

Communities for Children (CfC) Kwinana Governance Committee

Response to the DSS Discussion Paper: A New Approach to Programs for Families and Children

1. Introduction

The Communities for Children (CfC) Facilitating Partner (FP) Kwinana Governance Committee welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Department of Social Services' (DSS) discussion paper, A New Approach to Programs for Families and Children. The Committee strongly supports the Department's intent to strengthen outcomes, reduce reporting burden, encourage relational practice, and enable community-led planning.

However, we are concerned that the proposed reform removes core place-based infrastructure that makes these aspirations possible in practice. The CfC model already demonstrates how relational contracting, community-led planning, shared governance, outcomes-informed decision-making, and backbone facilitation work at scale. Removing this structure risks dismantling long-standing capability built in communities over 15+ years.

Our submission is informed by the Committee's extensive operational experience, local strategic planning processes, and the working group's synthesis of issues and opportunities arising from the reform proposals.

2. Who We Are

2.1 The Communities for Children (CfC) Facilitating Partner Model

Communities for Children Facilitating Partners (CfC FPs) are a national, place-based initiative funded by DSS to improve outcomes for children aged pre-birth to 12 years through prevention and early intervention. CfC FPs deliver a whole-of-community approach, build local service system capability, and coordinate evidence-based supports for children and families.

2.2 The Smith Family — Facilitating Partner for Kwinana

The Smith Family is the contracted Facilitating Partner (FP) for Kwinana. As FP, The Smith Family leads strategic oversight, manages subcontracting to Community Partners, undertakes community consultation, ensures coordination across the local service system, and stewards the Community Strategic Plan that guides all place-based investment.

2.3 The CfC Kwinana Governance Committee

The CfC FP Kwinana Governance Committee is a voluntary, place-based governance body comprising key local stakeholders who represent the diversity, strengths, needs, and aspirations of the Kwinana community. Its purpose is to provide strategic direction, strengthen partnerships, uphold evidence-based practice, and support transparent, collaborative decision-making.

3. What We Support in the Discussion Paper

The Committee supports several aspects of the proposed reform, including:

- an outcomes-focused approach
- reducing unnecessary administrative burden
- strengthening relational contracting
- greater alignment across DSS-funded programs
- the intent to understand provider connectedness and community relationships
- flexibility to move resources in response to emerging needs

4. Key Concerns and Impacts

4.1 Loss of Place-Based Backbone Infrastructure

The CfC backbone function—coordination, facilitation, governance, system navigation, engagement, shared planning—is the invisible infrastructure that keeps local service systems connected, collaborative, and responsive.

4.2 Disproportionate Impact on Small, Specialist and Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations

Competitive procurement assumes equal capacity across providers, which is not the reality for many small or specialist services.

4.3 Lack of a Clear Mechanism to Assess Connectedness

Relational capability cannot be demonstrated through short-term partnerships or letters of support.

4.4 Insufficient Consideration of Transition Impacts

Competitive tendering at this scale risks burnout, instability for families, and disruption of service continuity.

5. Strengthening the Reform: Two Key Areas of Emphasis

5.1 Child Safety, Safeguarding, and Trauma-Aware, Culturally Responsive Practice

Backbone organisations like CfC FPs underpin safe practice by ensuring consistent standards, workforce capability uplift, shared risk management, and culturally responsive delivery.

5.2 Evaluation Continuity, Data Integrity and Loss of Longitudinal Learning

The CfC model has generated over a decade of longitudinal data, shared learning, and iterative quality improvement that is at risk if backbone infrastructure is removed.

6. Recommendations

1. Retain CfC backbone infrastructure during reform implementation.
2. Explicitly resource backbone functions in future funding models.
3. Implement a fair, capability-sensitive procurement approach.
4. Develop a framework for assessing provider connectedness and relational capability.
5. Protect and strengthen evaluation continuity.
6. Embed child safety and safeguarding requirements within the reform.

7. Conclusion

The CfC model represents one of DSS's most successful place-based investments. We support reform that builds on what works rather than dismantling it, and would welcome the opportunity to discuss this submission further.