strong calls for counsellors and psychologist to be aware of challenges that arise from the experience of intercountry adoption, so they are equipped to work more effectively with adoptees and their families. In particular, many submissions made clear the need for services to be trauma and grief informed in their practice, some noting that adoptees may have experienced trauma prior to their adoption, and others noting that the experience of migration and transition to a new country was stressful or traumatic.

“Greater recognition of the impact of early trauma and its life-long effects and need for long term trauma-informed support with highly skilled professionals.”

Advocacy body

Submissions by service providers consistently acknowledged the trauma that adoptees may experience and noted the importance of service design including a focus on creating opportunities to rebuild a sense of control and empowerment.

“Trauma, including deep and complex childhood trauma, is a key feature of our work. It is essential that all staff involved in the service delivery to this client group are skilled and experienced in providing therapeutic interventions for trauma within trauma-informed care and practice.”

Service Provider

Grief was also an experience shared in a number of the submissions, relating to loss of birth family, country and culture. Many adoptees noted that the ability to process grief and to learn how to build connections with culture, country, and where possible birth family, was important to their identity development.

Some adoptees also spoke of their experiences of racism, including that this experience is often compounded for adoptees who are in the position of navigating two cultures, while assisting both their birth and adoptive family to understand cultural difference and the felt impacts of racism. Adoptees noted the benefit of counselling services incorporating an understanding of the impacts of racism on the individual and their family, and the importance of connection to culture as part of identity development for the adoptee into their practice.

“Racism is an issue in Australia – any report by the Australian Human Rights Commission or academic research in the area will highlight this. Adoptees deal with this reality and it is exacerbated by having no ‘same-race’ supports in our adoptive family.... Any service provision must include some assistance in supporting the adoptee in this regard.”

Adult adoptee

Respondents noted that the strengths of intercountry adoptees and their families in navigating this unique experience needs to be recognised and built on. A strength-based approach to the therapeutic care was recommended to help adoptees feel empowered in their experience, develop resilience and strengthen individual and family relationships.

“Trauma-informed care and practice is a strengths-based framework grounded in an understanding of and responsiveness to the impact of trauma, that emphasises physical, psychological, and emotional safety for both providers and survivors, and that creates opportunities for survivors to rebuild a sense of control and empowerment.”

Service Provider

1.2 Diverse therapy approaches to best meet client needs

Submissions noted that experiences of intercountry adoption, including but not limited to trauma, grief, loss, identity development and racism is felt differently for each adoptee and family. As such, different types of therapies are required to best meet diverse needs, including differing needs at different life stages. Submissions noted that play therapy may be more appropriate for a young child, rather than cognitive based talk therapy, while teenagers may be more likely to respond to group therapy sessions with peers over one-to-one counselling. Respondents stated that availability of diverse therapeutic approaches would allow the support provided to be specific to the life stage and diverse needs of the adoptee and family.

“Therapy services need to incorporate a range of approaches such as creative arts and play therapies to allow adoptees’ [to overcome] difficulties in expressing themselves and their complex emotions and challenges in expressing unconscious material [which is] often difficult to articulate verbally.”

Adult adoptee

Submissions from adoptees noted the multi-faceted challenges that may be faced throughout their lives. Being able to offer nuanced and targeted care from the beginning can help to minimise the risk of developmental trauma or developing mental illness later in life. Further, a nuanced approach to therapeutic care would allow for appropriate and competent support for adoptees with physical or intellectual disabilities. Suggestions also included the importance of having intercountry adoption practitioners who reflect similar backgrounds and experiences to those who access the service, and the option for adoptees and families to access practitioners of their choice to allow continuity of pre-established relationships.

“One of the significant findings of our research, which is supported by the current literature, is that adoption is a lifelong process with issues emerging at different points in time; for example, particularly around life stages such as adolescence, when identify needs become more prominent, and significant life events, such as becoming a parent.”

Academic

Further, submissions from adoptive parents noted that more support was needed for different stages of family life, in particular that there was a lot of support for parents and families pre-adoption and during the adoption process but that once the adoption process was finalised much of the support dwindled. This suggests more work is needed beyond the ICAFSS redesign to ensure adoptees and their families are aware they can access the ICAFSS at any stage of their adoption journey. This is particularly important after the more intensive support period offered by STCAs during the pre-adoption and the post-placement stage ends, which is usually around twelve months after the adoption is finalised.

Suggestions also related to the need for holistic family oriented support to minimise the risk of adoption or family breakdowns and address challenges related to family formation, family disruption or parenting challenging behaviours. Submissions also spoke to the changing needs of adoptees as they build relationships or become parents. Related to holistic family support were requests for support to be available for adoptee’s siblings and other family members, allowing a more cohesive family unit.

“We have seen an increase in the number of intercountry adopted teenagers at risk whose families are struggling to find adequate support.”

Advocacy body

Finally, a nuanced and needs-based approach to the type of therapeutic care offered was also of clear importance to those in regional and remote areas of Australia. Submissions noted that for adoptees in rural and remote areas, issues are intensified due to the lack of available or appropriate support. Also, identity development for adoptees living in regional or remote communities can be difficult because there may be limited or no families with similar experiences of intercountry adoption. In addition, visible cultural diversity may not be present in the adoptee’s community and therefore role models of similar cultural

background or experience may be limited or non-existent. This is addressed further at [Section 3.2](#).

“The program needs to be complemented by visiting regional areas, taking with them one or two impacted persons as peers to lead the sessions and have a face to face component so that isolated adoptees, have the chance to connect in. The power of connecting is not to be under estimated. Most adoptees struggle with feelings of isolation whether they are in remote areas or not; but enhanced by being geographically isolated.”

Advocacy body

1.3 Group work and other therapeutic care practices

Consistent throughout submissions was the desire for group activities and group counselling, to support adoptees and adoptive parents to form bonds with peers. A number of submissions noted that having regular meetups with other adoptees, or other adoptive parents and families, helped to build connections with others with shared experiences. Submissions suggested that group activities are particularly valuable for adoptees who do not wish to engage in formal counselling as it provides an alternative avenue to validate their feelings and experiences and help them see that they are not alone.

