



Australian Government
Department of Social Services

Consultation paper

Implementing the successor plan to the
National Framework for Protecting Australia's
Children 2009-2020



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Implementing the successor
plan to the
National Framework for
Protecting Australia's Children
2009-2020

Foreword

The successor plan to the *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020* will build upon the achievements of the National Framework, recognising there is still a significant amount of work required to achieve enduring change.

It is crucial that all levels of government, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the children and families sector, and the broader community work together to make a positive difference to the lives of our most vulnerable kids.

The successor plan will target vulnerable and disadvantaged kids and families, with a strong emphasis on early intervention and targeted support. The successor plan will also have a focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kids; young people and/or their parents/carers with disability; kids and families with multiple and complex needs; and kids who have experienced abuse or neglect, including those in and leaving care.

I want the new plan to have clear and measurable outcomes, so we know what our goals are and what we have to do to achieve them. We also want to be more flexible in identifying and preventing problems before they occur.

To make significant progress in reducing rates of child abuse and neglect, the focus should be on tangible actions that will benefit from collective effort and commitment from both the Australian state and territory governments and the non-government sector.

The successor plan is being co-designed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. SNAICC – is leading separate co-design consultations and working with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership Group to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders lived experience and knowledge are incorporated into the successor plan and the first five-year implementation plan.

This consultation process through DSS Engage will allow everyone to contribute to the development of the first five-year implementation plan — families, kids, young people, foster and kinship carers, government and non-government organisations and individuals. We welcome your views on what we can do to ensure kids and families are safe and supported.

Additional targeted consultations conducted by the National Children's Commissioner, Anne Hollonds, will provide an opportunity for kids, young people and families to inform the first five-year implementation plan.

I want Australians to have their say through engage.dss.gov.au to help us ensure all kids in Australia grow up in a safe, happy, healthy and caring environment.

I look forward to hearing your feedback.

Michelle Landry
Federal Member for Capricornia
Assistant Minister for Children and Families

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Introduction

National consultations on the broad direction of the successor plan to the National Framework were undertaken by Families Australia in 2019 and early 2020¹. Those consultations, as well as a separate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander process conducted by SNAICC – National Voice for Our Children, the national peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, informed the development of the successor plan, which is currently being finalised.

The successor plan outlines the vision, goal, priority groups and strategic priorities for the next ten years of the National Framework. This consultation paper seeks views from the public on the priorities agreed by Community Services Ministers on 9 April 2021, to inform the development of the first of two five-year implementation plans.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership Group (established under the current National Framework), is guiding the co-design process, with SNAICC actively working with government on the successor plan.

This public consultation process through engage.dss.gov.au will be complemented by targeted consultations with priority groups.

We have a particular interest in capturing views on what early intervention and targeted initiatives are necessary to support children and families to be safe and free from harm and neglect and, where possible, to stay together.

It is important to capture the views of priority groups and their experience and understanding of child safety and wellbeing, including through co-designing the successor plan and first five-year implementation plan. We are also keen to hear from people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, as well as those who are part of the LGBTQIA+ community.

To have your say visit [**engage.dss.gov.au**](https://engage.dss.gov.au).

¹ Families Australia, 2020, *Beyond 2020: Towards a successor plan for the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020*, [BEYOND-2020-FINAL-NATIONAL-CONSULT-REPORT-28MAY2020-1.pdf](#) (familiesaustralia.org.au)

Proposed Vision, Goal, Target Cohort and Priority Groups

Recognising the need for children in Australia to realise their full potential, there is in principle agreement by the Australian, state and territory governments to the vision, goal, target cohort and priority groups for the successor plan.

Vision: Children in Australia reach their full potential by growing up in safe and caring homes, free from harm and neglect.

Goal: To make significant and sustained progress in reducing the rates of child abuse and neglect and its intergenerational impacts.

Target Cohort: Children and families who are experiencing disadvantage and/or are vulnerable.

The **priority groups** under the target cohort include:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people
- children and families with multiple and complex needs
- children and young people experiencing, or who have experienced, abuse and/or neglect, including children in out-of-home care, and young people leaving out-of-home care and transitioning to adulthood², and
- children and young people with disability, and/or their parents/carers with disability.

