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?

While nurturing children and young people is key, it is important to recognise that protective factors for children extend beyond the immediate family unit. A better frame might be "All children and young people are supported by resilient families and communities who have the skills and confidence to nurture them."

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.

Consider a third outcome; "Outcome 3: Families and children are supported by resilient, connected communities."
'It takes a village.' Extensive consultation and collaboration with our community have shown that there is a critical 'third piece' of the puzzle when considering how to break cycles of disadvantage and support children and families facing complex challenges.
Lack of an extended network of support has been repeatedly cited as a point of strain for parents, and the tipping point that has turned a speedbump into a crisis requiring external intervention. Conversely, supports outside of the immediate family unit enable them to better cope with the challenges of childcare and cost of living, and have a positive influence on mental health. For first time parents or parents of neurodivergent children, the presence or absence of a connection with other families in the same 'age and stage' is often a deciding factor in whether they have access to parenting information, connect with programs and services or have the tools to identify early developmental delays or causes for concern in themselves or their children. For children and young people, role models and support figures outside of their immediate family unit can be a critical opportunity for mentorship, and exposure to different ideas and ways of thinking that can be a cycle breaker for family violence, abuse, and educational disadvantage.
The concept of community is a foundational element of human society that has been impacted by rapid cultural, social and technological change. This outcome is not just about providing parents and children with opportunities for social

connection, but rebuilding strong, connected communities where children are nurtured and grown by a network of people – and the individual strengths of their immediate caregivers do not represent a single point of success or failure. Strong communities where parents and caregivers are supported and have access to wisdom and experience, regardless of the capacity of their own parents to prepare them for success as adults and parents. We should respect the lessons of our Aboriginal communities who have not forgotten the value and importance of an extended network of kin, family and community in the life of a child, or the way a sense of being part of a community is crucial to a positive sense of identity.

As such there is value in supporting community development focused outcomes, designed specifically to build and strengthen the supports that exist outside the immediate family unit.

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

A single national program provides an opportunity to co-design bespoke models that leverage the strengths of our current program models while significantly reducing constraints and administrative burden. There is an opportunity to develop a holistic model of care with previously unattainable capacity to respond to identified need.

One challenge to be considered is how organisations servicing multiple communities with different needs will be contracted. Program and reporting needs will be different for these sites, and it will not be a benefit if organisations are unable to shape individual models to meet the needs of different communities and provide meaningful reporting for those programs, particularly where there are large disparities between population and demographics.

Flexibility is key; the proposed model will be an improvement so long as streamlining doesn't come at the cost of place-based service design - there is no 'one size fits all' approach that will meet the needs of all communities.

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?

Under the proposed definitions, a single stream would restrict rather than improve the capacity of organisatons to meet the needs of needs of families and children. An integrated 'multi-stream' approach incorporating community development, early-intervention and intensive support would be ideal and enable us to overcome many of the constraints of a traditional model.

A collaborative, integrated program offering holistic supports across the spectrum of crisis definition would provide unprecedented capacity to meet families 'where

they are at' with tailored support to meet their specific needs.

There is need for an additional stream focused on Community Development and Partnership to ensure programs are effective and build the capacity of the community to support the needs of families and children.

Community Development: Dedicated resourcing toward community development work to support meaningful community co-design and partnership, consultation and needs assessment, as well as ongoing place-based program design and evaluation.

Without this, capacity to offer community-led, place-based services will be drastically reduced. This will disproportionately affect small regional communities and minority groups, who's needs are regularly assumed and misunderstood by well-meaning providers.

Partnership: Working alongside community to ensure programs activities and services are meeting need / Capacity building and support for subcontracted programming and engagement in regional communities.

A common point of frustration for people who live and work in the country is the high cost and questionable value of resourcing outreach and short-term programming when weighed against provision of funding to established groups within the community. Workers in the nearest regional centre or metro area are not always best placed to meet the needs of the broader service area, and often have very little understanding of the specific needs of outlying communities. Conversely, outreach is generally prohibitively expensive, time consuming and often fails to attract engagement.

In our region, multiple groups exist who know exactly what would work for their community. The outcomes they describe are clearly aligned with 'early in the life of a crisis' type interventions for families significantly impacted by isolation, drought and limited access to services. The activities they propose do not require extensive qualifications, and where professional services are required, they are offering a platform to support effective outreach. These groups are willing to upskill, deliver services and supported targeted outreach - but they are not in a position to tender for and administer a funding agreement.