“An alternate service delivery model would be for a meet and greet, social club for adult adoptees, even if it is only monthly. At least adoptees, who aren’t ready for therapy would have the opportunity to know they are not alone and can be understood by other adoptees, who have likely experienced the same challenges.”

Adult adoptee

One submission from a young adoptee stated:

“I think some more groups should be organised for kids to have fun together... I would like to meet more older kids and adults who are adopted.”

Young adoptee

Submissions from adoptees made clear that many adult adoptees were addressing this gap by taking on mentor roles for younger adoptees. One submission noted adult adoptees are uniquely skilled for this role, and the availability of a program that helped to educate adult adoptees on how best to mentor younger adoptees would be beneficial for both adoptees and mentors.

“[Our organisation] is aware of adult intercountry adoptees who already mentor younger adoptees through art, dance and photography classes, and suggest the expansion of the Peer Support Model is supported through the redesign of ICAFSS.”

Service provider

Improvements in local adoption practices and changing social attitudes have made it easier for children to remain within their country of origin. This means that many of the children adopted through Australia's intercountry adoption program are usually older, and may have special needs, including significant medical issues and lifelong conditions. One submission noted the importance for intercountry adoptee families to connect with other families going through similar experiences to help build networks and supports, including through local support groups for parents of children with special needs. Diverse uses of group therapy were suggested, including open and closed groups:

“In terms of the group therapy options, this could be offered on a closed and open therapy session option – closed for adoptees with more significant issues who may be referred by their clinician, and open for adoptees seeking more peer support and mentorship among adoptees and potentially their families.”

Adult adoptee

Respondents also noted that group activities including therapeutic group work also presents a benefit for adoptees and their families in rural and remote areas of Australia, who do not have the same level of access to services that are usually available in urban areas. Group work that allows for peer and mentor relationship building within communities can help to reduce feelings of being alone or different and increase prevention or early intervention opportunities.

“Adoptees and their families often do not seek support until a situation is at crisis point. Being part of a group that shares information and anticipates future needs (e.g. adolescent exploration of identity in an adoption context) provides proactive rather than reactive post adoption support.”

Adoptive parent

1.4 Emotional support throughout search and reunion

Another significant theme emerging from submissions was the need for support throughout the process of searching for origins and reunification with birth family. This section addresses discussion on *emotional support* throughout this process. [Section 2.4](#) will address discussion on *practical support*. We acknowledge that there are differing preferred terms, including 'reunification' or 'connection' with birth family. For the purposes of this paper, we use the term reunification as it appeared most frequently in submissions.

All submissions that addressed the issue of support for adoptees considering or undertaking search and reunification highlighted the need for this support to be from a qualified caseworker (or similar) to support adoptees. Many submissions noted the need for support in understanding the realities and difficulties of the searching process and recognising that finding or reunifying with birth family may not be successful and may result in a new set of challenges. This part of an adoptees' journey can increase the need for emotional support. Some submissions noted the significant benefit gained in having caseworkers with a lived experience of intercountry adoption, or providing access to mentors who had experienced reunification, to help build trust and knowledge in guiding adoptees through this difficult experience.

“While reunion is often positive, unfortunately in some cases it is possible that significant disappointment and/or trauma can emerge during the reunion process and ideally this process needs to be professionally managed.”

Advocacy body

Submissions also spoke to the need for support before, during and after the process of search or reunification. The decision to search for one’s origins and understanding where to begin can be difficult. Some submissions noted that the searching process can be traumatic, particularly regarding the information, misinformation or lack of information found and for some the experience can be isolating. A few submissions also noted the importance of informed therapeutic care for those who may have experienced illegal or illicit adoption, with this support being provided not only through the search and reunification process but at all life stages as needed.

One submission noted that the ‘measure of success’ when searching for origins should be based on the adoptees’ wellbeing before, during and after the process rather than successful reunification with birth family.

Summary table

Ideas in scope for the ICAFSS redesign

- Continued free counselling.
- Intercountry adoption-aware counselling.
- Nuanced and needs-based approach to the type or therapeutic care provided.
- Group work, peer work and therapeutic mentoring.
- Trauma, grief, loss and identity-informed therapeutic care.
- Culturally responsive supports that understand the impacts of racism.
- Use of strengths-based care, with principles of empowerment.
- Encouraging employment of counsellors or caseworkers with lived experience of intercountry adoption.
- Acknowledgement that intercountry adoption is a life-long experience.
- Competent support at different life stages.
- Competent support for people with physical or intellectual disabilities.
- Holistic family support, including addressing challenges related to family formation, family disruption, parenting challenging behaviours and support for siblings.
- Mentor education programs for adult adoptees to learn how to best support young adoptees.
- Emotional support before, during and after search and reunion.
- Therapeutic support in helping to build connection with culture and country of origin.

Ideas out of scope for ICAFSS redesign

For consideration by relevant central authority

- Strengthening the transition of support from STCA led pre-adoption and post-placement support to the longer-term post-adoption and adult adoptee support services offered through ICAFSS.

2 Capacity building, involving the participation and input of people with lived experience

Another key observation from the submissions was the need to build the capacity of those in the intercountry adoption community to enable more holistic support across people's lifetime and beyond the therapeutic care offered by ICAFSS. This also related to engaging the broader community, education and allied health sectors. Often accompanying this was the suggestion and offer by those with lived experience to actively support, design and deliver activities that will build capacity within their, and the broader, community.

Four key themes relating to capacity building emerged from the consultation:

2.1 Greater involvement of people with lived experience – The importance of involvement of people with lived experience in the design and guidance of the ICAFSS and other intercountry adoption supports.

2.2 Peer support groups and activities – The importance of diverse means of engagement for the intercountry adoption community, including support groups, mentoring and group activities, with the emphasis on supporting adult adoptees to run these activities.

2.3 Intercountry adoption specific education and training – To help adoptive parents, schools and allied health professionals best support adoptees throughout the intercountry adoption journey.

2.4 Practical support for search and reunion – Including the benefits of professional guidance and access to resources for adoptees before, during and after the process of searching for origins or reunification with birth family.

2.1 Greater involvement of people with lived experience

Submissions consistently raised the potential for increased contribution of adoptees in providing support and mentorship to younger adoptees and their families. People with lived experience have a wealth of knowledge that is invaluable to those who are going through the intercountry adoption journey. Submissions noted that where appropriate, adoptees' time and contribution could be remunerated. The importance of creating opportunities for adoptees to develop and deliver resources, education and training was clear throughout many submissions.