Priority areas of collective effort for the successor plan

The priority areas of collective effort for the successor plan, agreed in principle by Community Services Ministers³ are:

- Addressing the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in child protection systems.
- A national approach to early intervention and targeted support for children and families experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage.
 - This includes strengthening the interface between services across jurisdictions including disability, early childhood education and care, health and mental health, drug and alcohol, domestic violence, justice, housing, and employment service systems.
- Improved information sharing, data development and analysis.
- Strengthening child and family sector workforce capability.

² *Communique*, 27 November 2020, Community Services Ministers.

³ *Communique*, 9 April 2021, Community Services Ministers.

What is the evidence telling us?

The importance of the early years

Supportive and nurturing environments play a critical role in a child's life.⁴ Evidence shows enhancing parenting skills and promoting healthy child development can help to prevent child abuse and neglect.⁵ The early years of a child's life provide the foundation for future health, development and wellbeing. The first five years, particularly the first one thousand days after conception, are crucial to children's development and can shape other life outcomes.⁶

The child protection environment has changed

Australia's current child protection environment is different to when the National Framework was launched 12 years ago. In particular, the complexity of need experienced by families receiving child protection services is increasing, and the impact of intergenerational trauma is more widely recognised.

Australian governments invest substantial effort and funding to protect children from abuse and neglect. In 2019-20, total recurrent government expenditure on family support services, intensive family support services, protective intervention services, and care services (out-of-home care and other supported placements) was \$6.9 billion nationally (a real increase of 4.7 per cent from 2018-19) of which care services accounted for more than half (59.3 per cent, or \$4.1 billion).⁷

Despite this investment, the number of children in contact with child protection is rising. Between 2014-15 and 2018-19, the number of children receiving child protection services rose by 12 per cent from 152,000 to 170,200 (1 in 33 children) with 68 per cent being repeat clients, indicating the effectiveness of current interventions could be improved.

⁴ Higgins, D. (2015). *A public health approach to enhancing safe and supportive environments for Children*. Australian Institute of Family Studies, Family Matters No.96.

⁵ Fortson, B. L., Klevens, J., Merrick, M. T., Gilbert, L. K., and Alexander, S. P. (2016). *Preventing child abuse and neglect: A technical package for policy, norm, and programmatic activities*. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

⁶ The Select Committee on Intergenerational Welfare Dependence, *Living on the Edge*, Chapter 2, 2019, Save the Children, *Submission 28*
https://www.apf.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Intergenerational_Welfare_Dependence/IG_WD/Final_Report/section?id=committees%2freportrep%2f024242%2f26847

⁷ Australian Government Productivity Commission (2021). *Report on Government Services 2021: Community Services*. [online] Available at: <https://www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2021/community-services>.

The reason for the increase may indicate changing social attitudes and awareness about child abuse and parenting standards, increases in the complexity of need for families coming into contact with child protection.⁸ It could also indicate an increase in reporting rather than prevalence.⁹

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children continue to be consistently overrepresented

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are eight times more likely to be involved with child protection services compared to non-Indigenous children.¹⁰ At 30 June 2019, there were over 18,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care.

Target 12 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap is to ‘reduce the rate of over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care by 45 per cent by 2031.’ To achieve this target, it is estimated that we need to see a reduction of over 8,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care by 2031.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, the reasons for over-representation in child protection are complex and varied. Reasons identified by various authors include intergenerational trauma from previous separation from family and culture, discrimination, a lack of understanding of cultural differences in child-rearing practices and family structure, and inadequate culturally safe and responsive universal and early intervention services.^{11 12} Accordingly, supports that are culturally safe, trauma and healing informed are important in ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children can safely remain with their families.

Children and young people with disability can be vulnerable to harm

Children with disability are more likely to experience abuse than children without disability.¹³ A study in Western Australia showed that despite only being 10.4 per cent of the population, children with disability represent 29.0 per cent of all children with a substantiated child abuse allegation.¹⁴

⁸ Harries, M., Harrison, C., Lonne, B., Morley, L., Pearce, T., Robertson, S., Russ, E. & Smith, J. (2021) ‘The “Front Door” to child protection – issues and innovation’. *International Journal on Child Maltreatment: Research, Policy and Practice*, vol. 3, pp. 351-327.