A real opportunity exists to provide early intervention support to these communities, but these opportunities are only viable through flexible funding or subcontracting. Outreach alone will not be effective.

Identification of similar opportunities in the future requires funding community development workers, who are able to dedicate resources to engaging with communities, building relationships, and working alongside in ways that are unsustainable for workers who are focused on service delivery or managerial functions.

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

Intentional pathways for this program to inform and support implementation of other government programs and priority areas such as the Flying Start Reform, Thriving Kids/NDIS reform for developmental delay, Closing the Gap, The Early Years Strategy 2024-2034 and the plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032

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

"Prioritise connected, co-located, and integrated services that work together to meet family needs" - While co-location is clearly beneficial, it doesn't necessarily entail collaboration; services can be siloed even within the same office. While the advantages of a single physical location can't be dismissed, it should be weighed against the risk of prioritising monopolisation of service delivery by the big NGOs who are well placed to take on multiple services at the cost of smaller, community led orgs and regional community service providers.
There is also an opportunity to improve collaboration and integration with other government led priority areas, such as NDIS reform for early developmental delay, and pre- and post-natal healthcare.

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

Ensure services are culturally safe, trauma informed, safe for cultural and linguistic and religious diverse groups, LGBTQI+, disability, neurodiversity and other diverse groups
Ensuring program design is suited to supporting all families, including people living in regional, rural and remote communities.

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

Early developmental delay has been identified as a significant concern for families in our region, and there is opportunity to work alongside NDIS reform to support early intervention outcomes for families.
Families in regional, rural and remote communities. These communities often face different challenges to families in larger population centres and the metro, and need can be difficult to quantify. Profitable agricultural areas might not fall into statistical areas of need, but this fails to account for drought conditions and

extreme weather events. Access to services, education, healthcare, emergency support is often inaccurately understood when viewed through a quantitative lens, failing to account for complexities such as service turnover and timeframes for travel. Need should absolutely be prioritised, but that definition should not purely be dictated by SEIFA rating and equivalent quantitative assessments but allow for responsive supports as issues are identified.

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

Much of the strength of co-location is in providing continuity of service, reducing the need for clients who have already had the strength to ask for help to ask again and 're-engage', re-build trust and tell their story again.

Other areas related to the burden of bouncing between services can be improved through collaboration, flexible programming, simplified referral pathways and the elimination of inflexible eligibility and participation criteria.

Effective community-led, place-based service design requires dedicated resourcing toward community development.

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?

Demonstrate community led programming – what voice does the community have in decision making, how have programs been adapted in response to community need

Demonstrate place-based service delivery, how are services tailored to meet the specific needs of their communities, and even different parts or groups within the same community.

How are these needs and nuances identified, how is consultation and collaboration resourced and prioritised, how do organisations engage with underrepresented groups

Feedback from community highlighting that services listen, follow through and adapt services in response to changing need.

The Consultation Summary highlighted that shared decision-making with community would also help improve accountability, by allowing better scrutiny of how both ACCO and non-ACCO providers are performing. This would make it easier to see whether programs are meeting the needs of First Nations families, and where providers might need extra support. While shared decision-making was most strongly recommended for First Nations communities, many respondents also supported using this approach to strengthen outcomes for non-First Nations families.

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

Demonstrate community led programming – what voice does the community have in decision making, how have programs been adapted in response to community need

Demonstrate place-based service delivery, how are services tailored to meet the specific needs of their communities, and even different parts or groups within the same community.

How are these needs and nuances identified, how is consultation and collaboration resourced and prioritised, how do organisations engage with underrepresented groups

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

Flexibility, relational contracting, community-led program design and the ability to adapt programs in response to identified community needs are key to attracting and retaining the trust and partnership of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations.

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

An integrated 'multi-stream' approach incorporating community development, early-intervention and intensive support is as critical to enabling both ACCO and mainstream organisations to overcome many of the constraints of a traditional model in effectively supporting outcomes for families, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities.

Dedicated resourcing toward community development work to support meaningful community co-design and partnership, consultation and needs assessment, as

well as ongoing place-based program design and evaluation. This is critical to effective service delivery by both mainstream services and ACCOs.

