



Australian Government  
Department of Social Services

# Families and children services

Discussion paper 2020



## Why we are proposing these reforms

The Australian Government invests over \$260 million each year under the Families and Children Activity to support disadvantaged families and children in Australia. It is important that this investment is targeted to those that need it most, is delivered as efficiently as possible and achieves demonstrable outcomes. This discussion paper seeks feedback from the families and children sector on proposed reforms aimed at achieving these objectives.

### ***The department's role***

The Department of Social Services (the department) supports family functioning and child wellbeing through the Families and Children Activity as well as other programs, payments and services. The department has had a strong focus on achieving outcomes as defined in the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022* and the *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020* and other outcomes as defined by the Government.

### ***The key role of families***

Families play a key role in our society. Around 45 per cent of the approximately 7.2 million families in Australia have children.<sup>1</sup> Families are among the most important influences on a child's life. Well-functioning families support children to grow, develop and have the best possible start in life.

### ***Reform objective***

The key focus of reforms is improving and measuring outcomes for Australian families and children. This includes ensuring the substantial investment under the Families and Children Activity is most appropriately targeted to support Australian families and children who need that support most.

There are five key themes for these reform ideas.

## Outcomes

*It is critical we continue on the journey to move from measuring inputs (resources provided) and outputs (how much is delivered) to outcomes (what is achieved) to strengthen our focus on making a real difference in the lives of Australian families and children.*

### **Proposed improvement:**

- Develop an overarching **outcomes framework** for in-scope programs. This will be developed and refined with input from service providers over 2020-21.
- **Introducing the reporting of outcomes** through the Data Exchange Partnership Approach as a requirement for all in-scope programs (phased in from 1 July 2021). This will be in new grant agreements.
- Service providers will be asked to demonstrate how and why, based on evidence, their program activities will contribute to the intended outcomes.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-status-families/latest-release#all-families>

## Certainty and Accountability

*Certainty of funding arrangements is key for service providers to build trust and engagement with clients, maintain workforce continuity and provide time to realise improved outcomes. It is also important to ensure greater certainty is balanced with accountability.*

### Proposed improvement:

- Implementing longer-term grant arrangements for **Communities for Children Facilitating Partners (CfC FP)**, **Family Relationship Services (FARS)** and **Family Mental Health Support Services (FMHSS)** for five years to 30 June 2026.
- Extending ongoing **Children and Parenting Support (CaPS)** and **Budget Based Funding (BBF)** services for two years to 30 June 2023, (with the exception of five CaPS services that are delivered at a national level, which will be extended for five years to 30 June 2026).
- To achieve greater certainty, while also balancing ongoing service quality, it is proposed that **longer-term grant arrangements have designated review points** to ensure relevant performance standards are met.

## Targeting and Accessibility

*Some families and children experience multiple and complex needs and are at greater risk of experiencing poorer outcomes than other families and children.*

### Proposed improvement:

- Strengthen **targeting** of services to families experiencing **vulnerability and multiple and complex needs**.
- Other ways of strengthening the targeting and accessibility of services might include improving the **cultural appropriateness** of service delivery, developing strategies to **reduce stigma**, and **developing stronger referral pathways**.

## Collaboration and Coordination

*We know there is continued room for better collaboration and coordination between services that support families and children. It is important that organisations within a community link or partner with one another, identify community needs, develop strong referral pathways and work together to coordinate holistic support and drive improved outcomes for families and children.*

### Proposed improvement:

- Bringing **FMHSS** (as a whole) to sit under the Families and Children Activity. Given the focus of FMHSS on early intervention support with a family and carer focus, there is a good synergy with other Families and Children programs.
- **Better integrate CaPS and BBF services** into the CfC FP program where suitable. Consultation will inform exactly what this might look like.

## Capability and innovation

*There are opportunities for capability building to better support service providers, particularly to enhance organisational capability in outcomes measurement and reporting.*

### Proposed improvement:

- Refocus existing **capability arrangements** to key areas, such as organisational support that encourages and champions evidence, outcomes measurement and reporting, evaluation and better targeting services to families experiencing vulnerability or families with multiple and complex needs.
- Enhance existing grant arrangements to **encourage innovation** that better contributes towards outcomes.

## Recent developments

### ***Recent announcements in the 2020-21 Budget***

#### *Social and Community Services Wage Supplementation*

The Government is providing \$132.6 million over three years from 2021-22 for ongoing funding for frontline service providers impacted by the legislated cessation of the Social and Community Services Pay Equity Special Account.

The additional funding will increase the base funding for Department of Social Services grants currently receiving Social and Community Services Wage Supplementation (SACS) through the Special Account. This will apply to grants from July 2021. The funding for these grants will ensure wage costs continue to be met.

#### *Funding for CaPS – Additional Services*

The Government announced ongoing investment in the CaPS Additional Services program to support continued delivery of frontline parenting services for vulnerable Australian families and children, including at risk young parents and cohorts with additional or complex needs.

The CaPS Additional Services program operates as part of the broader CaPS program.

### ***Recent program extension announcement***

The department has informed providers of its intention to extend funding agreements to ensure 234 providers continue to deliver crucial services to families and children in need across the country.

This includes implementing five-year grant arrangements for Communities for Children Facilitating Partners (CfC FP), Family Relationship Services (FaRS) and Family Mental Health Support Services (FMHSS), to 30 June 2026.

Children and Parenting Support (CaPS) and Budget Based Funding (BBF) services will be offered two-year extensions, to 30 June 2023 (with the exception of five CaPS services that are delivered at a national level which will be extended for five years to 30 June 2026).

These funding extensions will support these consultations and ensure funded services are meeting the needs of Australian children, families and communities now and into the future.

### ***Previous consultation***

In 2018, the department contracted KPMG to hold consultations across Australia to test ideas and gather feedback about the future of families and children services. The department would like to thank all those who participated, for all the valuable insights and feedback that were received. What we heard through the previous consultation is that we all want to continue to ensure the Government's investment effectively and measurably contributes to improving outcomes for Australian families, particularly those families experiencing vulnerability.

The department has since used this feedback to inform the development and implementation of improvements to families and children services. We have also already used this feedback to further develop ideas for enhancing our families and children services into the future. Our focus for this consultation is to test these ideas with you and to work together to refine them.

### ***New environment for service delivery***

In 2020, we are operating in a different and challenging environment. We know the 2019-2020 bushfires and more recently the global Coronavirus pandemic are having a profound effect on Australian children and families and the ongoing impacts of these events are still emerging. This has changed methods of service delivery and user expectations. It is important these learnings help to drive innovation in the sector.

This consultation also comes at a time when governments across Australia are looking to develop successors to the *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020* (the National Framework) and the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022*. This presents a unique opportunity to co-ordinate efforts to drive better outcomes for families and children.

## **This consultation process**

The department is seeking your feedback, because we want to hear from the families and children sector about how these services can achieve the best possible outcomes for families and children, particularly those experiencing vulnerability.

*Please be aware the ideas described throughout this discussion paper are for consultation purposes only – the department wants to continue to work with you to refine, inform and finalise these ideas.*

Through this consultation process, the department wants to hear how the 2019-2020 bushfires and Coronavirus pandemic have impacted family circumstances, service demand and service delivery, including what has and has not worked. We want to understand how service delivery has adapted and what can be done to continue to support families and children in this new environment.

We are particularly keen to hear from service providers in the families and children sector about how we can measure outcomes and better prioritise programs that are the most beneficial for Australian families and children. Your insights and experience are critical to establish new ways of working to deliver effective services in this changed environment.

This consultation will take place through the first quarter of 2021 using a range of approaches to provide stakeholders with different ways to engage and provide input. At this stage, it is anticipated this will largely be a virtual consultation process, as regulations in relation to the Coronavirus pandemic will limit face-to-face consultation.

