Are you an individual or making a submission on behalf of an organisation?

Individual

Are you a

Other

1. Does the new vision reflect what we all want for children and families?

The new vision moves in the right direction by recognising that families need earlier, more coordinated, and more culturally grounded support. Its commitment to prevention, long-term funding, and community-led design reflects what many of us have long asked for: systems that respond to real lives rather than bureaucratic categories. In principle, a unified program that reduces fragmentation is a welcome shift.

But a vision is only as strong as its capacity to see everyone it claims to protect. And here, a critical gap remains: children separated from their families through adoption, forced adoption, or institutional removal are still absent from the language, data, and priorities of the reform. This omission risks repeating the very patterns of erasure that continue to harm these communities across generations.

If the vision is to genuinely reflect what all families want, it must recognise that separation itself is a profound determinant of lifelong wellbeing. Families affected by adoption—particularly young parents, First Nations families, and those facing structural disadvantage—need supports that prevent separation, honour identity, and address the psychosocial impacts of coercive practices. Without naming these cohorts, the system inadvertently protects the narrative rather than the child.

A truly inclusive vision would:
• Explicitly recognise adoption and forced adoption as part of the child-and-family landscape.
• Ensure trauma-informed, identity-protective practice

2. Are the two main outcomes what we should be working towards for children and families? Why/Why not? - Outcome 1: Parents and caregivers are empowered to raise healthy, resilient children - Outcome 2: Children are supported to grow into healthy, resilient adults.

The two outcomes point in the right direction, but they are incomplete. They focus on individual resilience without acknowledging the structural conditions that make

or break a child's wellbeing. Parents cannot be "empowered" if the systems around them create barriers through poverty, discrimination, inaccessible supports, or practices that separate children from families who could have been safely supported.

Likewise, children cannot become "healthy, resilient adults" if their identity, culture, or family connections are disrupted or erased—as has happened through adoption, forced adoption, and institutional removal. Resilience is not something children should have to build in response to preventable harm.

To be meaningful, the outcomes must explicitly include:
• Keeping families together wherever safe.
• Recognising identity, culture, and family integrity as core protective factors.
• Addressing intergenerational and psychosocial trauma, not ignoring it.
• Supporting parents in ways that reduce the need for crisis intervention or separation.

The proposed outcomes are a useful foundation, but without naming the systemic drivers of family vulnerability, they risk reinforcing the very problems the reform aims to solve.

3. Will a single national program provide more flexibility for your organisation?

A single national program could offer greater flexibility, particularly by reducing administrative burden and allowing resources to be directed toward frontline work. Streamlined reporting and clearer funding structures would make it easier to respond to families' needs in a more integrated and timely way.

However, flexibility depends on whether the new program recognises the full spectrum of work required to support children and families—including those affected by adoption, forced adoption, family separation, and identity loss. If these cohorts are not explicitly acknowledged, the program may unintentionally narrow what organisations can deliver, rather than expand it.

For organisations working in trauma recovery, family preservation, and identity-protective practice, flexibility means being able to design supports that reflect lived experience, cultural context, and long-term healing—not just short-term service outputs.

A single national program will only enhance flexibility if it:
• Allows tailored responses for families at risk of separation.

- Recognises adoption-related impacts as legitimate areas of need.
- Supports culturally anchored, community-led models.
- Provides adaptable reporting and funding settings.

In principle, consolidation can increase flexibility—but only if it is built to hold the complexity of the communities it aims to serve.

4. Does the service or activity you deliver fit within one of the three funding streams? Do these streams reflect what children and families in your community need now – and what they might need in the future?

The work I deliver intersects with all three funding streams, but it does not fit cleanly within any of them. Adoption reform, family preservation, trauma recovery, and identity-focused support span wellbeing, capability-building, and targeted intervention—yet none of the streams explicitly recognise families affected by adoption, forced adoption, or system-driven separation.