⁹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2020. *Child protection Australia 2018–19*. Child welfare series no. 72. Cat. no. CWS 74. Canberra: AIHW. [Child protection Australia 2018–19; 16March2020; AIHW](#)

¹⁰ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2020. *Child protection Australia 2018–19*. Child welfare series no. 72. Cat. no. CWS 74. Canberra: AIHW. [Child protection Australia 2018–19; 16March2020; AIHW](#)

¹¹ Australian Institute of Family Studies 2020. [Child protection and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children](#). CFCA Resource Sheet— January 2020.

¹² Lonne, B., Scott, D., Higgins, D., Herrenkohl, T. (2019). *Re-visioning Public Health Approaches for Protecting Children*.

¹³ Jones, L., Bellis, M., Wood, S., Hughes, K. McCoy, E., Eckley, L. (2012). *Prevalence and risk of violence against children with disabilities: a systematic review and meta-analysis of observational studies* Vol: 380, ISSUE 9845, P899-907, Available at: [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(12\)60692-8/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(12)60692-8/fulltext)

¹⁴ Maclean, M., Sims, S., Bower, C., Leonard, H., Stanley, F., O’Donnell, M., (2017). *Maltreatment Risk Among Children With Disabilities* *Pediatrics*. 139. e20161817. 10.1542/peds.2016-1817. Available at:

In 2018-19, the *Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability* heard that, on average, 12 percent of children in out-of-home care were reported as having a disability. One expert witness from the *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse* estimated at least 24 per cent and up to 30 per cent of children in out-of-home care have some form of disability.¹⁵ Some children, parents and/or carers with disability may need additional supports, including through the National Disability Insurance Scheme, education and health services and other social supports, to ensure they can stay safe and thriving at home or in out-of-home care.

There can be intergenerational impacts of trauma, abuse and neglect

The repercussions of child abuse and neglect are powerful and enduring,¹⁶ and can result in trauma and intergenerational transmission of abuse, neglect and disadvantage.¹⁷ For example, it has been found that out-of-home care leavers are 10 times more likely to have their child in out-of-home care compared to the general population.¹⁸

This includes impacts on health outcomes

It is also well-known that children who have experienced trauma, neglect or abuse in their early years have a higher likelihood of developing health-related problems such as substance use, and poorer mental and physical health.¹⁹ For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, factors such as racism and historic and continuing child removal have been shown to contribute to intergenerational trauma, marked social disadvantage, and a deterioration in mental health and wellbeing.²⁰ Unaddressed trauma can have harmful impacts on future generations and family members.²¹ It is critical that the consequences of maltreatment be addressed to mitigate intergenerational impacts.²²

<https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2017/03/02/peds.2016-1817> While research suggests high rates of abuse of children with disability

¹⁵ Commonwealth, Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, Final Report (2017) vol 12, 11

¹⁶ Child Family Community Australia Resource Sheet (2014). *Effects of child abuse and neglect for children and adolescents*.

¹⁷ Select Committee on intergenerational Welfare Dependence (2019). *Living on the Edge: Entrenched disadvantage*.

¹⁸ NSW Government (2018). *Their Futures Matter: A new approach – Reform directions from the Independent Review of Out-of-Home Care in New South Wales*.

¹⁹ Select Committee on Intergenerational Welfare Dependence (2019). *Living on the Edge: Entrenched disadvantage*.

²⁰ 31 Newton, B.J. (2019). Understanding child neglect in Aboriginal families and communities in the context of trauma. *Child & Family Social Work*, vol. 24, no. 2, pp. 218-226.

²¹ Bendall, S., Phelps, A., Browne, V., Metcalf, O., Cooper, J., Rose, B., Nurse, J. & Fava, N. (2018) *Trauma and young people. Moving toward trauma-informed services and systems*. Melbourne: Orygen, The National Centre of Excellence in Youth Mental Health.

²² Van Wort, M., Anreiter, I., Fallon, BA (2019). *Intergenerational transmission of child abuse and neglect: A transdisciplinary objective analysis*, Centre for Research on Children and Families, McGill University, Canada.