Through this consultation, the department is particularly focusing on a selection of families and children programs that have the common goal of stabilising and supporting families and children:

- Communities for Children Facilitating Partner (CfC FP),
- Children and Parenting Support services (CaPS),
- Family and Relationship Services (FaRS), including Specialised Family Violence Services,
- Family Mental Health Support Services (FMHSS), and
- Budget Based Funded services (BBF).

These in-scope programs deliver a wide variety of services including but not limited to: playgroups, parenting programs, peer support groups, cultural programs, individual counselling, couples counselling, and therapeutic support and community development.

### ***Who is this consultation with***

The department is particularly interested in hearing from existing service providers delivering services under the programs listed above. With the exception of FMHSS, all these programs already operate under the Families and Children Activity. As part of this consultation, we also want to hear from FMHSS providers about further integrating their services under the Families and Children Activity as well as the other questions identified in the paper.

### ***What we would like feedback about***

We are seeking feedback on the below topics and ideas related to families and children service delivery. Specific questions relating to these topics are presented throughout this document.

### ***What is not covered as part of this consultation***

This consultation does not cover other more specialised services, such as Forced Adoption Support Services, Find and Connect, Family Law Services, supports for Intercountry Adoption, Youth Homelessness Reconnect, Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters (HIPPY) and Intensive Family Support Services (IFSS). While these services are not included, if issues are raised that could impact these services, the department will ensure they are appropriately communicated to these providers.

## Consultation snapshot

*Through this consultation, we are keen to hear from you on the following issues:*

### 1. Outcomes and evidence

Key **outcomes** the families and children services should be focussing on, and how they should be **measured**.

### 2. Certainty and accountability

An approach to **longer-term grant arrangements** with **review points** that balance the need for greater certainty of funding with the need to ensure service quality and achievement of desired outcomes.

### 3. Targeting and accessibility

Strengthening **targeting of services to key cohorts** of families and children experiencing vulnerability and families with multiple and complex needs.

### 4. Collaboration and coordination

Ideas for **optimising the structure** of the Families and Children Activity to support **integration** of programs such as Children and Parenting Support services and Budget Based Funded services with the Communities for Children Facilitating Partner program.

### 5. Capability and innovation

Opportunities for **capability building** to better support service providers.

### 6. Recent and emerging impacts on service delivery

How have recent and ongoing events such as the floods, bushfires and the Coronavirus pandemic impacted service demand and service delivery.

## Building on previous consultations

In 2018, KPMG conducted the national ‘Stronger Outcomes for Families’ consultation (the 2018 consultation) on behalf of the department, with over 400 stakeholders attending consultations in 30 locations across Australia.

This provided us with the opportunity to hear first-hand the views and perspectives of hundreds of service providers, representatives of peak bodies, academic institutions and research centres. Specific forums were also held to ensure the voices of families with children, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were heard.

Through this previous consultation, the department tested some bold ideas that could inform the future of families and children services, including investment streams, outcomes, targeting priority cohorts and locations, data and evidence requirements, and grants processes. A summary of the consultation and feedback received is at [Attachment A](#).

In particular, the 2018 consultation centred on significant change to the structure of the Families and Children Activity, moving from programmatic funding to three service investment streams:

- (1) place-based,
- (2) targeted intensive services, and
- (3) universal services.

Overall, stakeholders agreed that funding needs to be more flexible and should be focussed towards achieving outcomes. However, there were mixed views around whether the proposed investment streams were the best way to achieve this. Concerns were raised that proceeding with the three streams could encourage siloed services, despite some families needing a crossover of services across the three streams at different times. Stakeholders emphasised the importance of the universal service system as a key mechanism to identify families and children that would benefit from more targeted or intensive services.

Ensuring stability in the program structure acknowledges the well-established and regarded ‘on the ground’ achievements made within programs to date, and allows us to focus attention on achievable, incremental improvements with the existing structure.

## Progress so far

During the 2018 consultation, contributors identified many things that were working well, as well as aspects of service delivery that needed improvement. Changes have already been made as part of the grant extensions from 1 July 2020 to address some of the feedback received.

The department has made changes to reporting requirements more consistent across programs and seek to build better evidence around what is working well in supporting families and children. The department has sought to minimise the administrative burden on providers with simple and consistent reporting processes, while also collecting useful information.



These changes include the following:

- Standardising **Activity Work Plan** (AWP) requirements for all in-scope Families and Children Activity programs to make these requirements more consistent across programs. The AWP template has also been updated to better capture and use program information, while minimising the impost this places on service providers. An associated guidance document has also been developed to assist providers with this requirement.
- Through the renewed AWP, service providers will outline the **evidence** their service is based on. This will help us understand the logic of funded services, and help plan what supports are needed for service providers to demonstrate the evidence their service is based on. It will also help identify any capability building required across the sector.
- Through the AWP, service providers will now also be able to demonstrate how they are engaging clients and ensuring services are **accessible** to clients that may be facing barriers in accessing services, particularly those experiencing vulnerability.
- Service providers are required to list services on public facing **online directories** to provide easy access to information for families looking for support available in their local area.
- Service providers are also required to monitor and comply with the **Commonwealth Child Safe Framework** following the recommendations of the *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse*.

## The future of families and children services

Through this next phase of consultation, the department wants to work together with you to test further ideas for practical change to families and children services that will drive improved outcomes for Australian families. These ideas build on feedback received from the previous consultation, ongoing discussions with peak bodies and the sector, as well as recent experiences of service delivery during the 2019-2020 bushfires and the Coronavirus pandemic. These ideas are also based on insights gained from other consultation processes, including nationwide consultation conducted by Families Australia in 2019 and early 2020 to inform what should follow the National Framework.

### ***Interacting with other initiatives***

It is important to ensure families and children services continue to support the objectives of key national initiatives, such as the renewed [Closing the Gap](#) agenda and the successor to the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children and the National Strategy for Reducing Violence against Women and Children.

The development of a new National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood Strategy in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will be an important step in ensuring Indigenous children and their families have access to quality, culturally safe services, including maternal and child health, family support, and early childhood education and care.

**Recent and emerging impacts on service delivery**

*The department has heard from you that this is a new and challenging service environment, given the recent 2019-2020 bushfires, drought, floods and the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic, with many service providers seeing an increase in service demand and an increase in the level of complexities facing families. We recognise these events have impacted service delivery and clients' ability to access these services. We are keen to understand these impacts further.*

You also told us that alternative service delivery methods, such as tele or online services, have meant some service providers are supporting new clients. While through necessity and with many challenges, this has provided a chance to trial new, innovative service delivery methods that have the potential to be refined and used into the future.

Through these uncertain times, the department has worked with providers across the families and children sector to provide increased flexibility, including, for example, the use of grant funding for temporary new service delivery arrangements or extending grant arrangements to allow events to be rescheduled.

We have really appreciated how adaptive and innovative service providers have been in rapidly responding to these changing circumstances.

**Discussion question: Recent and emerging impacts on service delivery**

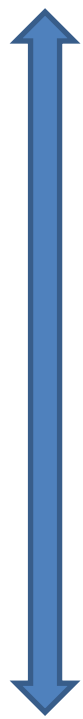
1. How have you adapted service delivery in response to recent crises such as bushfires, drought, floods and Coronavirus pandemic? When has it worked and when hasn't it worked? How will this affect how you deliver services in the future? Have your service adaptations included better integration with other initiatives?

## Outcomes

*The department is keen to work with you on strengthening our focus on driving improved outcomes for Australian families and children. We heard in previous consultations that it is critical we shift the emphasis from outputs (how much is delivered) to outcomes (what is achieved).*

This means strengthening our focus on outcomes across all stages of program design and delivery, as outlined in Diagram one. The department wants service providers to be clear about what they are trying to achieve, and for who, from the very beginning. Service providers' programs then need to be designed, drawing on evidence and lived experience, to achieve those desired outcomes for the intended target group. It is important to measure and report on outcomes so they can be considered as part of ongoing program improvement processes.