"We live it and breathe it - we know what our community needs."

Adult adoptee

Submissions noted a number of ways through which adoptees can contribute, including:

- **Supporting the development of resources, training and education materials** for adoptive and prospective adoptive parents, community and health professionals (including psychologists, social workers and doctors), and educators (including teachers, teachers aids and principals).

“[There should be] involvement of adoptees in STCA prospective adoptive parent information sessions and in training any service provider in the intercountry adoption space to understand the experience from an adoptee perspective. This should be delivered on an ongoing basis to maintain knowledge.”

Adult adoptee

- **Providing guidance and advice** through advisory groups, committees or panels. Submissions noted that where appropriate remuneration could be offered to those who provide their time, knowledge and expertise to these activities.
- **Offering peer support and mentoring** across an adoptee’s life, particularly with those who are going through the process of searching for origins or reunification. It was suggested that this support could be complemented by seminars, retreats, presentations or discussion groups.
- **Connecting through shared experience** with younger adoptees who are navigating independence and identity development, to help validate feelings and experiences that are unique to intercountry adoption.

“I want to meet older adoptees as they know what I am going through.”

Young adoptee

- **Employment** in intercountry adoption support services, noting that the recruitment of staff with appropriate skill sets who are also adoptees or adoptive parents may be beneficial in developing trust and positive relationships with clients built on a shared experience.

Submissions suggested that an increase in contribution and engagement from adoptees, as detailed above, has the potential for a ripple effect, with adoptees and adoptive parents more likely to engage in support services earlier with community members championing the services. Submissions suggested this also had the potential to cultivate prevention and early intervention support, reducing the need of some to access crisis services. Submissions also noted that active engagement of the intercountry adoptive community in service provision may provide prospective adoptive parents with a clear understanding of the life long journey of intercountry adoption.

“Driven by the insights of people with a lived experience - adult adoptees teaching new prospective adoptive parents.”

Adult adoptee

2.2 Peer support groups and activities

While [Section 1](#) discussed the benefits of therapeutic group work, submissions also noted the advantages of informal peer support groups and activities. There are a number of active peer support groups in the intercountry adoptee community offering support to families and individuals as they navigate everyday life while living the unique experience of intercountry adoption.

Submissions noted that there would be benefit in making resources and training available to facilitators of these groups to help in the work they do. These resources would also support new groups to develop and offer quality support over time. The existence of

regular information and activities or events for intercountry adoptees was seen as invaluable.

A number of submissions also noted the need for access to funding support for those who live in regional and remote communities to attend these types of group activities. As noted in [Section 1.2](#), it can be even more difficult for adoptees and adoptive families living in regional and remote communities to connect with people who share an experience of intercountry adoption. Group meetups can help to facilitate relationships and mentorship for those living in areas with less readily available support systems.

2.3 Intercountry adoption specific education and training

Much of the discussion in this paper focuses on how the intercountry adoptee community can be best supported. Many of the submissions acknowledged this cannot be achieved in full unless the broader community, including those who provide health and education service, are also adequately informed about the intercountry adoption experience and the life-long impacts it can have for adoptees and their families.

Some submissions noted that often the adoptee or the adoptive parents felt that they were left to educate health, education or other professionals they regularly interacted with about the intercountry adoption experience. Many submissions expressed that this was a common experience and there would be great benefit if health and education professionals were supported to become intercountry adoption-aware. A few submissions noted that this could be achieved through providing training or making other resources available to health and education professionals, one submission noting that the ICAFSS could help parents navigate medical and other services needed.

Submissions from adoptees and adoptive parents noted that they felt there was limited preparation for the lifelong journey of intercountry adoption. The current training provided to prospective adoptive parents is run by the STCAs and is focused on the adoption process and the immediate years after the adoption has taken place. Many submissions indicated that the intercountry adoption community would like training to include resources and information about the potential challenges families may encounter in later stages of the adoption journey and a greater understanding of the therapeutic support that parents can be in their child's life. A number of submissions noted that it would be beneficial for this training to include adoptees, who are able to help develop training material and share their own experiences. As these training sessions for prospective adoptive parents are run by STCAs, they are out of scope of the redesign of the ICAFSS. However, suggestions for training improvement will be considered by DSS and the STCAs.

Regular family challenges can become even more complex with the experience of trauma, grief, or loss related to intercountry adoption. In these instances parents can feel lost on how to best support their child or explain to others how to do so. Some submissions suggested that adoptive parents be provided with resources to give to health or education professionals they interact with to help build a shared understanding and language around the nuances of intercountry adoption and how they as professionals might better support the adoptee and the family. Other submissions noted that training for adoptive parents could focus on how to start conversations with professionals to help them understand what needs to be considered when developing strategies to support or work with adoptees.

“More availability of specific intercountry adoption-aware training needs to be made available for medical, allied health service and education providers, led or facilitated by professionals who identify as adoptees and can provide that first-hand lived experience and perspective where required.”

Adoptive parent

Some submissions from adoptive parents suggested the development of an information pack for educators that could include tips on how schools and teachers can best support students who have experienced intercountry adoption and how to open dialogue between teachers, parents and students.

“Some assembling of resources/tip sheets would be excellent.”

Adoptive parent

Terminology was another area of concern raised through the submissions, noting that where appropriate terminology relating to intercountry adoption was not understood or misused it could create barriers to adoptees seeking further help. One suggestion included producing a dictionary or reference guide for intercountry adoption-appropriate terminology.

“Training in new language terms for educators, health professionals and counsellors need to be able to refer to this dictionary as it may be, there should be no reference to 'real' parents, which is an insult to both adoptive and biological parents and hurts adoptees.”

Adult adoptee

Awareness raising of the ICAFSS services in the health and education sector was raised through submissions as a way to ensure that adoptees and adoptive parents who many not be aware of the service are provided an avenue to intercountry adoption-specific support. Awareness of health and education professionals would also enable them to make an informed decision about where to refer clients, or who to approach to gain a stronger understanding of intercountry adoption-related challenges.

“Educate allied health professionals about the existence of ICAFSS, market it so GPs, counsellors, psychologists, social workers automatically think of ICAFSS when coming in contact with an adoptee and their family.”