Without this, capacity to offer community-led, place-based services will be drastically reduced. This will disproportionately affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, who's needs are regularly assumed and misunderstood by well-meaning providers.

Working alongside community to ensure programs activities and services are meeting need, and capacity building and support for subcontracted service deliver or support through a flexible funding model would ensure services are delivered by the community, rather than for the community, particularly for Aboriginal communities without a large ACCO or mainstream service presence.

The importance of ensuring the whole community is supported to ensure good outcomes for children is absolutely critical when considering Aboriginal families. Westernised views of family as 'children and their parents or caregivers' fail to account for the deep importance of extended family, kin and community to the wellbeing of Aboriginal children and young people.

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

The ability to understand DEX data at an activity level, rather than an outlet level. Outlet level filtering will fall into further obsolescence as co-located and integrated services are prioritised, and multiple services are delivered from the same location. The DEX QLIK dashboard does not allow for data to be filtered at a case or session level. This means organisations have no mechanism to view data about what activities are delivered, track how many sessions or instances of program delivery are being delivered over a reporting period, or link demographic information to programs or services.

Understanding how clients are engaging with specific programs and activities, not just outlets, is important to support informed decision making for program funding. There is no capacity to generate custom reports at an activity level or extract data to support understanding of programming and analysis over time.

Without a clear breakdown of what programs are delivered at different locations, organisations have limited ability to understand how different communities within the region are engaging with programs, and what access to services different communities are being offered.

This impacts capacity for organisations to plan and monitor place-based programming outcomes and make informed decisions around program funding considering issues such as duplication of services and address accessibility to programs i.e. for people with transport challenges in areas with no public transport or identify service gaps for smaller communities.

Access to relational data, or at least better filter functionality, would support understanding of how community are engaging with services, and how programs are aligned with identified need, for example: What is the demographic profile of a given activity? Are the identified demographic group who a given activity is intended to support, engaging with the activity? What activities are community members with multiple intersects of vulnerability attending, or not attending? Are there any notable trends in how community members with multiple intersects of vulnerability engage with services?

These questions are critical to organisatons capacity to objectively analyse whether programs are effective in reaching families with the greatest need and inform decision making. This data also provides a strong foundation for advocacy, tendering, and provides legitimacy to decision making.

It is also critical to ensure there is a mechanism to provide narrative context for data reporting through DEX, ensuring narrative or qualitative data is tied to the quantitative dataset.

It would be beneficial for organisatons to be able to access additional tools to support thematic analysis of narrative or qualitative data, ensuring human perspective is not lost in the face of quantitative evaluation.

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?

Reporting mechanisms that allow for services to demonstrate how services are tied to identified needs are tied to high level outcomes.

This, partnered with more detailed options for filtering, would allow programs to demonstrate how services are being utilised, with a direct link to the needs identified through consultation.

A mechanism to include narrative or qualitative information alongside quantitative datasets would be extremely beneficial to demonstrating impact. It would allow for service providers to focus on benefit, shifting the focus from reporting that favours large numbers, even if services are ineffective.

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

Our program attempted to limit SCORE to a single domain in order to promote consistency and validity, reduce administrative burden and improve our percentage of paired domains.

We found that clients were less willing to engage with assessments that were less specifically linked to the service they were receiving, facilitators reported frustration as they felt the information collected was less useful and relevant, we

are now returning to a multiple domain approach with circumstance domain questions aligned to identified program outcomes.

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

Relational contracting provides services with the flexibility to tailor services to meet the needs of their community efficiently and effectively. It reduces the need to jump through hoops, or 'make services fit'. Relational contracts support place-based programming, and allow services to be responsive and act on opportunities as they arise. They support living workplans, and even allow for changes to priority areas to allow for immediate and effective response to local crises or opportunities.

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

Organisations should be able to provide a robust, evidence-based proposal.
The proposal should outline how they intend to engage with their communities to identify needs. They should be able to demonstrate how they will engage with underrepresented groups and commit to partnership and co-design of bespoke services that meet the unique needs of their communities.
The proposal should also demonstrate how they intend to monitor and evaluate services, and exactly how they intend to ensure outcomes remain aligned with program priority areas.