**Diagram one: Stages of program design**



Stage	Aim
Planning	What are the issues in our community or target group that need to be addressed? What outcomes should the program be seeking to achieve and who for?
Designing the program	Is there evidence and information from stakeholders that shows the activities in the program are likely to achieve the desired outcomes for the intended cohort?
Delivering the program	Is the program being delivered in the way it was designed?
Measuring outcomes	Are outcomes being measured? Are appropriate tools being used?
Reporting	Are outcomes being reported?
Assessing program effectiveness	Is the outcome data and other information collected being used to assess the program?
Program improvement	Is what we have learnt being used to improve the program to achieve even better outcomes moving forward?

### Reform snapshot: Outcomes

- Develop an overarching **outcomes framework** for in-scope programs.
- **Introducing the reporting of outcomes** through the Data Exchange Partnership Approach as a requirement for all in-scope programs (phased in from 1 July 2021).

***Previous consultations on outcomes***

Through the 2018 consultation, contributors told of the importance of clearly defining and measuring outcomes. The department previously tested three broad overarching outcomes to work towards:

- (1) families and children are safe and well,
- (2) families and children are strong and resilient, and
- (3) children are ready to learn.

While stakeholders agreed these are important outcomes for families and children, there were, however, varied views on whether this was the right mix of outcomes for the program suite. Stakeholders thought the outcomes needed to be more aspirational and strengths-based, but also feasible and achievable. There were also calls to add an outcome encompassing connection to community and culture.

***A new outcomes framework***

As a first step, the department is keen to identify the key outcomes the families and children programs should be seeking to achieve. Diagram two below outlines the aims of the in-scope programs and the proposed key outcomes and reflects previous input received. The outcomes at Diagram two are a draft for consultation and we are looking forward to working with you to further refine and develop it into an outcomes framework over time. This will include consideration of possible sub-outcomes, indicators, stretch and aspirational targets, appropriate measurement tools and how the framework connects with the Data Exchange.

It should be noted the department is looking to develop a program-level outcomes framework; a framework specifically for the families and children programs under the Families and Children Activity, rather than a population-level outcomes framework (such as ARACY's The Nest). Accordingly, the identified outcomes are those that are feasible for the families and children programs to achieve.

Diagram two: Families and children programs aims and outcomes

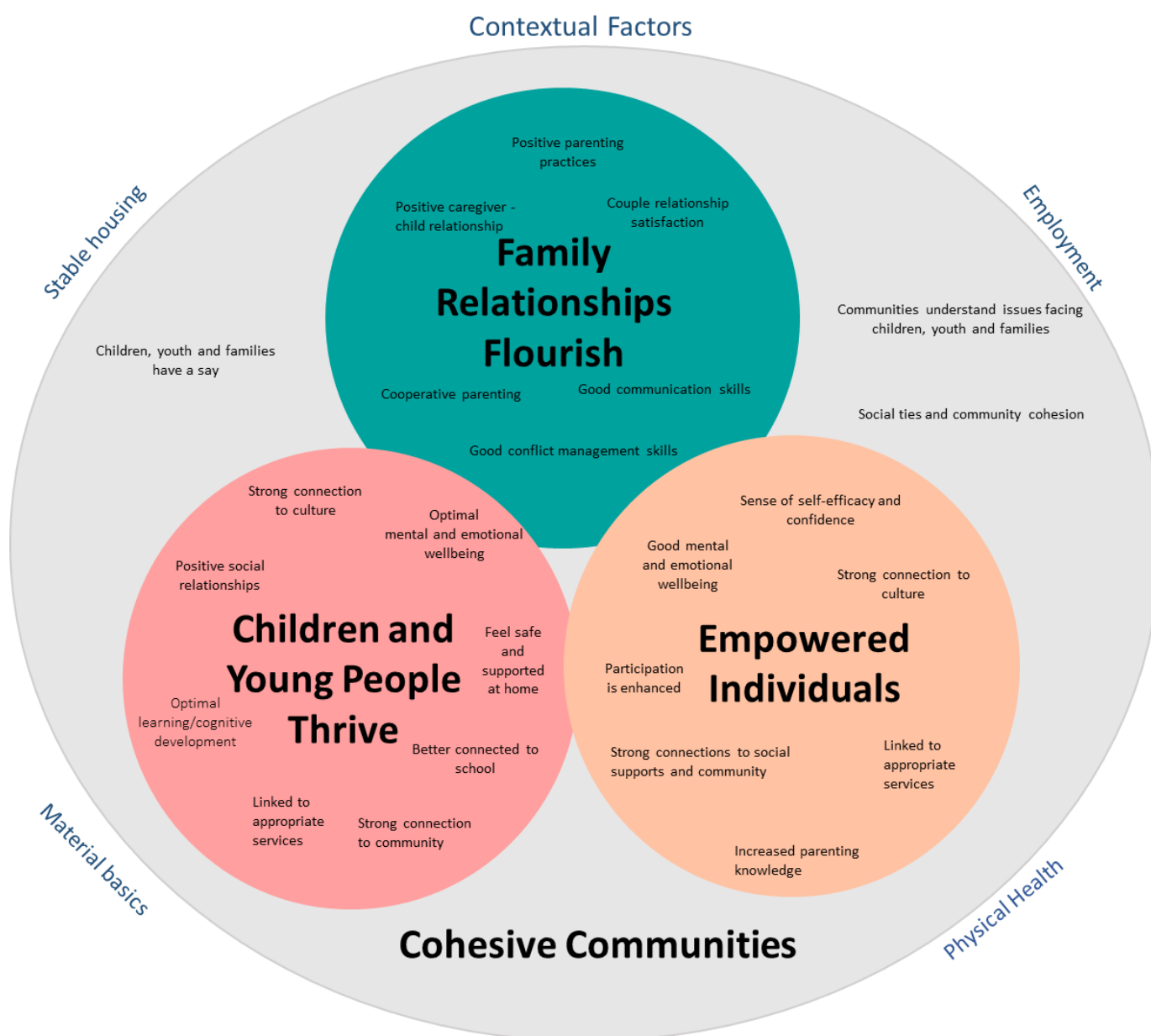


Diagram two highlights four key **aims** of the families and children programs:

- Children and young people thrive
- Family relationships flourish
- Individuals are empowered
- Communities are cohesive.

These aims are strengths-based and aspirational. The aims are shown as overlapping circles in acknowledgement that they are interacting. The **associated outcomes** are listed within the circles. Research literature has shown these outcomes are linked to improvements in families and children's wellbeing now and into the future. They are also linked to the prevention of health and social problems in the longer term, which has positive flow-on effects for broader society. For further information on the development of the outcomes and how Diagram two is intended to be interpreted, see [Attachment B](#).

The department welcomes feedback on these outcomes, particularly whether these are outcomes your service can meaningfully contribute toward, and if there appear to be any key outcomes that could be strengthened, changed or are missing.

### ***Data Exchange Partnership Approach***

Once we have identified the key outcomes, it is critical to know if these outcomes are being achieved. One way of doing this is for service providers to report outcomes data through the Data Exchange Partnership Approach, using SCORE (Standard Client/Community Outcomes Reporting).

Reporting outcomes through the Partnership Approach is currently optional for families and children service providers. The department is now proposing to require service providers to report outcomes data through the Data Exchange Partnership Approach. This would improve our ability to evidence the outcomes that are being achieved. Only through seeing what outcomes are occurring can we properly assess the value of our programs for families and children, and ensure we are reaching those who need it most.

While many providers are providing high quality data through the Partnership Approach, there is currently not enough data reported to draw meaningful conclusions about what outcomes are being achieved and what program improvements might be required. For example, in the January to June 2020 reporting period, only 18 per cent of individual clients were fully assessed for 'change in circumstances' through the Data Exchange Partnership Approach by families and children service providers.

To get the most out of this data, we need a larger number of service providers consistently reporting high quality outcomes data. If reporting was higher, the department could look for trends and see if there were particular areas where greater support may be needed. It would also help us to determine if the funded programs are making a difference and to demonstrate the value of these programs.