These families often fall through service gaps because their needs are long-term, identity-based, and tied to both historical harm and current structural pressures. Without naming this cohort, the streams risk overlooking one of the most vulnerable groups in the child-and-family landscape.

While the streams reflect some present needs—early support, cultural connection, and integrated services—the future demands a clearer focus on family integrity and the prevention of avoidable separation.

To be genuinely comprehensive, the model must:
- Recognise adoption-impacted families as a distinct group.
- Resource identity, culture, and trauma recovery across the lifespan.
- Support community-led, culturally grounded approaches.
- Prioritise keeping families together wherever safe.

The three streams are a strong foundation, but they leave critical gaps unless separation-related trauma and identity loss are explicitly included.

5. Are there other changes we could make to the program to help your organisation or community overcome current challenges?

Yes. The program needs several key changes to address gaps that continue to affect children and families—particularly those impacted by adoption, forced adoption, family separation, and identity loss.

First, the program should explicitly recognise adoption-impacted families as a priority cohort. Their needs sit outside conventional service categories, which means they are consistently under-served despite carrying significant trauma across generations.

Second, the program should embed family-preservation and identity-protection as core objectives, not optional considerations. Preventing avoidable separation and strengthening family integrity must sit at the centre of national child-and-family policy.

Third, funding must support long-term, trauma-informed, culturally grounded services, rather than short program cycles that interrupt healing and connection.

Fourth, the program should allow community-led models with flexibility for innovative approaches that reflect lived experience, cultural context, and local knowledge.

Finally, improved data collection is essential. Without tracking adoption-related outcomes, identity disruption, or separation risk, reform efforts will continue to miss the populations most affected by past and present system failures.

These changes would ensure the program responds to the real conditions families face—not just the categories systems are comfortable acknowledging.

6. Do you agree that the four priorities listed on Page 4 are right areas for investment to improve outcomes for children and families?

The four priorities are important, but they are not yet sufficient. Improving wellbeing, increasing access, focusing on high-need communities, and strengthening cultural safety are all essential foundations. However, the priorities overlook one of the most consequential determinants of child outcomes: family integrity and the prevention of unnecessary separation.

Without explicitly investing in supports that keep families together—especially young parents, First Nations families, and those vulnerable to coercive or crisis-driven interventions—the system risks continuing the very patterns that undermine wellbeing in the first place.

The priorities should also recognise the long-term impacts of adoption, forced adoption, and institutional removal. These are not historical issues; they continue

to shape identity, belonging, and mental health across generations. Investment must therefore include trauma-informed, identity-protective services that address both current and legacy harms.

I support the four priorities as a starting point. But to truly improve outcomes, the reform must add a fifth: protecting family unity and addressing the impacts of past and present separation. Only then will the investment framework reflect the real conditions children and families face.

7. Are there any other priorities or issues you think the department should be focusing on?

Yes. A critical missing priority is the need to address family separation and identity loss as major drivers of long-term harm. Children who experience adoption, forced adoption, or institutional removal face lifelong impacts that current policy settings do not fully acknowledge. Their wellbeing cannot be improved without naming this reality.

The department should prioritise:
• Family preservation, with early, practical supports that prevent avoidable separation.
• Identity continuity, recognising culture, lineage, and truth-telling as core to healthy development.
• Long-term trauma recovery, including services that follow individuals across the lifespan, not only in childhood.
• Culturally led decision-making, especially for First Nations families, where past systems have caused profound intergenerational harm.
• Data collection that captures adoption-related outcomes, ensuring policy is based on truth rather than silence.

These priorities are essential if the reform is to serve all children—not only those whose families fit neatly into existing frameworks.

8. Do the proposed focus areas – like supporting families at risk of child protection involvement and young parents match the needs or priorities of your service?

The proposed focus areas—supporting families at risk of child protection involvement and young parents—align closely with my priorities, but they do not go far enough. These groups are essential to reach, yet the framework misses a critical adjacent population: families who have already experienced separation

through adoption, forced adoption, or institutional removal.