There is a growing number of families with multiple and complex needs

A further challenge can arise where services are not adequately equipped to support the growing number of families with multiple and complex needs. Families with multiple and complex needs are likely to be experiencing at least one or more issues, including family and domestic violence, parental mental health issues, and drug and alcohol use.

Child protection services frequently find themselves in ‘crisis mode’ due to an increase in reporting, requiring child protection workers to triage families and refer those not at the highest risk to services that may not have capacity to address the needs of these families. This sometimes results in families returning to the child protection system later at a higher risk.²³

There is a need for better integration across Commonwealth and State and Territory Services as well as across portfolios

There can be challenges at the interface between Commonwealth and state and territory services posed by siloed decision making, inadequate co-ordination within governments and insufficient data on services and outcomes at the community level.²⁴

Research has also shown that services do not always address the needs of families, and families may experience barriers when accessing services, including poor collaboration or coordination between services, resulting in poor attendance, disengagement, or withdrawal from the service.²⁵

What is known about ‘what works’ for safe and supported children?

Support in the early years

Research has shown that investing time, effort and resources in the early years of a child’s life has significant impacts on their behaviour, learning, health and wellbeing, as they transition from childhood to adulthood.²⁶ Ensuring children and youth have safe and supporting environments at an early stage of development and at key transition points can reduce the risk of abuse, neglect and disadvantage and significantly reduce the long term costs in areas of health care, homelessness and unemployment.

²³ Harries, M., Harrison, C., Lonne, B., Morley, L., Pearce, T., Robertson, S., Russ, E. & Smith, J. 2021, ‘The “Front Door” to child protection – issues and innovation’, *International Journal on Child Maltreatment: Research, Policy and Practice*, vol. 3, pp. 351-327.

²⁴ Productivity Commission, *Expenditure on Children in the Northern Territory*, Study Report Overview, p.iii.

²⁵ Centre for Community Child Health (2010). *Engaging marginalised and vulnerable families*. Policy Brief No. 18. Parkville, Victoria: Centre for Community Child Health, The Royal Children’s Hospital, available at:

https://www.rch.org.au/uploadedFiles/Main/Content/ccch/PB18_Vulnerable_families.pdf

²⁶ Australian Early Development Census Report, 2018 <https://www.aedc.gov.au/resources/2018-aedc-results>

Support to transition from care

Where data is available, it shows that Australian families who are child protection clients are often facing multiple and complex adversities. Most often, this includes the co-occurrence of parental mental health issues, substance use, and family violence.²⁷

Research consistently points to the poor social and economic outcomes of many young people in out-of-home care. Better planning and preparation for leaving care; better targeting of existing services to young people with a care experience; and stronger referral pathways are often considered to result in better outcomes.²⁸ Recognising that young people leaving out-of-home care and transitioning to adulthood is a priority group under the successor plan, improving supports for these young people will be a key focus.

Intensive Family Support

It should be made clear that not every family with multiple risk factors present will result in child maltreatment. However, the exposure to risk factors is cumulative, resulting in children being at a heightened risk of abuse and neglect.²⁹

From this, the research suggests that a greater emphasis should be placed on intensive family support and the needs of the whole family and their unique circumstances. Priority should also be given to supporting the child protection system and family support services to shift the balance from incidence driven and stigmatising investigations.³⁰ This includes improving multi-disciplinary specialist responses within child protection systems, as well as improved referral pathways, in recognition of the various professional specialities needed to address multiple issues experienced by families.

Partnership and connection to culture

It is well known that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children will thrive in environments where there is a strong connection to culture and community, and families are enabled to provide safe and nurturing home environments.^{31 32}

²⁷ Bromfield, L., Lamont, A., Parker, R. and Horsfall, B. (2010). *Issues for the safety and wellbeing of children in families with multiple and complex problems: The co-occurrence of domestic violence, parental substance misuse, and mental health problems*. NCPC Issues 33, Australian Institute of Family Studies. [online] Available at: <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/sites/default/files/publication-documents/issues33.pdf>.