Adult adoptee

Finally, submissions also noted that families experiencing difficulties did not know where to go to find support. One submission suggested the need for a central hub of information and contacts for families to go to when they need support. This included suggestions for holding literature on issues facing families in later stages of the adoption journey, providing a national noticeboard with relevant information for the intercountry adoption community, opportunities to meet and connect with others with shared experiences, and information on support services that were intercountry adoption-aware.

“Create a national database that provides access to an online adoptee portal inclusive of support groups, phone counselling and video counselling services.”

Adult adoptee

2.4 Practical support for search and reunion

Searching for origins and reunification with birth family is an emotional topic, and one that adoptees and their families are very passionate about. [Section 1.4](#) explored the need for *emotional support* in undertaking search and reunion. This section looks at the *practical supports* that can assist adoptees and their families while undertaking search or reunion.

Search for origins

Intercountry adoptees have had varying experiences when searching for origins. Many adoptees may need to undertake search activities, while for others their adoptive parents had initiated and maintained contact with their birth family, and for some their birth family may have reached out to them. Search and reunion processes are not a point-in-time event but something that is central to an adoptee's identity development and can be a lifelong journey.

“Search and reunion create a whole new path to navigate over a lifetime, not just short-term.”

Adult adoptee

For those who do decide to search for origins, a common difficulty raised in submissions was knowing where or how to begin. Other challenges noted in the submissions included funds to cover costs associated with searching, communicating with their country of origin due to language and culture barriers and access to skills and knowledge needed to search if or when this path was chosen.

“As an adoptive parent I would like to have all the tools to enable me to best support my child if they wish to seek out their origins.”

Adoptive parent

One submission noted that where possible, and in the best interests of the child, discussions about searching for origins or attempts to search for family be conducted as early as possible or as early as the child wishes. This was also seen as potential early steps that families and adoptees can take when planning search for origins (both emotionally and practically), particularly around practical support and advice for parents that chose to engage with their children on the possibility of a future search. The support of professionals was viewed as critical to this type of practical and emotional preparation.

Reunification

Some searches for origins end with reunification of the adoptee and their birth family in their country of origin. This reunification can be a powerful bonding experience for the adoptee and birth family and also allows the adoptee to further connect with the culture, sights and sensory experiences of their country of origin. It is important for intercountry adoptees and their families to be prepared for a reunion, including in maintaining a relationship after the physical reunion. Submissions noted that there were many emotional and practical ways that governments can support adoptees and their families during this process. Emotional supports are discussed in [Section 1.4](#).

One submission suggested the development or provision of cultural booklets to help adoptees and their families better navigate travelling to their country of origin.

Another submission noted the need for discussion on ways to support adoptees' birth families. Reunification for birth family has the possibility of surfacing feelings of loss and grief. While this is out of scope for the ICAFSS, it is recognised that the success of reunification relies on all parties being supported during the process with access to relevant information. There may be scope for the department consider ways to direct adoptees and families to relevant information, drawing on the wealth of knowledge and expertise of the existing intercountry adoption community.

“There also needs to be some consideration for how to support found birth parents in overseas countries. For those who work in local post adoption support services, we know that for those found parents, the trauma of the loss and grief is triggered, and support is required prior to any reunion/contact with their child.”

Advocacy body

Suggestions provided through submissions on practical supports to search for origins or undertake reunification included forms of peer and professional support, provision of resources and guidance material and language and cultural support. Not all of these practical supports will be in scope for the ICAFSS redesign, and this distinction is provided in the [summary table](#) below. However, where items are not in scope for the ICAFSS, they may be taken for policy consideration by the relevant central authority.

Peer and professional support:

- It is imperative that counselling be available before, during and after search or reunification.
- To be available throughout searching for, accessing and reading personal or family records.
- To include guidance on how to access reunion mediation, where appropriate.
- To enable peer mentoring through seminars, retreats, presentations and discussion groups.

“It would be good to have seminars, events retreats that cater to our specific needs run by professionals. A house/cottage where we can get away to be supported and focus on healing.”

Adult adoptee

- For adoptees and families undertaking DNA searching, including access to professional genealogical advice.

Resources and guidance material:

- To be developed by and for intercountry adoptees and their families. Suggestions included the development of intercountry adoptee children's books, a Rights of Adoptee's booklet, with tips on how to respond to racist comments and stories of lived experiences of intercountry adoption.

“Educational videos would be awesome for adoptees to participate in or a way to submit written articles.”

Adult adoptee

- To be available in a central and regularly updated online space and include information, factsheets and guidance on search and reunion. This could include video and other interactive resources.
- To include a volunteer register, which links adoptees and families who have been through search or reunion processes and are willing to mentor, with those who may be beginning their journey.
- To have accessible resources, including those in braille or audio.

Language and culture supports:

- To be available for adoptees to build their capacity to communicate with birth family, including the realities of travelling to the country of origin.

“Obtaining language skills is also invaluable especially if visit to their country of origin or a reunion with their birth family occurs. Language skill will also connect the adoptee to the country specific community in Australia.”

Adult adoptee

- To have translation and interpreting services subsidised, including reducing the financial burden of having certified translations of official documents.

“The Government should provide a subsidised translation service or funding to allow us to communicate with biological families.”

Adult adoptee

- To provide country specific information or guidebooks for adoptees and their families.
- To offer assistance to adoptees and their families who are communicating with overseas adoption agencies, orphanages and possibly private searchers in relation to finding birth family.
- To encourage adoptive parents to support the whole family to learn the language of origin, and develop meaningful relationships with people who share the adoptee’s cultural background.

A number of ideas relating to capacity building and practical support were raised in submissions which are not in scope for the ICAFSS redesign but which merit further policy consideration. These are listed in the [summary table](#) below.

Summary table

Ideas in scope for the ICAFSS redesign

- Include adoptees in the design and guidance of support services, including through consultation, advisory groups or employment.
- Provide training and resources to adoptees and adoptive families who provide mentorship, peer and other support.
- Access to funding support for those who live in regional and remote communities to attend these types of groups or activities.
- Practical support and preparation in planning for search or reunion.
- Develop factsheets or guidance on searching for origins.
- Raise awareness of the ICAFSS among the education, community and health professionals.
- Provide training for adoptive parents on engaging with professionals to help them understand the needs of adoptees and adoptive families.