We understand it will take time and additional training and support to achieve detailed outcomes reporting. That is why we are proposing a transition period, where increased reporting through the Data Exchange Partnership Approach will be phased in over time from 1 July 2021.

### ***Building capability to measure and report outcomes***

Through the 2018 consultation, many service providers supported increased outcomes measurement and reporting, however, expressed concerns or challenges associated with reporting through the Data Exchange Partnership Approach. In particular, service providers expressed a strong need for additional capability development and support, such as tools and training to assist with collecting, reporting, accessing and interpreting data through the Partnership Approach.

The department is continually working to enhance the operation of the Data Exchange. For example, we have made it easier for service providers to see which clients have SCORE records, and which do not, allowing for potential review or follow-up with these clients. The department has also introduced the ability to see a summary of each clients' SCOREs.

Resources to support providers are available on the Data Exchange [website](#) and the Data Exchange [Helpdesk is also available](#) for support or assistance. Task cards and videos on the Data Exchange [website](#) are available to assist with the set up and use of the different functions on the Data Exchange. The range of training resources will be regularly reviewed and updated. In light of the Coronavirus pandemic, the department will be reviewing the training options available to organisations, including potentially offering virtual training in place of in-person training.

While the Data Exchange is focused on the reporting of raw outcomes data, the Families and Children Expert Panel Project (the Expert Panel) managed by the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) is also available to help service providers to interpret the outcomes data they are collecting and use it as part of evaluations. The Data Exchange has translated a number of validated outcomes measurement tools commonly used in the families and children sector into SCORE. The Expert Panel can provide further guidance on other appropriate tools that can be used to provide valid outcomes measures.

**Discussion questions: Outcomes**

2. Are the proposed key outcomes for the families and children programs the right ones?
3. How can we include strengths-based outcomes that focus on family or child safety?
4. What tools or training would support you to effectively measure and report outcomes through the Data Exchange Partnership Approach?

## Evidence

*Once the outcomes we are seeking to achieve for families and children are clear, we need to ensure the programs and services being delivered contribute directly to these outcomes. This means being clear about what the evidence tells us works.*

One of the advantages of the Families and Children Activity is that providers deliver a broad range of tailored services under each program. However, this also means that it can be hard for the department to determine the strength of the evidence-base of these varied programs and the outcomes they are seeking to achieve. Demonstrating the evidence-base is an important part of giving the Australian public confidence that robust and effective programs are being delivered, as well as ensuring that services are most effectively meeting the needs of families and children.

### Reform snapshot: Evidence

- Service providers will be asked to demonstrate how and why, based on evidence, their program activities will contribute to the intended outcomes.

### Previous consultation on evidence

From previous consultation and ongoing discussions with the families and children service sector, there is agreement on the importance of using evidence of what works to inform service delivery design. However, there are varied opinions on the role of readily available ‘off-the-shelf’ evidence-based programs versus more flexible program models that can be adapted to specific communities.

### Current evidence-based service delivery requirements

The Communities for Children Facilitating Partners program already has evidence-based program requirements and has taken a balanced approach to how evidence is defined. To meet the requirement, Facilitating Partners can either fund ‘off-the-shelf’ evidence-based programs from an approved [guidebook](#) or have other programs assessed by the Expert Panel as meeting a particular set of criteria for high quality programs. An important part of this process is the development of program logics with a strong theory of change.

### What are program logics and theories of change?

These terms are often used interchangeably but one way to think about the distinction is:

- A **program logic** is often a visual representation of the resources and activities that make up the program and the changes (or outcomes) expected to be achieved. (See [Australian Institute of Family Studies](#) for a more detailed explanation.)
- A **theory of change** takes this a step further and documents and explores the assumptions about how and why the program’s activities will create change. It examines the evidence that is available to support these assumptions.



***Developing program logics and theories of change***

The department notes that many service providers are already using ‘off the shelf’ evidence-based programs and see value in them for clients. However, it is acknowledged these programs are not always appropriate for all communities and target groups. Moving forward, the department is proposing that providers will be asked to develop a program logic and theory of change for the program they are delivering. The department will work with service providers on how this could operate, including on what would be appropriate timeframes for their development, and whether there are specific contexts where developing a program logic and theory of change may present unique challenges.

***Importance of program logics and theories of change***

Service providers have often accumulated experience from delivering a program or activity for many years. The development of a program logic and theory of change presents an opportunity to reflect on whether the particular programs or activities are still fit-for-purpose or whether there are improvements that can be made. This process encourages service providers to make assumptions explicit and engage in a process of reflection and learning. Developing a program logic and theory of change will enable service providers to clearly outline the service-level outcomes they are seeking to achieve, interrogate the theory underpinning their program, identify its strengths, and demonstrate how the program will lead to improved outcomes for families and children.

**Discussion question: Evidence**

5. Do you already have a program logic or theory of change outlined for your program? Did you find the process useful? If you do not have one, what has stopped you from developing one? What capacity building support would assist service providers to develop program logics and theories of change?

## Certainty and accountability

### Starting with longer-term grant arrangements

*The department recognises that certainty of grant and funding arrangements is critical for service providers to build trust and engagement with clients, maintain workforce continuity and provide time to realise improved outcomes. It is important to ensure greater certainty is balanced with accountability for ongoing service quality and to ensure the desired outcomes are being achieved.*

#### Reform snapshot: starting with longer-term grant agreements

- Starting with the implementation of **longer-term grant arrangements** for **Communities for Children Facilitating Partners, Family Relationship Services** and **Family Mental Health Support Services** for five years to 30 June 2026 with **review points**.
- Extending ongoing **Children and Parenting Support (CaPS)** and **Budget Based Funding** services for two years to 30 June 2023, (with the exception of five CaPS services that are delivered at a national level which will be extended for five years to 30 June 2026).

### Balancing certainty with accountability through review points

To achieve greater certainty, while also balancing the department and community needs to ensure ongoing service quality, it is proposed that longer-term funding agreements are put in place but with clear, measurable performance indicators and agreed levels of achievement. This could include having designated review points to ensure relevant performance standards are being met.

Initial review points could assess whether certain standards are being met, such as provision of adequate Activity Work Plans (AWPs) and program logics and participation in the Data Exchange Partnership Approach. In the future, funding certainty might mean longer-term grants with review points or initial, shorter funding periods may be provided with an agreement for specified extensions should outcomes be met.

The department will continue to use the Data Exchange for collection and analysis of data and to help improve outcomes for Australian families and children. We are aware that many service providers have expressed concerns about performance being assessed solely on client outcomes data reported through the Data Exchange. The department notes these concerns and is committed to a comprehensive and holistic assessment of performance. While the Data Exchange represents a vital source of information, it needs to be supported with other data, including qualitative information that can provide greater context about trends, including through AWP reporting.

#### Discussion questions: Certainty and accountability

6. As longer-term agreements are implemented, how can the department work with you to develop criteria to measure and demonstrate performance? How can the Data Exchange better support this?
7. What does success look like for your service, and how do you assess the overall success of your service?

## Targeting and accessibility

*Some families and children experience multiple and complex needs and are at greater risk of experiencing poorer outcomes than other families and children..*

### Reform snapshot: Targeting and accessibility

- Strengthen **targeting** of services to families experiencing **vulnerability and multiple and complex needs**.

### *Previous consultation on targeting services*

Through the previous consultation, the department tested whether having a dedicated targeted service investment stream providing intensive services for priority cohorts would be beneficial in supporting these families. Overall, service providers recognised these families require more targeted and intensive support, however, also emphasised the need for discretion and flexibility in who they support.

To ensure services are delivered to those most in need, it was suggested services could be targeted towards particular cohorts but available more broadly. There was strong support for improved access to services for certain groups including: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; people who identify as culturally and linguistically diverse; families and children experiencing domestic violence, abuse and neglect, alcohol and other drug issues; refugees who have experienced trauma; and teenage parents.

A new section of the Activity Work Plan can further support service providers demonstrate how they are engaging families who are experiencing vulnerability and are at increased risk of experiencing poorer outcomes. This Activity Work Plan section was implemented as part of the recent one-year extension to services through to 30 June 2021.