²⁸ FaHSCIA, *Transitioning from out-of-home care to independence*, December 2010, p.4.

²⁹ Australian Institute of Family Studies (2017). *Risk and protective factors for child abuse and neglect*. CFCA Resource Sheet.

³⁰ Malvaso, C., Pilkington, R., Montgomerie, A., Delfabbro, P. and Lynch, J. (2020). *A public health approach to preventing child maltreatment: An intelligent information infrastructure to help us know what works*. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 106, p.104466.

³¹ Davis, M 2019, *Family is Culture Final Report: Independent Review into Aboriginal Out-of-Home Care in NSW*, NSW Government, available at https://www.familyisculture.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/726329/Family-Is-Culture-Review-Report.pdf.

³² Bourke, S, Wright, A, Guthrie, J, Russell, L, Dunbar, T & Lovett, R 2018, 'Evidence Review of Indigenous Culture for Health and Wellbeing', *International Journal of Health, Wellness, and Society*, vol. 8, no. 2, pp. 11-27, DOI: 10.18848/2156-8960/CGP/v08i04/11-27

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities need to be able to access services that are culturally appropriate and safe, and more likely to experience better outcomes when these services are available.³³

Strengthening the cultural competence of the child protection system and family support services to support the requirements for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families includes ensuring services and systems are culturally safe, culturally appropriate, trauma and healing informed, and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led decision-making.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families must have the support they need to interact and navigate the system, and to ensure children who have been removed can safely reunify with their families. Further, culturally safe service delivery is crucial in enhancing personal empowerment, and therefore should promote more effective and meaningful pathways to self-determination.

The National Agreement on Closing the Gap identifies four priority reform areas that are key to ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are safe and supported.

These are:

1. Build and strengthen structures to empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to share decision-making with governments.
2. Build formal Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sectors to deliver services to support Closing the Gap.
3. Systemic and structural transformation of mainstream government organisations to improve accountability and better respond to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
4. Enable shared access to location-specific data and information to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations to achieve the first three reforms.

The successor plan is committed to taking a partnership approach to driving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by building on the relevant priorities and principles National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

A critical element of the successor plan and the two five year implementation plans will be pursuing a strengths-based approach, which seeks to strengthen the cultural competence of the child protection system and mainstream family support services.

³³ Australian Human Rights Commissioner. *Cultural safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people*. Available at: <https://childsafe.humanrights.gov.au/diverse-needs/cultural-safety>.

Coordinated service delivery

Community Services Ministers have agreed that strengthening the interface between services across jurisdictions is a priority for the successor plan. This includes disability, early childhood education and care, health and mental health, drug and alcohol, domestic violence, justice, housing, and employment service systems.

Guiding principles

The successor plan will focus on areas where national and collective effort are most likely to have an impact. These draft guiding principles are informed by the Closing the Gap reform priority areas and the 'building blocks' of *Family Matters*. The draft principles are:

Access to universal and targeted services necessary for children to thrive, emphasising child and family outcomes which are critical in determining whether government investments are effective.

A **trauma informed, culturally safe and responsive** approach to law, policies and practice, to ensure quality and culturally safe services for children and families in contact with family support and child protection systems.

An ongoing commitment to **excellence in practice and policy development**, implementation. This could include better data to understand trajectories of disadvantaged children and effective service interventions; and developing best practice responses for vulnerable children and families.

Recognising **we need to do more for at-risk Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families**, including through strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance and decision making, to better enable self-determination and achieve outcomes.

Listen and respond to the voice of children and young people and the voice of those who care for them and **participation in decision-making** by acknowledging children, young people and families as active agents in their own safety, and their views need to be considered in policies and decisions that affect them.

Accountable governments and services with a focus on improved implementation, accountability and transparent reporting across governments for delivering system level change. This will include ensuring governance structures facilitate collaboration across relevant Australian Government portfolios areas, and state and territory governments.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander co-design

On 20 March 2020, Ministers agreed that addressing the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care, and ensuring co-design with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, would be key principles underpinning the development of the successor plan.

Co-designing the successor plan will ensure the priorities and actions specific to improving the safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families are effective.

The National Agreement on Closing the Gap outlines socio-economic outcomes.