Ideas out of scope for ICAFSS redesign

For consideration by relevant central authority

- Provide resources, such as an information pack or reference books, for adoptive and prospective adoptive parents, and health, education and community sector professionals.
- Develop country specific information and guidebooks.
- Funding for translation or interpreting services.
- Guidance or support when dealing with authorities in the country of origin.
- Guidance on immigration matters.
- Diplomatic support in overseas countries relating to trafficking experiences.
- Database of reputable overseas service providers offering search and reunion support.
- Reunion mediation.
- A central information and resource hub for intercountry adoption.
- A volunteer register for adoptees and families.
- Development of an intercountry adoption terminology phrasebook.
- Support for birth families.

3 Promotion, awareness and access of services

The need for greater promotion, awareness and access of intercountry adoption services was also a clear theme throughout the submissions. Suggestions explored how best to promote the ICAFSS and other available services to the intercountry adoption community, including accessibility for regional and remote community members.

Two key themes relating to promotion, awareness and access of intercountry adoption services emerged:

3.1 Greater promotion and awareness – The need to raise awareness in the intercountry adoption, health, education and community sector of the ICAFSS and other intercountry adoption supports.

3.2 National accessibility – The need to develop strategies to better support and provide access to intercountry adoptee community members in regional and remote areas, including understanding the unique challenges they face.

3.1 Greater promotion and awareness

Promotion and outreach of the ICAFSS was a common theme throughout the online submissions. A number of the submissions noted either not being aware of the service or suggested other means of promotion for the service. Some submissions suggested that the ICAFSS is underutilised due to lack of awareness and promotion of the service, with resulting low levels of engagement in the service.

“I haven’t heard anyone in the adoptive community that I am a part of speak about the ICAFSS or know what they do and how they are available to help support my adopted child and family.”

Adoptive parent

Submissions offered a number of suggestions on how to best engage with the intercountry adoption community. These suggestions included:

- **Appointing an advisory group** of those with lived experience of intercountry adoption to guide the ICAFSS and other intercountry adoption related support services.
- **Direct and active engagement** with the intercountry adoption community, including with young and adult adoptee, adoptive parent and prospective adoptive parent groups, advocacy bodies and peer support groups.
- **Promotion of available supports, including through online platforms.** One submission suggested engagement of social media to promote face-to-face events, meetups, conferences and workshops. Other submissions suggested advertising through banner advertisements and promotion of social media posts.

“Advertisement and awareness created so people know where and how to access these services.”

Adult adoptee

- **Maintaining communication** with the intercountry adoption community, service providers and the STCAs through submission emails and newsletters. It is also important that adoptees, young and adult, are aware of, and able to access service independent of their parents.

“Have ICAFSS information regularly sent to adoptive families for them to utilise if they wish in a number of formats (emailed, written, via social media, etc).”

Adult adoptee

As raised in [Section 2.3](#), promotion of the ICAFSS and other intercountry adoption related services would benefit the health, education and community sector. Submissions in particular listed schools, general practitioners, mental health services, Lifeline and suicide hotlines, which act as first ports of call for some and could provide referrals.

3.2 National accessibility

Many submissions noted the importance of ensuring access to intercountry adoption counselling services when needed, regardless of location. Some submissions expressed feeling that access to the ICAFSS and other services, including peer groups, was inequitable for those in the intercountry adoption community living in regional and remote areas. One submission made clear the need for both digital and in-person counselling services to overcome the barriers to regional and remote access and feelings of isolation.

The current ICAFSS provider noted that building awareness and adoption-competency amongst educators, general practitioners, counsellors and other professionals living in regional and remote areas was a goal for building national accessibility and that they also provide services through in-person and digital means.

“Currently the services can be accessed via telephone, email and video link which enables access for people living remotely.”

Service provider

Submissions also demonstrated that there was confusion around the provision of the ICAFSS as a national service, with a few submissions noting they thought that face-to-face services were only available in Melbourne or to those who were willing to travel.

“I was also of the belief until last week that the services were largely based in Victoria until I was told otherwise.”

Adult adoptee

Importantly, national accessibility is not only limited to geographic location. One submission suggested a greater need to engage with young adoptees, particularly during times of transition such as just after the adoption has occurred or during the teenage years. This is detailed further at [Section 1.2](#).

A number of suggestions were provided to support access to those in the intercountry adoptee community, including:

- **Expanding access to face-to-face counselling**, acknowledging the importance of in-person counselling. Suggestions included providing home visits where possible, expanding the number of service centres across Australia, increasing the number of intercountry adoption-aware practitioners in regional and ‘hub’ areas, and roadshows or regular travelling practitioners to these areas.

“I have worked with regional and rural families through both online and face-to-face forums and believe that a variety of methods need to be utilised to engage with children and families from all types of backgrounds with differing levels of need. Ensuring face-to-face opportunities are available is essential in ensuring potentially vulnerable adoptees and families do not slip through the cracks and fell [sic] like they are overlooked in terms of their metropolitan counterparts.”

Adult adoptee

- **Effective use of digital communication**, such as Skype, Zoom, teleconference and phone calls. However, submissions noted that digital communication is to be used to complement, rather than replace, face-to-face services and that these services should allow for anonymity, if desired.
- **Advertise the available service options explicitly**, including geographic locations, practitioners available and online options, so that those researching the service can see what may be available to them. Advertising should also include consideration of the imagery and language used.
- **Development of a national network** of agencies or single providers to assist in the delivery of the ICAFSS to regional and remote Australia or development of partnerships with existing services in regional and remote areas.

“National accessibility is best achieved through a national network of agencies or single provider with established presence in all jurisdictions. This operational model has the best capability to deploy a high quality nationally consistent and locally available service able to leverage and build capacity of the whole service system there by achieving quality client outcomes for intercountry adoptees and their families.”

Service provider

- **Regular or scheduled visits** by intercountry adoption-aware counsellors to regional hubs, to add to the online interaction with face-to-face or community meetings. The frequency of visit suggestions varied between submissions but was considered an important step to developing a trusting relationship and building a service that delivered effective national counselling services.

“Having someone visiting every 3 to 6 months would be beneficial and, I believe, foster better relationships.”