My work centres on prevention, identity protection, and long-term trauma recovery. While the focus areas recognise early risk, they overlook the ongoing needs of those who were not supported early enough and now live with the consequences of system-driven separation.

To match the needs of my service and the communities I work with, the focus areas should explicitly include:
• Families vulnerable to coercive or crisis-driven separation, not only those already in contact with child protection.
• Young parents who need non-stigmatising, practical supports to keep their families intact.
• Children and adults affected by adoption, whose identity, belonging, and mental health needs extend across the lifespan.

The proposed focus areas are aligned, but incomplete. A full match requires acknowledging both prevention and the long-term impacts of separation.

9. Are there other groups in your community, or different approaches, that you think the department should consider to better support family wellbeing?

Yes. A major group missing from the current framework is families and individuals affected by adoption, forced adoption, and institutional removal. These communities experience some of the deepest disruptions to identity, belonging, and mental health, yet remain largely invisible in policy design and service planning. Their needs span prevention, healing, and lifelong support.

The department should also recognise:
• Parents vulnerable to coercive or crisis-driven separation, who require early, practical, non-judgmental support.
• Adults who were removed as children, whose trauma continues to shape family formation, parenting, and wellbeing.
• Culturally displaced families, including First Nations families, where identity continuity is central to healing.

In terms of approaches, the department should consider:
• Identity-protective practice, ensuring children maintain knowledge of family, culture, and truth.
• Long-term trauma recovery, not limited to short program cycles.
• Community-led, culturally anchored responses, rather than uniform national

models.
• Integrated family-preservation pathways, designed to prevent avoidable separation.

These additions would close critical gaps and ensure the system supports families before, during, and long after moments of vulnerability.

10. What are other effective ways, beyond co-location, that you've seen work well to connect and coordinate services for families?

Co-location helps, but it is not enough. The strongest coordination I've seen comes from approaches that build continuity, trust, and shared responsibility across services.

Effective strategies include:
• Warm referrals, where a practitioner personally introduces the family to the next service, reducing drop-off and fear.
• Integrated case navigation, with a single, consistent worker who supports the family across multiple systems.
• Shared assessment tools so families don't have to retell traumatic histories to every provider.
• Community-embedded outreach, taking services into homes, schools, and cultural spaces where families already feel safe.
• Cross-sector practice teams (health, mental health, family support, cultural leaders) who meet regularly to coordinate plans.
• Culturally led hubs, where Elders, peer workers, and community organisations guide service pathways.
• Digital coordination platforms that let families access information, booking systems, and support options without navigating bureaucratic silos.

Most importantly, services connect effectively when they operate from a shared principle: keep families intact wherever safe, and centre identity, culture, and truth in every intervention.

11. What would you highlight in a grant application to demonstrate a service is connected to the community it serves? What should applicants be assessed on?

A genuinely connected service demonstrates deep, ongoing relationships with the community—not just consultation on paper. In a grant application, I would highlight:
• Community governance or advisory structures, including lived-experience

leadership.
• Co-designed programs shaped with parents, young people, and those affected by past system interventions.
• Cultural partnerships, such as collaboration with Elders, local leaders, and identity-anchored organisations.
• Demonstrated reach into vulnerable groups, including young parents, families at risk of separation, and adoption-impacted individuals.
• Evidence of trust, shown through repeat engagement and positive word-of-mouth within the community.

Applicants should be assessed on:
• Authentic relationships, not token consultation.
• Lived-experience involvement in decision-making and service design.
• Cultural safety and identity-protective practice, especially for First Nations communities and families affected by separation.
• Ability to respond flexibly to local needs rather than delivering rigid program models.
• Capacity for long-term support, recognising trauma and identity disruption require more than short interventions.

A service connected to its community is one that listens, adapts, and is accountable to the people it claims to serve.