Outcome 12 – **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are not overrepresented in the child protection system** – is central to the successor plan. Co-design will engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and leaders with a focus on the strategies required to achieve this outcome, which sets the target to reduce the rate of over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care by 45 per cent by 2031.

Targeted consultations with children, young people and families

The public consultation process through DSS Engage will be complemented by targeted consultations with children, young people and families in the priority groups.

These targeted consultations will be held in June 2021.

Consultation Questions

When providing feedback, please consider (where relevant) the needs of vulnerable or disadvantaged children, children, young people and their families with disability, or those from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds or other groups such as refugees or those who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer, Asexual, and + (LGBTIQ+) and how they could be supported through the successor plan implementation activities.

Strategic Priority: Addressing the over-representation of Indigenous children in child protection systems

A broad range of commitments have been agreed to by all Australian Governments in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap³⁴. This includes 16 targets and activities under four reform priority areas:

1. Formal partnerships and shared decision making.
 2. Building the Community-Controlled Sector
 3. Transforming government organisations
 4. Shared access to data and information at a regional level.
- Beyond delivering on the existing commitments in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, what is the most important thing we can implement under the successor plan to reduce over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care by 45%³⁵?

Strategic Priority: A national approach to early intervention and targeted support for children and families experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage.

This includes strengthening the interface between services across jurisdictions including disability, early childhood education and care, health and mental health, drug and alcohol, domestic violence, justice, housing, and employment service systems

- Tell us about your experience in finding and accessing support when you needed some extra help?
- What are some of the barriers you have faced trying to access individual or family supports across the service system (i.e. disability support, early childhood education and care, housing health and mental health, drug and alcohol, domestic violence)? Tell us about the additional barriers to accessing services faced by:
 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families,
 - children with disability and/or parents and carers with disability,
 - children and families with multiple and complex needs
 - children and young people experiencing or who have experienced abuse and/or neglect, including children in out-of-home care, and young people leaving out-of-home care and transitioning to adulthood

³⁴ Australian Government, *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*, July 2020, [National Agreement on Closing the Gap | Closing The Gap](#)

³⁵ Please note that further Indigenous specific consultation questions are being progressed through the co-design process.

- How do you think we could facilitate greater access to and navigation through public supports such as disability, early childhood education and care, health and mental health, drug and alcohol, domestic violence, justice, housing, and employment service systems?
- What action can governments take to support collaboration between services to offer wrap around supports to vulnerable children and families?
- How can children, families and communities be better engaged in service design and delivery? How would you like to be engaged?

Strategic Priority: Improved information sharing, data development and analysis

- What data and information is needed to better understand and improve outcomes for vulnerable children and families?
- What information should be shared between non-government organisations and governments to support service delivery and outcomes for vulnerable children and families?
- How should monitoring and reporting on the successor plan be made available to the public (i.e. online dashboard, annual reporting)?

Strategic Priority: Strengthening child and family sector workforce capability

- What skills, competencies, and/or practices does the workforce need to provide the most effective support for children and families in the priority groups?
- What changes are needed to prevent high levels of turnover or burnout for staff working with children and families experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage?

Priority groups

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families

- What do you think we need to know about the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families in their dealings with family support and other targeted support services and their ability to access and/or navigate them?

Supporting families with multiple and complex needs

- What are the top things that work to develop the referral mechanisms, partnerships, practices and services needed to better support families with multiple and complex needs?

Children and young people experiencing or who have experienced abuse or neglect

- What changes or supports are needed to help children access therapeutic services to recover from experiences of domestic violence, abuse or neglect?

Improved support for young people leaving out-of-home care and transitioning to adulthood

- For young people leaving out-of-home care and transitioning to adulthood, what works to help young people to transition into adulthood well? For example, to find somewhere safe to live, continue education or get a job, and have good health and mental health.
- If you accessed the Transition to Independent Living Allowance (TILA) payment, what were some of the challenges and helpful parts of this experience?

Children and young people with disability and/or parents and carers with disability

- Tell us about the experiences of children with disability in their dealings with intensive family support services, child protection, out-of-home care and leaving out-of-home care?
- Tell us about the things that work to ensure children and young people with disability live in safe homes, free from harm and neglect?
- Tell us about what works to support vulnerable or disadvantaged parents with disability help their children reach their full potential in safe and caring homes?