Adult adoptee

- **Subsidising transport funds** for those in regional and remote areas to attend community events or counselling services.

- **Building adoption-competence** amongst health, education and community practitioners in regional and remote areas. This is detailed further at [Section 2.3](#).

“Locally available supports ensures that staff are familiar with other services, and in particular when responding to high and complex needs.”

Service provider

- **Changing the name of the ICAFSS** from Intercountry Adoption Family Support Service to Intercountry Adoptee and Family Support Service to make it clear that the service is not available only to adoptive families, but to both adoptees and their family.
- **Ensuring services are accessible to those with a disability** for both face-to-face and online support.
- **Providing self-directed educational materials**, such as webinars, podcasts, information booklets or interactive website.

“Webinars are a good tool to use for therapeutic education groups, as well as training for other health care professionals.”

Adoptive parent

One submission raised concern regarding the use of digital communication and the digital divide between metropolitan and regional or remote Australia, as well as between younger and older Australians.

“Accessibility is not solved by online presence alone. Older adoptees may have limited scope to access services that are only offered via social media, web conferencing (‘skype’) and similar ... Priority should be given to physical service reach across urban and regional Australia.”

Advocacy body

Summary table

Ideas in scope for the ICAFSS redesign within funding limitations

- Appointing an advisory group to guide the ICAFSS.
- Direct and active engagement with the intercountry adoption community.
- Use of social media platforms to promote the service.
- Regular communication through submission emails and newsletters.
- Expanding access to face-to-face counselling.
- Effective use of digital communication.
- Development of a national network of agencies or single providers to assist in service delivery.
- Regular or scheduled visits by intercountry adoption-aware counsellors to regional hubs.
- Subsidising transport funds for those in regional and remote areas to attend community events or counselling services.
- Changing the name of the ICAFSS.
- Providing self-directed educational materials.

4 Measurement and outcomes

To ensure that the redesigned ICAFSS meets the needs of the intercountry adoption community, and is delivered as intended, the consultation discussion paper included a section dedicated to suggested measurement and outcomes.

One submission provided an insightful suggestion to focus on life transition points in measuring the outcomes of the ICAFSS, stating:

“Outcomes can be achieved at key life transition points such as occur when dealing with change associated with adolescence and progression to secondary schooling as well as young people transitioning from school. In our experience, supporting people across the life course is important as adoption identity often arise throughout adulthood at such times as marriage [and] parenthood.”

Service provider

Many submissions offered specific measures or success indicators for the ICAFSS.

Short-term measures included:

- adoptee and family wellbeing before, during and after an interaction with the service
- number of adoptees and families accessing the service and/or training sessions
- client satisfaction rates, including whether they would recommend the service
- increased awareness of the ICAFSS and other services available to the intercountry adoption community.

Medium term measures included:

- understanding and managing the impacts of trauma (for parent)
- development of cohesive families
- behavioural challenges, including social (or anti-social) behaviour
- a shift in feelings of being disconnected, unsupported or unheard
- continue periodic evaluation, surveys and quality improvement of the service
- changes to emotional self-regulation and rejection sensitivity
- development of attachment.

“... outcomes are securely attached kids, more harmonious families, and more capacity for relationship building.”

Service provider

Long-term measures included:

- understanding and managing the impacts of trauma (for adult adoptees)
- developing resilience to overcome challenges (particularly at key life transition points)
- managing feelings of grief, loss, guilt and shame (for adult adoptees)

- percentage reduction in severity of physical or mental health concerns
- building cultural connection and identity with country of origin (for adoptees and their families).

“Development and enhancement of resilience to better overcome the challenges we face growing up as intercountry adoptees.”

Adult adoptee

Longer-term suggestions relating to research and national discourse were also provided. These are not in scope for the redesign of the ICAFSS, however they will be taken on board for future policy consideration.

- creation of established and recognised national intercountry adoption-aware dialogue, including in the intercountry adoption community, the education, health and community sector and in the wider Australia community
- longitudinal studies on outcomes for adoptees and their family
- inclusion of intercountry adoptee population in health statistics
- development of in-depth and evidence based research and analysis.

Related to the development of research and analysis in intercountry adoption, one submission suggested the use of an annual qualitative survey, conducted by an external research provider with expertise in intercountry adoption or mental health and wellbeing.

“Annual qualitative surveying regarding adoptive community engagement and incorporating of metrics similar to Net Promotor Score and Customer Satisfaction Score.”

Adult adoptee

Part Three

Additional information

This section presents summary lists, graphs and tables covering the discussion paper questions, stakeholder grouping, consolidated ideas for the ICAFSS redesign and the frequency of themes presented through submissions.

In addition, it is of note that a number of the suggestions provided through the ICAFSS submissions are also reflected in the findings of the recent research paper by Fronek and Briggs (2018)¹ titled *A Qualitative Exploration of the Adult Intercountry Adoptee Experience in Australia*.

Ideas emerging from Fronek and Briggs' research, which align with the views expressed by participants in the ICAFSS online consultation, include the desire for:

- Intercountry adoption-aware counsellors.
- Trauma, grief and loss-informed counselling.
- Culturally responsive counselling that understands the impacts of racism.
- Availability of intercountry adoption practitioners who reflect similar backgrounds and experiences to those who access the service.
- Peer support or mentorship by and for intercountry adoptees.
- Funds to support adoptee-led peer groups and mentorship.
- Intercountry adoption specific education and training for prospective adoptive parents, educators and counselling practitioners.
- Professional support throughout search and reunion.
- DNA testing to support searching for origins.
- Practical assistance in countries of origin to access personal documentation and complete search and reunion.
- Equity of national accessibility to intercountry adoption services and supports.

¹ Fronek, P. & Briggs, L. (2018). A qualitative exploration of the adult intercountry adoptee experience in Australia. *Adoption Quarterly*, 21(3), 161-181. DOI: 10.1080/10926755.2018.1488330

Intercountry Adoption in Australia

In Australia, the [Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-Operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption](#) (the Hague Convention) governs intercountry adoption. It aims to protect children and their families against the risks of illegal, irregular, premature or ill-prepared adoptions abroad.

The Hague Convention reinforces the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (Article 21) and seeks to ensure that intercountry adoptions are only conducted when in the best interests of the child and with respect of their fundamental rights.

