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A new approach to programs for families and children

Submission from the
Parenting Research Centre
and Raising Children
Network

Acknowledgement of Country

The Parenting Research Centre acknowledges and respects the diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of this country and the Elders of the past and present.

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Parenting Research Centre

The Parenting Research Centre (PRC) is an independent, non-profit organisation that helps children thrive by advising on new and better ways to support families in their parenting. We help governments and community organisations in the fields of early childhood, health, education, disability and welfare put the best evidence on parenting and family support into action.

We have an outstanding record of accomplishment in program development, practice support, research and evaluation related to parenting. We focus on achieving real world outcomes by helping service providers, families and policy makers to develop and implement parenting and family support solutions that are informed by evidence and sensitive to culture and context.

Our landmark programs and services, including Raising Children Network and MyTime (both currently funded via the DSS Families and Children Activity) are all accessible to parents and carers across Australia, and tailored towards managing wellbeing and reducing stress.

Summary Statement

Purpose

This submission highlights evidence-based priorities for strengthening the Families and Children (FaC) Activity. Our recommendations focus on parenting capability, parental wellbeing, culturally safe practice, evidence-informed service delivery, system efficiencies and equitable access to supports.

Priority populations identified

- Parents and carers, including parents of children with disability or developmental concerns and parents with an intellectual disability
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families
- Young parents
- Families requiring support at key developmental transitions

Key evidence signals

Summary statement

Strengthening parenting capability and parental wellbeing is one of the most effective, scalable levers for improving child outcomes and reducing long-term system costs. A reformed FaC Activity that prioritises accessible, culturally safe, evidence-informed parenting support, paired with a capable workforce, strong data capability and systems and digital access, will deliver more timely, equitable and coordinated assistance to families across Australia.

Evidence synthesised across our experience in designing and delivering parenting programs and practice frameworks, data available through the Parenting Today national survey, and our understanding of national frameworks consistently shows that strengthening parenting capability and wellbeing is one of the most effective, scalable levers for improving child outcomes and reducing long-term system costs.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Embed parental wellbeing within the FaC outcomes framework.

Parents' mental health, stress, confidence and coping capacity must be explicit outcome areas to reflect their direct influence on child wellbeing.

Recommendation 2: Make evidence-informed parenting supports available early, proportionately and at scale.

Remove any constraints and strengthen access to parenting supports across universal, targeted and intensive settings, including exploration of digital accessibility for parenting supports and strategies to enhance reach to at risk and vulnerable communities.

Recommendation 3: Provide tailored, developmentally informed supports for parents with intellectual disability and parents of children with disability.

Ensure options and pathways are accessible so these families can access mainstream parenting support e.g. Parenting Young Children program

Recommendation 4: Invest in workforce capability across the sector.

Focus on cultural fitness, data capability, reflective practice, working with lived experience, supervision and implementation support, including Communities of Practice.

Recommendation 5: Build practical, ethical data systems that uphold Indigenous Data Sovereignty.

Services need simple, actionable tools for data collection, interpretation and continuous improvement. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities must retain ownership and governance of their data.

Recommendation 6: Strengthen the role of trusted universal platforms (e.g., Raising Children Network).

Improve message consistency, national reach and accessibility across all three funding streams, including through social media, digital channels and emerging AI tools with appropriate quality standards.

Recommendation 7: Formally embed telepractice and hybrid service delivery in the model.

A virtual continuum of care improves access for rural, remote and time-poor families, supports Stream 1, Stream 2 and Stream 3 functions, and reduces fragmentation.

Recommendation 8: Increase investment in Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs).

Support self-determined design, governance and delivery aligned with Priority Four of the National Closing the Gap Agreement.

Recommendation 9: Recognise early adolescence and the school-to-adulthood transition as critical intervention points alongside early childhood.

Invest in supports for parents and caregivers at these transitions to prevent escalation into mental health, justice or child protection systems.