### *Aligning efforts for the greatest impact*

During the previous consultation, a number of stakeholders suggested developing a long-term national strategy outlining priorities for families and children and committing all stakeholders to work collaboratively to achieve shared outcomes. Stakeholders suggested this would ensure a long-term focus on early intervention and prevention that reduces the numbers and severity of families and children experiencing crisis in the future.

Throughout preliminary consultation to inform the successor to the National Framework, stakeholders also called for greater linkages between existing investment in families and children services and the successor to the National Framework, particularly to enhance evidence-based prevention and early intervention. Stakeholders also identified an opportunity for the successor to the National Framework to focus on families and children experiencing vulnerability, to enable governments and sectors to better support those at-risk of engaging, or those who have already engaged with child protection systems, or following up on those who have disengaged with the system.

The development of the successor to the National Framework provides an opportunity to consider and target particular cohorts, and to align our efforts to work towards shared outcomes for particularly vulnerable families and children. For example, as agreed at the 20 March 2020 meeting of Community Services Ministers, the successor strategy will have a ten-year lifespan, with two five-year implementation plans, including a focus on:

- Improving protective factors with evidence-based prevention and early interventions to help prevent engagement with the child protection system.
- Supporting young people who are transitioning from out-of-home care.
- Enhancing responses to support young parents who may have been in care as children and young people who are kinship carers.

All Ministers agreed that addressing the over representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in child protection systems, ensuring co-design and engagement with Indigenous communities, and ensuring the voice of the child is included in decision making, would be some of the key principles underpinning the development of the new strategy.

Any efforts towards aligning services to have the greatest impact must be balanced with maintaining a broad access and early intervention approach to families and children services. The department intends to conduct further consultation on the successor to the National Framework in the coming months, where there will be further opportunity to provide your views and feedback on these issues.

**Discussion question: Targeting and accessibility**

8. Do you currently service cohorts experiencing vulnerability, including those at risk of engaging with the child protection system? If not, how does service delivery need to adapt to provide support to these cohorts?

## Collaboration and coordination

*The need for collaborative and coordinated efforts to provide holistic support and drive improved outcomes for families and children is well recognised. The department has heard that much of the impact from families and children services is due to three things: delivering well-evidenced programs, making sure that funding is coordinated and services are collaborating.*

### Reform snapshot: Collaboration and coordination

- **Optimise the structure** of the Families and Children Activity, including incorporating Family Mental Health Support Services. Integrating Children and Parenting Support and Budget Based Funded services into a single program.
- **Better integrate Children and Parenting Support and Budget Based Funded services** into the Communities for Children Facilitating Partners program where suitable.
- Work with state and territory governments to identify service coordination mechanisms through development of the successor to the National Framework.

### Collaboration across governments

Responsibilities for families and children services are split across different levels of government and between various agencies. The Australian Government generally funds national family and children programs and universal access programs. States and territories fund prevention and early intervention programs, including within their child protection systems. Both levels of government fund services such as education and maternal and child health. Previous consultation indicated this has resulted in fragmented service delivery within the families and children sector.

In a recent report on *Expenditure on Children in the Northern Territory*, the Productivity Commission noted issues including siloed decision making, inadequate coordination between and within governments, and lack of data on services and outcomes at the community level. These all represent significant challenges to delivering effective children and family services across Australia.

There can also be significant overlap in the types of services being funded by different levels of government and their departments. To avoid service fragmentation and overlaps, governments across Australia have undertaken a number of initiatives to improve service coordination at local, state and national levels.

The department is working with the Northern Territory Government and the **Northern Territory Children and Families Tripartite Forum** (the Tripartite Forum) on a coordinated funding framework to guide investment and support governments to work together to improve outcomes for families and children in the Northern Territory. The Tripartite Forum developed a proposed scope for the framework in 2019, and relevant Commonwealth and Northern Territory government agencies are working together to continue this work. The coordinated funding framework will be informed by the Productivity Commission's final report on *Expenditure on Children in the Northern Territory*, released in April 2020, which is being considered by Governments.

Through the development of the successor to the National Framework, the department will also work with state and territory representatives to identify opportunities and mechanisms for greater collaboration and coordination across governments.

The department is also committed to working on improved service coordination at a local level through our wide network of Funding Arrangement Managers. This may include increased information sharing arrangements between jurisdictions as well as better local service coordination and integration on the ground. As a related preliminary step, as part of the recent one-year grant extensions, service providers are encouraged to list and maintain services on public facing online directories to provide easy access to information for families looking for support in their local area.

### ***Collaboration across services***

Currently, Families and Children Activity Guidelines encourage service providers to work collaboratively with each other and other government and non-government agencies that support families and children.

Stakeholders are supportive of greater collaboration among service providers. Possible mechanisms may include establishing regional service provider forums to bring together service providers in a particular area to identify challenges, share learnings, identify service priorities and strengthen collaboration mechanisms.

Another mechanism for further strengthening collaboration across related families and children services could be to align the **Family Mental Health Support Services** program to sit within the Families and Children Activity. This program offers evidence-informed interventions to improve mental health outcomes for children, young people and their families.

The department is also considering integrating the existing **Children and Parenting Support services** and **Budget Based Funded services** into a single program. Analysis has identified many of the services delivered under these programs are similar. Integrating these programs will provide greater efficiency in program administration and support coordination.

### ***Community collaboration***

Stakeholders, particularly families, have provided feedback on the benefits of 'community hub' models or co-location of services to support coordination and service access for families. Better linking of universal service delivery platforms, such as health services (antenatal care, child and family health services), school education and early childhood education, with the delivery of supports to targeted populations through partnerships and co-location arrangements, was also a suggestion raised through the consultation to inform the successor to the National Framework.

Previous consultation identified strong support for place-based approaches, such as Communities for Children Facilitating Partners, as they promote responsiveness to local needs and improve collaboration. The Communities for Children Facilitating Partners program is an innovative, community-informed program where the department funds Facilitating Partner organisations to on-fund Community Partner organisations, to provide services targeted to their community (as identified by a local committee).

The department wants to explore with service providers how to work with local communities where possible and ensure service delivery best meets local community needs. This is particularly relevant to the Communities for Children Facilitating Partners program and the [Stronger Places, Stronger People](#) initiative, a place-based collective impact initiative being implemented by the Australian Government in partnership with state and territory governments and 10 communities across Australia.

Increasing the ability of local communities to receive relevant data and influence the services being delivered in their local area is vital to improving outcomes for Australian families and children. As part of this, the department is committed to empowering the community and listening to community voices.

Consideration should also be given to creating better links between family and domestic violence services, in particular those which are funded through the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022*.

***Incorporating Children and Parenting Support services and Budget Based Funded services into the Communities for Children Facilitating Partners model***

In response to feedback for better community collaboration, the department is considering expanding the Communities for Children program within existing funding resources.

One option to achieve this would be to allocate existing Children and Parenting Support services and Budget Based Funded services to a nearby Facilitating Partner who could provide capacity building support, ensure services were meeting community needs and use their networks to promote collaboration within a particular geographic area. The department would like to discuss the potential impacts of this approach with service providers.

In geographic areas where there are multiple Children and Parenting Support and Budget Based Funded services, but not an existing Communities for Children Facilitating Partner, the creation of new Communities for Children sites could be considered. This may involve running a grants round to determine whether an existing Children and Parenting Support, Communities for Children Facilitating Partner or Budget Based Funded service provider sees value in undertaking a Facilitating Partner-type role who would then manage the site and the other Children and Parenting Support and/or Budget Based Funded services in that community.

It is acknowledged that there are some Children and Parenting Support and Budget Based Funded services that could not be merged into the Communities for Children Facilitating Partner program for a range of reasons, such as offering a national service, like a website or community playgroups.