Australia only facilitates intercountry adoptions if the principles and standards of the Hague Convention are met in practice, regardless of whether the country has signed the Convention. Currently, Australians can apply to their state or territory central authority to adopt from 13 countries.

The Hague Convention came into force in Australia in December 1998 and is implemented by the [Family Law Act 1975](#) and its regulations. Each state and territory in Australia also has laws relating to intercountry adoption, which are similar, but not identical.

Each country that signs the Hague Convention is required to have a central authority to implement its standards. The Australian Government Department of Social Services (the department) performs the duties of the Australian Central Authority under the Hague Convention. There is also a central authority for each state and territory. Responsibility for intercountry adoption is shared across these central authorities.

As the Australian Central Authority, the department is responsible for:

- enabling the performance of Australia's responsibilities under the Hague Convention
- building strong relationships with overseas countries
- providing national policy leadership on intercountry adoption practices.

The department funds the ICAFSS, which is delivered by Relationship Matters: Relationship Counselling, Mediation and Education Services. It is a free, national service that provides post-adoption support for adoptees and families formed by intercountry adoption, including adoptions by expatriate Australians. The ICAFSS also provides support to individuals and couples before and during the intercountry adoption process.

The ICAFSS is currently designed and funded to provide:

- broad-based relationship and education counselling
- intensive, long-term and early intervention support
- information and referrals to other support services as required
- responsive support tailored to meet the needs of the client
- parenting and education training
- distance and outreach services and counselling (including face-to-face, email, online chat, telephone and video-link, depending on the client's needs)

- training and education for families to prepare them to:
 - support children with special needs
 - respond to issues commonly associated with intercountry adoption (including family functioning, cultural identity, mental health, trauma, grief and social issues).

The department also delivers the [Intercountry Adoption Australia](#) information and referral service. State and territory central authorities are responsible for:

- managing and assessing adoption applications
- preparing families for, and supporting them through, the intercountry adoption process
- providing advice and assistance to families regarding specific overseas country requirements
- monitoring progress of individual applications with the relevant agency in the overseas country
- providing support and supervision of families after the placement of adopted children.

Discussion Paper questions

In February and March 2020, the department published an online discussion paper titled *Capturing the voices of the intercountry adoption community in the redesign of the Intercountry Adoption Family Support Service*, which can be found at DSS Engage under [Discussion Paper](#). The Discussion Paper questions for public submission are listed below.

Addressing the needs of those who use the ICAFSS

1. Does the ICAFSS meet the needs of the intercountry adoption community, as identified in the evaluation?
2. If not, what changes to the ICAFSS would you recommend?

Ideas for different forms of support

3. How could the ICAFSS facilitate different forms of support, like those listed above, for the intercountry adoption community?
4. What is the best way to ensure that the available funding is accessed equitably?

National accessibility

5. What alternative service delivery models can you suggest that would support national delivery of the ICAFSS and ensure equitable access for people living in regional and remote areas?

Capacity building

6. Do you have any suggestions on how to:
 - a. Support or encourage capacity building and improved collaboration in the service sector?
 - b. Support or encourage peer support and mentorship among adoptees and families?
 - c. Encourage development of support networks and information resources for adoptive and prospective adoptive parents?

Measuring success

7. What are the short-term outcomes that your idea or activity seeks to achieve for people using the ICAFSS?
8. What are the long-term outcomes that your idea or activity seeks to achieve?
9. What knowledge, attitudes or skills should be developed through the activity?
10. What performance indicators or other measures could be used to show the change or benefit that has occurred?
11. What evidence or data could be collected to measure the intended outcome of your idea or activity?

Other suggestions

Further suggestions or comments that were not raised by the evaluation or captured by the prompted questions were invited.

Stakeholder grouping of submissions

The department received 35 written submissions to the online consultation, representing responses from 1 young adoptee, 10 adult adoptees, 11 adoptive parents, 1 prospective adoptive parent, 4 service providers, 3 advocacy and support groups, 2 academics and 3 participants who did not identify their background.

Stakeholder group	Number of Submissions
Young adoptees	1
Adult adoptees	10
Adoptive parents	11
Prospective adoptive parent,	1
Service providers	4
Advocacy and support groups	3
Academics	2
Participants who did not identify their background	3
Total	35