Recommendation 10: Fund the “glue”.

Ensure dedicated, sustainable “glue funding” for essential back-of-house functions to improve service effectiveness, reduce administrative burden, and support long-term operational stability.

Recommendation 11: Trial the new model before full implementation.

Pilot and refine the model with diverse family groups to ensure it works in complex, real-world contexts. Engage intermediary organisations such as the Parenting Research Centre to test and review approaches before going live.

Recommendation 12: Fund ongoing national parenting data collection.

Provide sustained funding for surveys like the Parenting Today national survey that generate continuous insights that inform policy, program design and future investment.

Recommendation 13: Invest in evidence-informed peer support models.

Scale proven peer-led programs nationally to strengthen parents' self-advocacy and navigation skills while leveraging local community support.

Recommendation 14: Remove system barriers between State/Territory and Commonwealth services.

Design systems with simple entry points, multiple pathways and strong safeguards so families do not fall through jurisdictional gaps. Streamlined gateways are essential to ensure equitable access for those facing the greatest complexities.

Recommendation 15: Provide sustainable, flexible funding for full service delivery.

Adopt long-term funding models that cover the real cost of delivery, including infrastructure and “glue” functions, to ensure services remain viable, effective and sustainable.

Recommendation 16: Strengthen Outcome 1

Strengthen Outcome 1 by explicitly incorporating parental wellbeing, for example:

Programs

Below are key programs and initiatives delivered by the Parenting Research Centre that are funded and/or relevant to a new approach to programs for families and children.

MyTime

MyTime is a well-established, facilitated peer support program in Australia. It is currently funded through the Children and Parenting Support stream of the Families and Children Activity (DSS) and is coordinated by PRC in partnership with eight key state and territory providers and a series of sub-contracted entities. Designed for parents and carers of children aged 0-18 years with a disability, developmental delay or chronic medical condition, the program provides opportunities to share experiences with peers in similar situations and receive valuable social and emotional support.

MyTime offers skilled guidance from trained facilitators, who help parents and carers access local services and reliable information. While adults participate in the program, play helpers engage pre-school aged children in targeted activities.

PRC developed MyTime and coordinates more than 180 groups nationwide, delivered by eight state-based disability and family support partner agencies. Groups are offered both in-person and virtually to reduce barriers such as geographic isolation, transport limitations or significant health concerns.

Since its inception in 2006, more than 12,000 parents and carers have participated in MyTime. This evidence informed, peer led program has the capacity to scale and adapt to meet a range of challenges and service solutions for government and the community. Parents consistently report MyTime as a critical support and capacity building program. Identified gaps include MyTime for young adults, MyTime for siblings and extended virtual MyTime to support hard to reach communities and families.

Raising Children Network

Research from the Parenting Research Centre's survey shows that three in four parents seek information, guidance and support online, including those experiencing socio-economic disadvantage or psychological distress.

The Parenting Research Centre, together with the Murdoch Children's Research Institute, delivers the Raising Children Network (RCN), an initiative providing accessible, evidence-based online resources for parents, carers and the professionals who support them. Funded through the Children and Parenting Support stream of the Families and Children Activity (DSS), RCN has been supported by successive Australian governments since 2006. The website now reaches more than 80,000 parents and professionals every day with up-to-date, plain-language information about raising children.

Audience data from raisingchildren.net.au shows that connecting with trusted, credible information helps parents know what to do next, try new strategies, feel less worried, build confidence and connect with services. RCN content is designed to meet the needs of diverse families, including fathers, grandparents and kinship carers, and families with children with disability. Resources also cover key areas such as family violence and child sexual safety and are available in a range of accessible formats, including audio, video and parenting-in-pictures.

In the 2024–26 period, RCN is focused on strengthening the reach of its messages across new digital channels—including social media and emerging AI-driven tools—and on expanding partnerships with government and non-government organisations to connect with approximately 2.5 million families nationwide.