12. Beyond locational disadvantage, what other factors should the department consider to make sure funding reflects the needs of communities?

Beyond geography, the department must recognise the deeper structural and psychosocial factors that shape family vulnerability. Many families experience disadvantage not because of where they live, but because of systemic forces that undermine stability, identity, and access to support.

Key factors include:
• Family separation risk, especially for young parents, First Nations families, and those facing crisis-driven interventions.
• Identity disruption, including for children and adults affected by adoption, forced adoption, or institutional removal.
• Intergenerational trauma, which influences parenting, attachment, and access to services.
• Cultural displacement, where families lack connection to community, language, or cultural leadership.
• Stigma and fear of authorities, which prevents many families from seeking early

help.
• Economic precarity, including unstable housing, insecure work, and financial stress.
• Disability and mental health barriers, which require long-term, integrated support.

Addressing these factors is essential if the department wants to understand why families struggle and how to strengthen them before crises occur.

13. What's the best way for organisations to show in grant applications, that their service is genuinely meeting the needs of the community?

Organisations demonstrate genuine alignment with community needs when they can show evidence of relationship, responsiveness, and accountability. In a grant application, the strongest indicators are:

• Lived-experience leadership in governance, design, and delivery—parents, young people, and those affected by separation shaping the service directly.
• Co-designed programs with clear documentation of how community input changed or guided the model.
• Local data and qualitative evidence showing real demand, including feedback from groups often overlooked—young parents, First Nations families, and adoption-impacted individuals.
• Cultural partnerships, such as collaboration with Elders, cultural practitioners, or community-controlled organisations.
• Demonstrated reach into vulnerable cohorts, tracked through participation, retention, and community referral patterns.
• Transparent evaluation, showing how the service adapts its approach in response to community feedback.

Ultimately, a service proves it meets community needs by showing it listens, adapts, and is accountable—not by claiming expertise, but by demonstrating active relationship with the people it serves.

14. How could the grant process be designed to support and increase the number of ACCOs delivering services to children and families?

To increase ACCO participation, the grant process must remove structural barriers and actively prioritise First Nations leadership. This requires shifting from competition to equity.

Key improvements include:
• Dedicated funding streams for ACCOs, with targets that ensure a significant proportion of contracts go to Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations.
• Simplified application processes, recognising that overly technical or resource-heavy requirements disadvantage smaller community-led organisations.
• Longer funding cycles that allow ACCOs to plan, retain staff, and build stable, culturally anchored services.
• Capacity-building support, including grant-writing assistance, governance training, and administrative resourcing.
• Priority weighting for proposals that demonstrate cultural authority, connection to Country, and community governance.
• Co-design of criteria with ACCOs, ensuring the process reflects cultural values and community priorities rather than bureaucratic assumptions.

Supporting ACCOs means recognising that culturally led responses are not an "option"—they are essential to improving outcomes for First Nations children and families.

15. What else should be built into the program design to help improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families?

Beyond the essential commitments to cultural safety, community control, and self-determination, the program must confront a critical missing issue: the ongoing impacts of forced adoption and historical child removal, which run parallel to the Stolen Generations and continue to affect families today.

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are still separated from family through pathways that mirror past practices—poverty misinterpreted as neglect, crisis-driven removals, and decisions made without cultural authority. A program that aims to improve outcomes cannot ignore this sister issue.

To strengthen outcomes, the design should include:
• Explicit recognition of forced adoption and separation as ongoing drivers of harm.
• Family-preservation pathways led by ACCOs, prioritising kinship and culture.
• Identity-protective practice, ensuring children maintain connection to family, Country, and truth.
• Long-term healing supports for parents and adults who were separated as children.
• Culturally governed decision-making, with ACCOs holding authority, not merely providing advice.
• Stronger accountability mechanisms to prevent separation where safe support

could keep families together.

Addressing forced adoption alongside child protection reform is essential to healing, justice, and true self-determination.