Consolidated ideas for the ICAFSS redesign

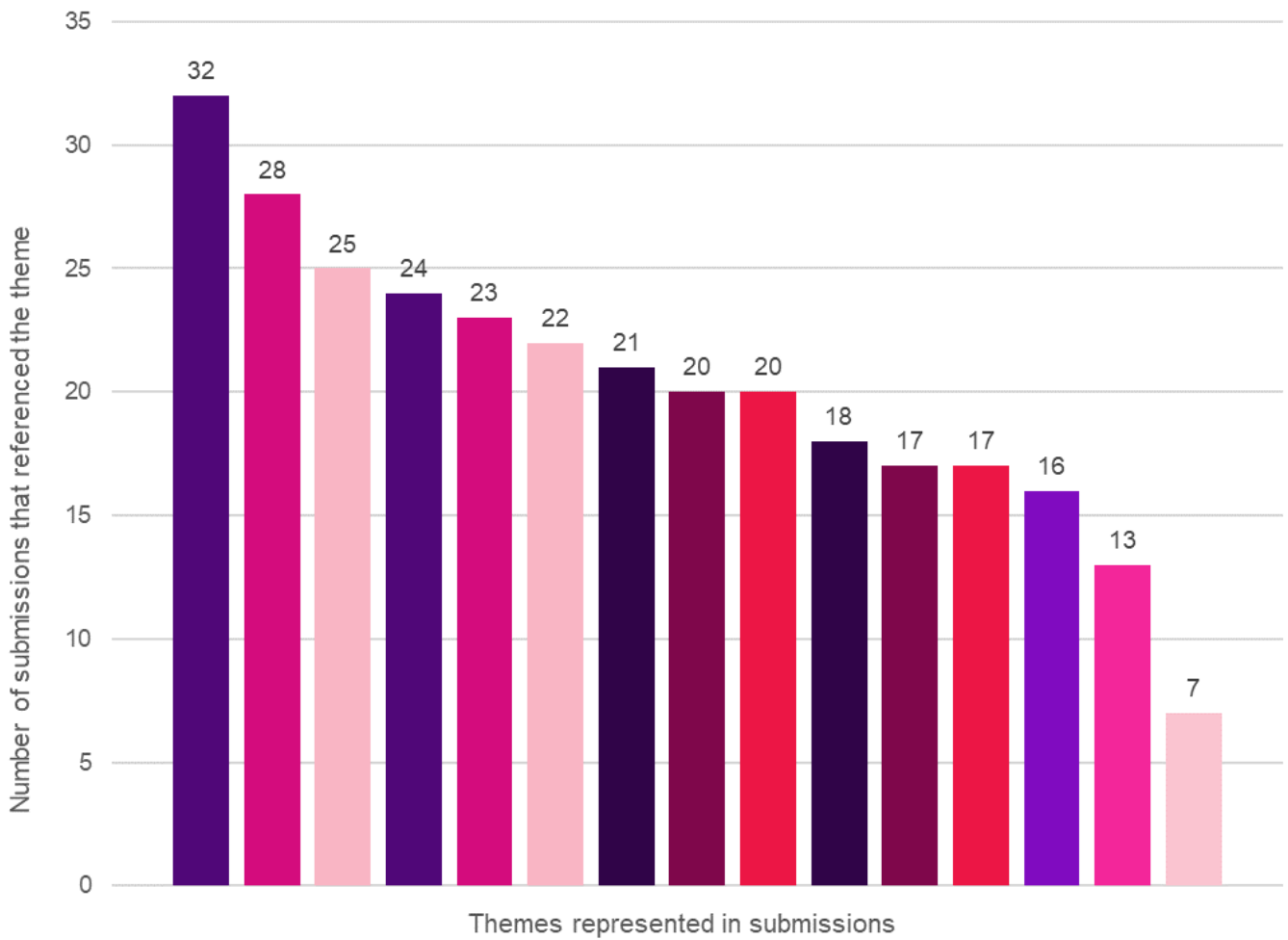
Therapeutic care	Intercountry adoption-aware counselling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued free counselling. • Intercountry adoption-aware counselling. • Nuanced and needs-based approach to the type or therapeutic care provided. • Group work, peer work and therapeutic mentoring. • Trauma, grief, loss and identity-informed therapeutic care.
	Diverse therapeutic approaches to best meet client needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culturally responsive supports that understand the impacts of racism. • Use of strengths-based care, with principles of empowerment. • Encouraging employment of counsellors or caseworkers with lived experience of intercountry adoption. • Acknowledgement that intercountry adoption is a life-long experience.
	Group work and other therapeutic care practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competent support at different life stages. • Competent support for people with physical or intellectual disabilities. • Holistic family support, including addressing challenges related to family formation, family disruption, parenting challenging behaviours and support for siblings.
	Emotional support throughout search and reunification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide mentor education programs for adult adoptees to learn how to best support young adoptees. • Emotional support before, during and after search and reunion. • Therapeutic support in helping to build connection with culture and country of origin.

Capacity Building	Greater involvement of people with lived experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include adoptees in the design and guidance of support services, including through consultation, advisory groups or employment. • Provide training and resources to adoptees and adoptive families who provide mentorship, peer and other support. • Access to funding support for those who live in regional and remote communities to attend these types of groups or activities. • Practical support and preparation in planning for search or reunion. • Raise awareness of the education, community and health professionals of the ICAFSS. • Provide training for adoptive parents on engaging with professionals to help them understand the needs of adoptees and adoptive families.
	Peer support groups and activities	
	Intercountry adoption specific education and training	
	Practical support for search and reunification	
Promotion, awareness and access	Greater promotion and awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appointing an advisory group to guide the ICAFSS. • Direct and active engagement with the intercountry adoption community. • Use of social media platforms to promote the service. • Regular communication through submission emails and newsletters. • Expanding access to face-to-face counselling. • Effective use of digital communication.
	National accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of a national network of agencies or single providers to assist in service delivery. • Regular or scheduled visits by intercountry adoption-aware counsellors to regional hubs. • Subsidising transport funds for those in regional and remote areas to attend community events or counselling services. • Changing the name of the ICAFSS. • Providing self-directed educational materials.

Measurement and outcomes

<p>Short-term service awareness and access (outputs) wellbeing indicators (outcomes)</p>	<p>Measuring changes in:</p> <p><u>Short-term</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • adoptee and family wellbeing before, during and after an interaction with the service • service access numbers • client satisfaction • awareness of the ICAFSS and other services available to the intercountry adoption community.
<p>Medium-term service awareness and reach (outputs) and early indications of emotional support and behavioral change (outcomes)</p>	<p><u>Medium-term</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • understanding and managing the impacts of trauma (for parents) • development of cohesive families • behavioural challenges, including social (or anti-social) behaviour • shift in feelings of being disconnected, unsupported or unheard • changes to emotional self-regulation and rejection sensitivity • development of attachment
<p>Long-term wellbeing measures (outcomes) before, during and after service access (outputs)</p>	<p><u>Long-term</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • understanding and managing the impacts of trauma (for adult adoptees) • developing resilience to overcome challenges (particularly at key life transition points) • managing feelings of grief, loss, guilt and shame (for adult adoptees) • building cultural connection and identity with country of origin (for adult adoptees and their families)
<p>Research, analysis and national discourse</p>	<p><u>Evidence-base</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • creation of established and recognised national intercountry adoption-aware dialogue, including in the intercountry adoption community, the education, health and community sector and in the wider Australia community • development of in-depth and evidence based research and analysis.

Frequency of issues raised in submissions



- Education, training and supports for adoptive parents, educators and health practitioners
- Practical support for search and reunification
- Peer support and mentor activities
- Support at different life stages
- Emotional support for search and reunification
- Intercountry adoption-aware counselling
- Promotion and awareness of the ICAFSS
- National accessibility
- Therapeutic care that supports identity formation and is culturally responsive
- Involvement of people with lived experience
- Coordination of intercountry adoption information, supports and services
- Theory-informed practice, including trauma and strengths based practice
- Measurement and outcomes
- Practitioners who reflect similar backgrounds and experiences of those accessing support
- Support to access and translate personal files

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