Supporting the mental health and wellbeing of parents and carers is also central to the RCN-developed *Raising Healthy Minds* app, funded by the Australian Government Department of Health. Both RCN and the Raising Healthy Minds app have significant potential for growth as a one-stop source of evidence-based information and tools that reduce stress and enhance parenting confidence, particularly for fathers in the early years.

smalltalk

smalltalk is an example of an evidence-based parenting program that support parents of children from 0-4 years by promoting quality everyday interactions that boost children's learning and development. With funding from the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, *smalltalk* is delivered through every supported playgroup in Victoria funded by the Department. The program equips parents with practical strategies such as tuning into their child's cues, using everyday moments as learning opportunities, and fostering a stimulating home environment. It also emphasises parental self-care and building community connections. Developed through rigorous research, *smalltalk* has demonstrated sustained improvements in parent–child interactions, home learning environments and early literacy outcomes.

smalltalk contributes to improved mental health for parents and carers by strengthening their sense of efficacy and confidence in the parenting role. Its focus on self-care and stress management supports parents and carers to maintain their wellbeing, while the group-based delivery model fosters social connection and reduces isolation. By offering practical, strengths-based strategies and promoting access to local support services, *smalltalk* empowers parents to engage more positively with their children and to navigate the challenges of early parenthood with greater resilience.

Responses to the Discussion Paper

Vision and outcomes

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

PRC strongly supports the proposed vision:

All children and young people are supported by strong families who have the skills and confidence to nurture them.

The vision aligns with a substantial body of evidence showing that the quality of day-to-day interactions between parents/carers and children is one of the most powerful, modifiable influences on children's development and wellbeing.

Parenting support is one of the most effective ways to improve child wellbeing, by focusing on strengthening parent–child interactions and relationships. These supports, whether delivered through peer networks, group-based programs, or online information services, provide parents with the skills, knowledge and confidence they need to meet their child's evolving needs.

Every child is unique, but children's wellbeing is consistently linked to parenting qualities such as warmth, sensitivity, responsiveness and flexibility. These can be expressed in diverse ways across cultures and family contexts. Supporting parents to develop and express these qualities is one of the most effective ways to buffer the effects of social adversity and supplement broader policy efforts aimed at addressing the causes of family stress.

Evidence shows that parenting is a key determinant of children's mental health, physical health, educational outcomes, and protection from maltreatment and family violence. Yet despite this strong evidence base, high-quality parenting supports are not routinely available at scale. Many parents who could benefit, particularly those facing emerging challenges, miss out due to fragmented policy settings, restrictive eligibility rules, and limited access to parent-only interventions.

The proposed vision provides a clear foundation for addressing these system barriers. It reinforces that:

- **Parents are the central agents of change in children's lives.** When parents are supported, children thrive. Any program design must embed *family-centred, relational, and strengths-based* approaches across all service systems
- **All parents need support at different points in their child's development.** This can be from a range of sources, from informal networks to structured, evidence-based programs.
- **Parenting support is a capacity-building endeavour.** It is aimed at strengthening parents' skills, confidence, autonomy and ability to manage future challenges.
- **Effective support is built on collaborative, respectful relationships.** This recognises parents and carers as experts in their own children and acknowledging their existing strengths.

PRC's work across *smalltalk*, MyTime and the Raising Children Network, as well as our work in developing and implementing practice frameworks, demonstrates the transformative impact of accessible, evidence-based supports when they are delivered early, consistently and at scale. These programs build parent confidence, reduce stress, foster social connection, and strengthen children's learning and wellbeing, directly realising the vision of strong families raising thriving children.

These services have significant capacity to scale and demonstrate an exceptional partnership between the Federal Government and the Parenting Research Centre who, through our work as an intermediary, sub-contract services in all jurisdictions with local community-based providers. This creates efficiencies for Government.

Are the two main outcomes what we should be working towards for children and families? Why/why not?