**Discussion question: Collaboration and coordination**

9. If you are a Children and Parenting Support or Budget Based Funded service provider, do you currently link with a Communities for Children Facilitating Partner or other regional planning mechanism to understand what other services are provided in the community and what the community identifies as their needs? How does this work in practice? Would you value the increased support of being attached to a local Facilitating Partner?
10. For all providers, are there other ways to improve collaboration and coordination across services and systems?



## Capability and innovation

*Through AIFS, the department provides funding to support the families and children sector to build capability to deliver effective services that drive improved outcomes for families and children.*

*The department also recognises the importance of ensuring service providers have flexibility to build their own capability and develop innovative approaches to service delivery. Opportunities for innovation may be emerging that have not yet made their way into practice. We want to ensure our grant arrangements under the Families and Children Activity support capability development, adaptability and service innovation.*

### Reform snapshot: Capability and innovation

- Refocus existing capability arrangements to key areas, such as organisational support that encourages and champions evidence outcomes measurement and reporting, evaluation and better targeting services to families experiencing vulnerability or families with multiple and complex needs.
- Enhance existing grant arrangements to encourage innovation that better contributes towards outcomes.

### Capability building needs

An AIFS review undertaken in 2019<sup>2</sup> revealed that professionals working in the child, family and community welfare sector valued support to incorporate research into practice, but often needed extra support to find and apply evidence to their work. The Child Family Community Australia (CFCA) Information Exchange helps providers to do this. Through the Expert Panel, AIFS also provides direct capability building support to Families and Children Activity service providers and assists Communities for Children Facilitating Partners with meeting evidence-based program requirements.

An evaluation of the Expert Panel identified the following capability building needs for further consideration:

- Increased awareness in the value of program logics, needs assessment, community consultation and evaluations,
- Improved utilisation of data collected and evaluation findings, and
- Increased knowledge and improving skills in key areas such as outcomes measurement and reporting, research, data collection and evaluation.

<sup>2</sup> Australian Institute of Family Studies, 'Scoping of future capacity-building activities – Families and Children Activity: Report', Melbourne, 2019.

### ***Commitment to organisational support that encourages service innovation***

The department appreciates the sector is willing to work with us in an evidence-informed way, and acknowledges service providers require support both at an individual and organisation level to do this. The department appreciates incorporating more evidence-based practice is particularly challenging given there are increasing demands on services and practitioners. Some practitioners told us they are supported by managers who acknowledge the importance of evaluation and evidence-based practice. Others may lack buy-in from their agency, which can limit opportunities to build skills in evaluation activities including data collection and reporting, or to suggest improvements to every day practice. They may also have other priorities and be time poor in relation to this work.

The department is committed to working with organisations to explore how we can better support an organisational culture around evaluation and evidence-informed practice. For example, recently the Expert Panel has been exploring how to engage leaders to influence organisational change to use evaluation findings. We are interested to hear what other interventions are needed within your organisations to create greater buy-in for evaluation and to support leaders to recognise the value of evaluation beyond funding accountability and reporting.

### ***Innovation***

The department is fully committed to ongoing improvements to the management of grants that will improve outcomes for families and children. Building on what is already working well, as part of the recent extensions, the department added a few requirements to support service provider innovation and further improve access to services for families and children. These included requiring providers to report on strategies to identify and address barriers clients may face in accessing services, particularly vulnerable client groups, and listing services on public facing online directories to provide easy access to information for families looking for support available in their local area.

In response to the Coronavirus pandemic, this has included supporting service providers through flexible grants management, such as allowing providers to use innovative service delivery methods to better meet the current needs of their clients, and working with providers to ensure their programs can adapt to the changing needs of their vulnerable clients.

To support further innovation into the future, the department is considering the ideas discussed in this paper, and is seeking service provider views on how to best improve outcomes for families and children. Central to the discussion is understanding how innovations in service delivery — through program adaptation, introduction of new technologies or new partnerships and networks — can lead to improved outcomes for children, families and communities. Further, innovations rely, in part, on improved outcomes measurement, program logics and best practice evaluation. These can all highlight the most appropriate programs and interventions for specific communities or emerging issues.

**Discussion questions: Capability and innovation**

11. The capability building support offered under Families and Children Activity programs has gone through several iterations. What works well? What do you think should change?
12. How can the department best work with you to support innovation in your services while maintaining a commitment to existing service delivery?

## Next steps and how you can contribute further

The department welcomes and appreciates your ongoing involvement and support as we continue to shape the future of families and children services.

### Web

Visit the consultation website at [DSS Engage \( www.engage.dss.gov.au \)](http://www.engage.dss.gov.au)

### Complete the online guided questionnaire (preferred)

OR

### Email a written submission

If you provide your submission online via the online guided questionnaire, you will be asked to specify whether you would like your submission to be published on the department's website.

If you send your submission via email or standard post, please specify whether you would like your submission to be published online.

OR

### Send us a written submission

You can send a submission in writing to:

Family Policy Section  
GPO Box 9820  
Department of Social Services  
Canberra ACT 2601

Please specify if you could like your submission to remain anonymous.

Questions about the consultation process can be directed to  
[families@dss.gov.au](mailto:families@dss.gov.au)

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) will be updated via **the Engage website**

For further information on our families and children services please refer to the Department of Social Services website at [Families and Children Activity](#).

## THE CLOSING DATE FOR SUBMISSIONS IS 12 FEBRUARY 2021

Engagement with the families and children sector on the proposed reforms will continue throughout the first quarter of 2021.

## ATTACHMENT A



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Social Services**



## Summary of Stronger Outcomes for Families consultation

In 2018, KPMG conducted the national ‘Stronger Outcomes for Families’ consultation on behalf of the Department of Social Services (the department) to identify ways to strengthen the investment in families and children services under the Families and Children Activity.

The consultation process provided the opportunity to hear first-hand from service providers, representatives of peak bodies, academic institutions, research centres and families with children. Specific forums were also held to ensure the voices of families with children and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were heard. Over 400 stakeholders attended consultations in 30 locations across Australia.

Through this consultation, the department proposed a set of principles to underpin the design of programs for families and children: (1) outcomes focussed, (2) targeted (3) evidence and data driven, (4) early intervention and prevention focussed, and (5) collaborative. Key themes from the consultation process are summarised below.

### Outcomes

Three broad outcomes for families and children services to work towards were proposed: (1) families and children are safe and well, (2) families and children are strong and resilient and (3) children are ready to learn. Overall, stakeholders agreed these were key outcomes for families and children, however, there were divergent views regarding whether these were the right mix of outcomes. Many stakeholders expressed a desire for outcomes to be more aspirational and strengths-based, for example families and children to be safe, thriving and flourishing. Consistent feedback was received that outcomes should be considered across the life course and that an additional outcome was needed that covered connection to community and culture.

Stakeholders also highlighted the need for greater consistency of outcomes across Commonwealth and State and Territory funded services. Several stakeholders suggested the department consider existing outcomes frameworks, such as ARACY’s The Nest.

There was also an acknowledgement that these outcomes are long-term and unable to be achieved in the current funding and budget cycles. The development of short, medium and long-term outcomes that measured progress and success over different time periods was suggested given the incremental nature of progress with families and children.

## **Investment streams**

It was proposed the Families and Children Activity be restructured from programmatic funding towards three investment streams: (1) universal services, (2) targeted intensive services, and (3) place-based approaches.

Overall, stakeholders agreed that funding needs to be more flexible and should be focussed towards achieving outcomes. However, there were mixed views around whether the proposed investment streams were the best way to achieve this.

Concerns were raised that proceeding with the three streams would result in siloing, despite most families needing to access a combination of services across the three streams at different times. Stakeholders advised that if the department were to proceed with the three streams, there would need to be the ability to move funding seamlessly between them.

While there were mixed views on the streams, stakeholders emphasised the importance of the universal service system, and consistent feedback was received that universal services were a key mechanism for identifying families and children that would benefit from more targeted services. Additionally, there was a significant amount of support for place-based service delivery models.