16. What types of data would help your organisation better understand its impact and continuously improve its services?

To truly improve our services, especially concerning adoption and avoiding forced separation, we need data that clearly shows:

Successful Family Keeping-Together: How many families, particularly those at risk of child removal, stayed together safely due to our support. This includes evidence of improved parenting, child safety, and family wellbeing, preventing the need for adoption.
Ethical Process Confirmation: Detailed proof that all adoption-related decisions were made with free, informed consent, ensuring birth parents received full counselling, explored all options, and were not pressured. For Indigenous families, this includes strict adherence to cultural placement principles.
Long-Term Wellbeing: Data on the emotional, social, and cultural health of adopted individuals over time, including their sense of identity and connection to their heritage. We'd also track the wellbeing of birth parents who have placed children for adoption.
Access to Post-Adoption Support: Who uses our ongoing support services (for birth parents, adopted people, adoptive families) and how helpful they find them for healing, contact, or identity needs.
Fairness for All Backgrounds: Data broken down by cultural background, especially for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, to ensure our services are culturally safe and achieve fair, equitable outcomes, addressing historical disparities.

17. What kinds of data or information would be most valuable for you to share, to show how your service is positively impacting children and families?

To show our positive impact, particularly regarding adoption and preventing forced separations, we would share:

Family Preservation Stories: Compelling, real-life accounts and feedback from families who, with our help, avoided child removal or adoption, highlighting the specific supports that kept them together safely.
Evidence of Ethical Practice: Clear documentation and testimonials demonstrating

that adoption processes were voluntary, fully supported, and respected the rights and choices of birth parents, ensuring no coercion.
Adopted Individuals' Connections: Feedback and narratives from adopted people showing positive experiences with their identity, cultural connections, and facilitated contact with birth families through our services.
Birth Parent Empowerment: Testimonials from birth parents about how our counselling and support helped them make informed decisions, process grief, or maintain contact, ensuring their ongoing wellbeing.
Upholding Indigenous Rights: Specific examples and data proving our strong commitment to and successful implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle, ensuring cultural connection is maintained.
Reduced Removals: Aggregate data showing a decrease in the number of children needing to be removed from their families or placed for adoption in communities we serve, indicating successful preventative interventions.
Regenerate
Copy
Good response
Bad response

18. If your organisation currently reports in the Data Exchange (DEX), what SCORE Circumstances domain is most relevant to the service you deliver?

For an organisation focused on adoption and forced adoption, the most relevant SCORE Circumstances domain in DEX would likely be Connectedness.

This domain directly addresses:

Family Relationships: The fundamental impact of adoption and potential forced separation on birth families, adoptees, and adoptive families.
Social Support: The need for strong support networks, which are often fractured by these experiences.
Community and Culture: Crucially, for adoptees and birth parents, maintaining or re-establishing connections to their cultural heritage and community, especially vital for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.
While Overall Wellbeing and Safety are also highly pertinent (addressing trauma, mental health, and the circumstances leading to removal), "Connectedness" best captures the unique relational, identity, and cultural challenges central to adoption and the profound disconnections resulting from forced adoption.

19. What kinds of templates or guidance would help you prepare strong case studies that show the impact of your service?

To prepare strong case studies, particularly with an adoption and forced adoption focus, we would benefit from templates and guidance that ensure depth, ethics, and relevance:

Structured Narrative Template:

Background: Prompts to detail the family's situation before our intervention, highlighting risks of separation or trauma from past adoptions.
Our Intervention: Specific questions on the types of support provided (e.g., family preservation counselling, cultural reconnection, ethical adoption support).
Key Turning Points: Sections to describe critical moments where our service made a difference.
Outcomes: Prompts to articulate the positive change achieved, focusing on family preservation, ethical consent, cultural connection, or healing.
Client Voice: Dedicated space for direct quotes (with consent) from individuals.
Ethical & Consent Guidance:

Clear instructions and forms for obtaining informed, voluntary consent from all parties for case study use, especially regarding sensitive adoption details.
Guidelines on rigorous de-identification to protect privacy while maintaining the story's integrity.
Specific advice on cultural protocols for sharing Indigenous family stories respectfully.
Impact Measurement Prompts:

Guidance on linking case study outcomes to broader service goals (e.g., reduced removals, increased safe connections).
Prompts to highlight how the service addressed systemic barriers or contributed to ethical practice in adoption.
This would allow us to capture

20. What does a relational contracting approach mean to you in practice? What criteria would you like to see included in a relational contract?