Role of the non-government sector

- How can governments and the non-government sector and Aboriginal community controlled sector work best together to improve outcomes for children and families?

What would success look like?

- What changes do you expect to see in the short, medium and long term?

National Framework – lessons learnt

The *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020* recorded some significant successes throughout its implementation. Notable achievements of the National Framework include:

- establishing the role of the National Children's Commissioner
- a commitment to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (ATSICPP) and supporting improved implementation
- development of national standards for out-of-home care and national principles for child safe organisations
- improved information sharing protocols and infrastructure across jurisdictions
- projects to improve service responses for families and promote better understanding of child-wellbeing, such as, improving service responses to vulnerable families during pregnancy and infancy, and
- community awareness raising activities focused on effective parenting practices and strategies to enhance safe and supportive environments in the early years, at both national and local levels.

The findings of the evaluation and Beyond 2020 consultations

The Evaluation of the National Framework undertaken by PwC Australia recognised that the National Framework delivered many achievements, including establishing an important mechanism for national collaboration on protecting Australia's children.³⁶

However, it also found that the National Framework did not effectively coordinate the policy agenda for all children and young people. Further, the development of action plans focussed on smaller initiatives and trials rather than delivering on the broad mandate of reducing childhood abuse and neglect.

The Evaluation highlighted five key opportunities for the successor plan:

- improve the service system to better support vulnerable children and their families
- establish a governance structure enabling greater involvement of other relevant portfolio areas
- adopt an outcomes framework to guide and measure efforts and commission a national prevalence study on child abuse and neglect
- implement independent monitoring and reporting mechanisms to ensure accountability, and
- ensure children, families and communities have an opportunity to inform the next phase of the National Framework.

³⁶ PwC Australia, 2020, *Evaluation of the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020*, [evaluation-national-framework-pwc-report-12-july-2020-updated-oct-2020.pdf \(dss.gov.au\)](#)

The findings of national consultation undertaken by Families Australia in 2019 and 2020 on the broad direction of the successor plan were similar, and note consensus for it to:

- be long-term, practical and achievable
- strengthen the focus on wellbeing (including child safety and protection)
- intensify preventive approaches
- prioritise the voices of children and young people in policy and program design and implementation
- emphasise activities that support key cohorts, especially Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, and
- strengthen data and evaluation.³⁷

Related strategies and consultations

A number of related consultations have occurred or are in progress. These include:

- Youth Taskforce consultations (Department of Health, 2019-2020)
- The Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (Australian Government, 2019-current)
- Consultations for the Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women's Voices) report, (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2018-2020)
- Families and Children (FaC) Activity Reform (Department of Social Services, closed)
- Draft National Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy (National Mental Health Commission, closed)
- Closing the Gap Refresh (National Indigenous Australians Agency, closed)
- Co-design process for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood Strategy (National Indigenous Australians Agency, 2020-current).
- National Strategy to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse consultations (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2018-current)
- National Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy (Department of Health, closed), and
- National Action Plan for the Health of Children and Young People (Department of Health, 2020-2030).

The consultations for the successor plan will build on existing findings from these consultations and co-design processes.

³⁷ Families Australia, 2020, *Beyond 2020: Towards a successor plan for the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020*, [BEYOND-2020-FINAL-NATIONAL-CONSULT-REPORT-28MAY2020-1.pdf](#) (familiesaustralia.org.au)

Where possible, the successor plan will link with other child and safety-related national initiatives, including in areas such as health and mental health, early childhood education and care, domestic and family violence, and disability support and education, to pursue joint activities that will contribute to the successor plan's outcomes.

In particular, the successor plan will work alongside the:

- National Agreement on Closing the Gap
- National Disability Strategy 2010-2020, and the next Strategy
- National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children 2010-2022, and its successor plan
- National Strategy to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse

We will work with Australian, State and Territory Governments to ensure that efforts are not duplicated across the plans, and that we work together to address the drivers of child abuse and neglect.

Related plans, framework and strategies