## **Grants processes**

The majority of stakeholders agree that longer-term grant agreements are needed to allow service providers to build relationships and trust in order to improve outcomes for clients. Stakeholders emphasised that short-term funding can have a negative effect on staff retention, community trust and engagement and the overall ability of the service to function.

There were mixed views on consortia funding arrangements. While there was support for more collaborative service delivery, feedback was received that this did not need to occur through formal consortium arrangements, particularly given the significant investment needed to form a consortia. If the department proceeds with a consortia approach, sufficient time (18 months to two years) will be required to allow for consultations and partnerships to be developed.

## **Targeted service delivery**

### *Cohorts*

The majority of stakeholders were reluctant to identify priority cohorts, given that many families experience multiple risks or complexities. Instead, service providers expressed the need for discretion and flexibility in regards to the clients they service. In order to ensure services are received by those most in need, it was suggested that services could be marketed towards particular cohorts but available to everyone.

There was strong support for improved access to services for certain groups including: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including a suggestion to have an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander identified position in every organisation; people who identify as CALD; families and children experiencing domestic violence, abuse and neglect, alcohol and other drug addiction issues; those transitioning from prison; refugees who have experienced trauma and torture; and teenage parents.

Additionally, consistent feedback was received (particularly through the focus groups) that there is a gap in services for children beginning from age four, and continuing through to the teenage years (noting this varies between locations, with some having sufficient services through to age eight). Additional support for parents, in particular fathers, was also identified as a service gap.

### *Locations*

There is strong support for place-based service delivery. Families and children, in particular, provided feedback on the benefits of 'community hub' models. Involving the local community in identifying priorities and needs was strongly articulated across the consultations. Feedback was received that there needs to be a better understanding of existing services in the community to avoid duplication (this includes services funded by state and territory governments), and to aid with referrals and better leverage existing investment.

In terms of identifying locations, feedback was received around the limitations of using measures such as Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas to identify priority locations. It was highlighted that these measures can fail to identify pockets of disadvantage, which may be masked within a broader statistical area.

### *Service delivery*

Several stakeholders, in particular families and children, identified that clients can feel shame when accessing services. A broad awareness campaign, both in communities and nationally, was proposed to change community attitudes and make it more acceptable for people to access services (i.e. it is not for 'bad' parents).

Feedback was also received around the need for there to be more visibility of the services available within a community. A number of stakeholders identified a key role for Government could be the establishment and maintenance of an online service directory with national coverage. Enhancing relationships with existing universal services (such as schools) was also considered a key lever for increasing awareness of services.

Workforce capacity and staff retention were consistently identified by providers as current service delivery challenges. Longer-term grant agreements were seen as one way to address the issue, as it would provide staff with some certainty around their future. Suggestions were also made around providing specific funding for training and development opportunities.

## **Data and evidence**

There was a robust discussion on the balance between evidence-based programs and innovation. While evidence-based programs were acknowledged as a desirable end goal, stakeholders expressed the importance of drawing on the valuable skills, insights and wisdom of practitioners in responding to client and community needs. Stakeholders also expressed the need to ensure any 'off-the shelf' services are appropriate in the context of the family or community being served.

Separate funding for research and evaluation was suggested by several stakeholders. All stakeholders acknowledged the need to have strong continuous improvement mechanisms to ensure that services remained relevant, appropriate and improved outcomes for families and children. Many existing service providers monitor client outcomes through client satisfaction surveys, pre and post evaluations and some identified using SCORE to measure outcomes at their program level.

Many of the existing service providers are signed up to the Data Exchange Partnership Approach, or are willing to, however the need for additional training and resources to assist with collecting, measuring and interpreting data was seen as imperative. The need for more timely and relevant reports through the Partnership Approach and privacy concerns were highlighted as issues that needed to be resolved. Feedback was also received about the need to improve the use of qualitative data, which many stakeholders feel is currently not captured adequately via the Data Exchange.

## **Early intervention and prevention**

There was universal support for the principle of early intervention and prevention. Responses from the consultation questioned and discussed how this would be implemented, how it interacts with other principles (in particular the targeted principle) and how it could be achieved in the current environment.

The majority of stakeholders acknowledged the difficulties in balancing funding for crisis care with early intervention and prevention. Many stakeholders identified a need to increase upfront investment in early intervention and prevention, without reducing crisis care funding.

## **Collaboration**

Better collaboration across all levels of government was a strong and consistent theme across the consultation process. In order to facilitate this, a number of stakeholders suggested developing a long-term national strategy outlining priorities for families and children and committing all stakeholders, levels and departments of government, service providers and academics, to work collaboratively to achieve shared outcomes. The view was expressed that this would ensure a long-term focus on early intervention and prevention that reduces the numbers and severity of families and children who may experience crisis in the future.

A number of stakeholders suggested that governments could also do more to encourage collaboration among service providers. For example, bringing together service providers within a region to discuss shared learnings and challenges. It was noted this would also provide an opportunity for the department to share data with its service providers.



## ATTACHMENT B

## Developing an Outcomes Framework for families and children programs

### Purpose

The department intends to develop an outcomes framework for families and children programs within the Families and Children Activity.

An outcome describes a specific and measurable change in people's lives because of what you do. Outcomes can include changes in skills, knowledge, attitudes, behaviours and circumstances.

An outcomes framework helps to clearly define the change we are trying to achieve. Which in turn helps us to focus on designing activities and programs that are likely to lead to changes in these identified outcomes.

### Why are we so focussed on outcomes?

In the past we have often focussed on measuring outputs – “the how much” rather than the “what’s changed.” Focussing on and measuring outcomes is beneficial for children and families, for service providers and for government.

- We know that service providers want to deliver services and supports that benefit their clients. Being goal and outcome-oriented has been found to impact on whether positive outcomes are achieved.<sup>3</sup>
- Outcomes measurement contributes to a strong learning culture. It allows service providers to determine whether their services are benefitting their clients and adjust, tailor and improve their practice in response.<sup>4</sup>
- There is an imperative for all of us to not do harm. Sometimes we rely on impression and intuition in guiding service delivery choices but these can be misleading. In the past it has been found that assumptions have been used to justify ineffective, and sometimes harmful, approaches. An outcomes-focus can ensure that we guard against this possibility.<sup>5</sup>
- Asking clients to participate in outcomes measurement can be empowering. It can be a process where clients can reflect on how much they have changed.<sup>6</sup> It ensures that client voices are heard and they can then potentially play a role in adjusting the design and implementation of services so they are even more effective.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Bamblett et al. 2012. ‘Not One Size Fits All’: Understanding the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal Children. Bundoora: La Trobe University.

<sup>4</sup> SVA. Managing to Outcomes: A Guide to Developing an Outcomes Focus

<sup>5</sup> Bamblett et al.