For us, relational contracting means a deep, trusting partnership. It acknowledges the complex, often traumatic history of adoption and forced removals. In practice, this entails:

Co-designing ethical solutions: Collaborating with the department to prioritize family preservation and ensure all adoption decisions are genuinely voluntary and informed.

Flexible, trauma-responsive care: Autonomy to adapt interventions to individual family needs, cultural contexts, and healing journeys, rather than strict activity rules.

Focus on healing and connection: Prioritising long-term wellbeing, ethical practice, and cultural identity over mere service output targets.

Key criteria for a relational contract should include:

Ethical Family Preservation: Centered on preventing unnecessary removals; ensuring voluntary, fully informed adoption processes.

Trauma-Informed & Culturally Safe: Upholding principles addressing historical trauma, including the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle.

Flexible, Long-Term Funding: Stable funding for complex, extended healing and reconnection work.

Impact-Focused Reporting: Qualitative, narrative-based reporting on healing and ethical practice, not just activity counts.

Joint Learning & Adaptation: Collaborative reviews to continuously improve strategies based on lived experience.

21. What's the best way for the department to decide which organisations should be offered a relational contract?

To decide on relational contracts, the department should prioritize organisations demonstrating:

Proven Ethical Practice: A strong track record in upholding human rights, ensuring genuine consent, and applying trauma-informed care for adoption and separation issues.

Family Preservation Success: Evidence of effectively preventing child removal and supporting safe family reunification.

Cultural Competency & Indigenous Leadership: Deep commitment to culturally safe practices, strict adherence to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle, and strong partnerships with ACCOs.

Client-Centred Approach: Active integration of birth parents', adoptees', and families' voices in service design and evaluation.

Flexibility & Innovation: A history of adapting services to complex needs, learning from experiences, and solving problems creatively.

Community Trust: Recognised reputation for building trust with vulnerable families.

The selection process should actively involve feedback from individuals with lived experience.

22. Is your organisation interested in a relational contracting approach? Why/why not?

Yes, our organisation is very interested in a relational contracting approach.

Why:

Addresses Complexity: Adoption, particularly with its history of forced removals, involves deep trauma and complex, long-term healing journeys. A relational contract offers the flexibility and trust needed to respond individually, rather than with rigid, activity-based rules.

Prioritises Ethical Outcomes: It allows us to truly focus on family preservation, ensuring genuine consent, upholding the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle, and supporting ethical pathways to connection and identity for all affected.

Reduces Administrative Burden: Less focus on transactional reporting means more resources and staff time dedicated to direct, sensitive support for birth parents, adoptees, and families.

Fosters Collaboration: It creates a true partnership with the department, enabling co-design and shared learning to continuously improve services in this critical, sensitive area.

23. Is there anything else you think the department should understand or consider about this proposed approach?

Yes, critically, the department must deeply understand the ongoing trauma and intergenerational impacts of past forced adoptions, especially within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

This new approach cannot inadvertently replicate these harms. It must explicitly:

Prioritise genuine family preservation as the highest ethical standard.

Ensure true informed consent and exhaustive exploration of alternatives before any child separation.

Embed cultural self-determination for Indigenous families in every policy and practice.

Focus on healing and reconnection for those already impacted, not just service delivery.

Without this deep, historical consciousness, even well-intentioned reforms risk perpetuating systemic injustices.