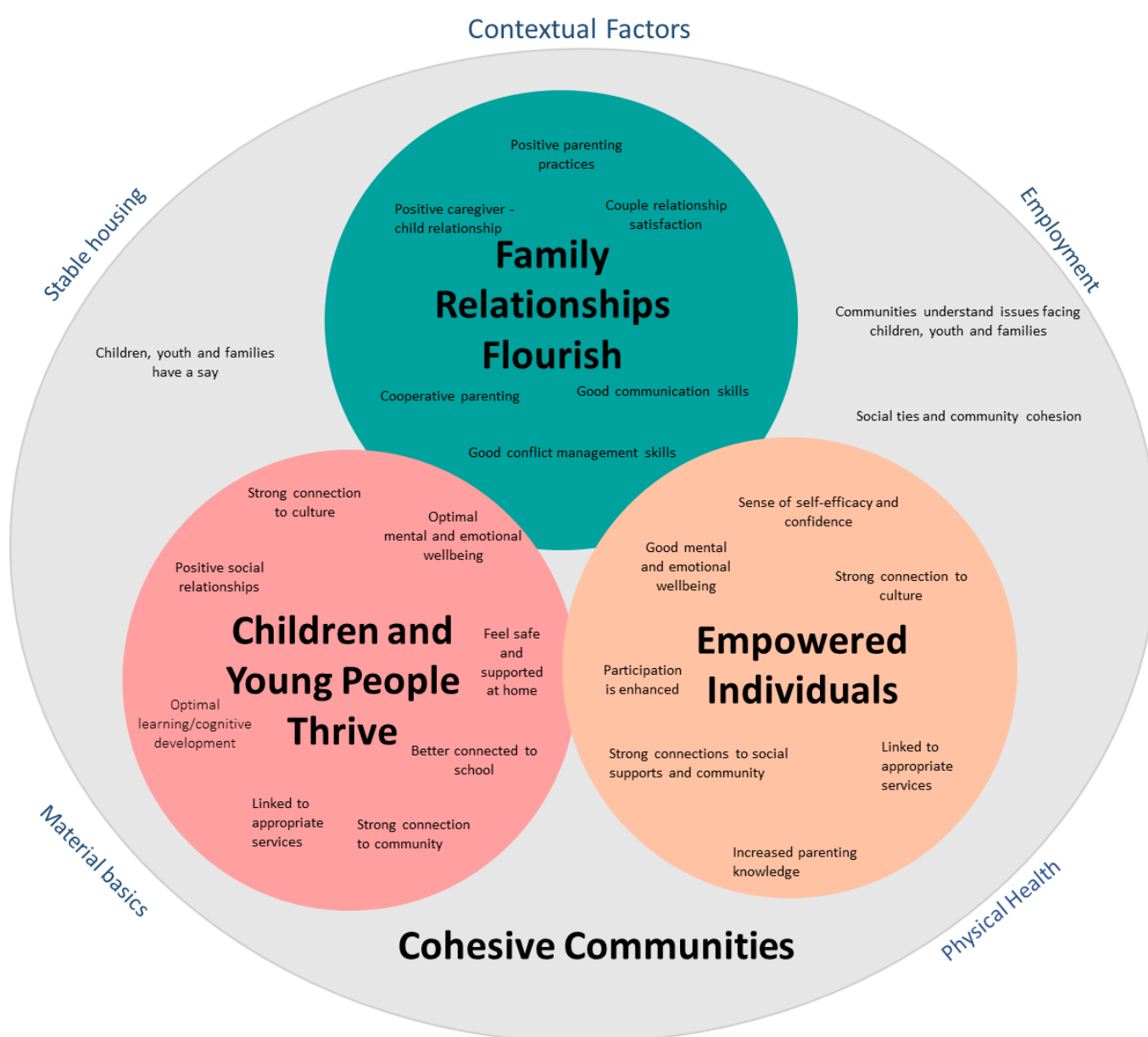
<sup>6</sup> Bamblett et al.

<sup>7</sup> Social Ventures Australia.

- Outcomes measurement helps providers to demonstrate to government and others how their services are benefitting their clients.
- Outcomes reporting helps the department to be accountable for using public resources in the most effective and efficient way. It helps the department and government to collectively demonstrate the tangible benefits and value of funded services.

Outcomes measurement is not without challenges. There can be issues around building internal capacity, deciding on the best measurement tools to use and the most appropriate way to interpret outcome results. That is why the department intends to gradually phase in outcomes measurement and work together with you to develop an approach that is practical and achievable.

**Diagram three: Families and children programs outcomes**



The department envisages developing a program-level framework, that is, an outcomes framework designed specifically for the families and children programs under the Families and Children Activity. A program-level framework is designed to articulate outcomes that the in-scope programs can reasonably be expected to influence and improve. This contrasts to population or system-level frameworks, like ARACY's The Nest, which focus on the entire population of children and the whole system that supports them. See below for an outline of other types of outcomes frameworks.

### Types of outcomes frameworks

- **Population-level:** An outcomes framework that articulates outcomes for the whole population. For example, ARACY's The Nest.
- **System-level:** An outcomes framework that articulates outcomes for a service system, such as an outcomes framework for children in out-of-home care.
- **Program-level:** An outcomes framework for services being delivered under a particular funding program.
- **Agency-level:** An outcomes framework developed for a particular government agency, such as the Department of Social Services.
- **Service-level:** An outcomes framework developed for a particular service, such as for a playgroup.

We know that the wellbeing of children and families is impacted by a complex interplay of a wide array of factors – individual, community and societal. However, as the outcomes framework will be program-level it will need to recognise that a number of these factors are outside the scope of the families and children programs under the Families and Children Activity. Diagram three acknowledges these factors, such as material basics, stable housing, employment and physical health, but places them on the outside of the circle to represent that they are important contextual factors. Other programs (such as income support social housing, health and jobs programs) focus on these factors. Families and children programs will need to work collaboratively and build strong referral pathways with this broader network to achieve the ultimate aim of improving the wellbeing of children and families. Importantly, families and children programs should build the capability of participants to move towards greater independence.

The wide array of factors impacting on children and families points to the importance of holistic, multi-sectoral approaches in supporting children and families. The Australian Government is driving a number of pieces of work that have this focus, including the successor to the National Framework and a National Indigenous Early Childhood Strategy. The families and children programs will play a vitally important role in supporting and contributing to the work of these strategies with their focus on early intervention and prevention and building up protective factors while reducing risk factors.

*What do we mean when we say family?*

*A family can be made up of anyone a person considers to be their family. Families can include children, but they may not. Family members contribute significantly to the wellbeing of each other and play essential roles in supporting each other through life's transitions, stresses and celebrations.*

## **Which outcomes?**

As a first step in developing an outcomes framework, the department is keen to identify the key outcomes that the families and children programs under the Families and Children Activity should be aiming to achieve. The in-scope programs are Communities for Children Facilitating Partners, Children and Parenting Support, Budget Based Funded services, Family and Relationship Services (including Specialised Family Violence Services) and Family Mental Health Support Services. These programs deliver a wide variety of services including but not limited to: playgroups, parenting programs, peer support groups, cultural programs, individual counselling, couples counselling, and therapeutic support and community development. Despite this variety these programs all work towards achieving similar aims. Diagram three outlines these key aims as:

- Children and young people thrive
- Family Relationships flourish
- Individuals are empowered<sup>8</sup>
- Communities are cohesive

These aims are strengths-based and aspirational. The aims are shown as overlapping circles in acknowledgement that they are interacting. For example, we know that individual parents' mental wellbeing can impact on their parenting practices and through to child development<sup>9</sup>.

Within the circles the outcomes associated with each aim are outlined. Research literature has shown that these outcomes are linked to improvements in families and children's wellbeing now and into the future. They are also linked to the prevention of health and social problems in the longer term which has positive flow-on effects for the broader society<sup>10</sup>.

The outcomes within the circle(s) are those that we expect families and children programs to feasibly influence and achieve. Not all of the identified outcomes are relevant to all service providers. The families and children programs deliver a wide variety of services but all service providers should be able to identify at least one outcome that they are working towards. We are aware that many families and children programs are already actively measuring outcomes and using validated tools to do so.

The draft outcomes may not pick up every single outcome a program has identified and is currently measuring. The outcomes are designed to be relatively high-level and can be further refined into service-level outcomes which map back to these higher level outcomes.

<sup>8</sup> Individuals refers to adults, as opposed to children and young people.

<sup>9</sup> UCL Institute of Health Equity. 2012. An Equal Start: Improving outcomes in Children's Centres – The Evidence Review.

<sup>10</sup> Toumbourou et al. 2017. Strengthening prevention and early intervention services for families into the future.

**What comes next?**

The department welcomes your feedback on these outcomes. Once the high level outcomes are agreed, the department will continue to work with you to develop an outcomes framework that links to indicators, SCORE and relevant outcomes measurement tools. The initial focus will be on working with you to refine outcomes and support the collection of high quality data through the Data Exchange; over time we will build capacity for performance monitoring and evaluation.

We also want to assure the sector and providers that quantitative outcomes measurement will not be the only form of reporting the department is interested in. Qualitative information is highly valuable and we are keen to work together on the best ways to identify and collect this information as we move forward.

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