PRC supports the dual focus on outcomes for both parents/carers and children. Children's ability to thrive is inseparable from the support, confidence and wellbeing of the adults who care for them. Elevating parents within the outcomes framework appropriately recognises their central role in child development and reflects strong international evidence that parent-focused interventions can drive improvements across multiple domains of child wellbeing.

We recommend that **parental wellbeing be explicitly recognised within the outcomes**, alongside empowerment. Empowerment alone is insufficient when many parents, particularly those facing vulnerability, are experiencing significant stress or mental health challenges.

This trend underscores that parents cannot be fully empowered without adequate support for their own mental health, social connection and coping skills.

Our programs consistently demonstrate the value of addressing parent wellbeing in tandem with parenting skill development, for example:

- **smalltalk** improves parent efficacy, reduces stress, strengthens parent–child interactions, and enhances home learning environments.
- **MyTime** provides social and emotional support for parents of children with developmental delays or disability—reducing isolation and increasing coping capacity.
- **Raising Children Network** provides trusted, evidence-based information that reduces worry, builds confidence, and connects families to services.

Together, these programs illustrate that **improving parent wellbeing is not an adjacent benefit. It is a core mechanism through which children's resilience and long-term outcomes are strengthened.**

Program structure

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

A single national program has the potential to increase flexibility by reducing duplication, streamlining administrative requirements and enabling more coordinated, consistent service delivery. Consolidating multiple streams into a unified program would simplify governance, monitoring, and reporting processes, allowing providers to redirect efforts toward direct service delivery, community engagement, innovation and continuous improvement. A coordinated national approach may also support more equitable access to early intervention services across locations and reduce gaps or overlap in support for families with intersectional issues.

We support the review's intention to ground the new program fund in a robust evidence-informed approach that integrates research evidence, professional expertise and lived experience. This approach is more likely to produce services that are effective, culturally safe and responsive to local needs. Achieving this, though, requires investment in provider capability, including training, supervision, communities of practice and practical implementation tools, to ensure that evidence can be interpreted and applied effectively. Lived-experience involvement must also be embedded in ways that are safe, meaningful and sustainable.

To ensure a genuine evidence-informed approach, the national program should include dedicated support for capacity building, practice guidance and continuous improvement. With the right infrastructure in place, a single national program could enable providers to deliver more connected and integrated services that are responsive and outcomes-focused and strengthen the wellbeing and resilience of Australian children and families.

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 into the future?

Our two programs currently funded through the Families and Children Activity, MyTime and Raising Children Network, align well with Stream 1: National Programs and Information Services. Both are long standing, nationally available programs delivered free to all families.

MyTime operates across all states and territories, offering both virtual and in-person groups for parents and carers of children with a disability, developmental delay or chronic issues. Its national footprint and flexible delivery model ensure equitable access, particularly for families facing barriers such as geographic isolation, transport issues or health concerns.

The Raising Children Network provides families and professionals with free, up-to-date, independent and evidence-based information that supports children's healthy development. Content is rigorously quality assured by experts, which is increasingly important in a digital environment where parents encounter large volumes of unverified information through social media and emerging AI tools. Recent funding has enabled RCN to invest in genuine partnership approaches with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and culturally diverse communities. Through co-design and targeted resource development, these collaborations ensure that RCN content is culturally responsive, strengths based and

accessible. This work is critical for ensuring that national information services meet the needs of all families, particularly those who have historically been underserved by mainstream services.

Programs like MyTime and RCN reflect what families need now: trusted information, accessible support and connection to community and services regardless of location or circumstance. They are also well placed to meet future needs, as families continue to seek digital support, hybrid service models, and evidence-based guidance that is culturally responsive and easy to navigate.

Stream 1 therefore provides an appropriate and future-focused home for both programs, supporting their continued contribution to national consistency, broad reach and quality information for Australian families.

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

To help organisations address current challenges, the program should prioritise support for providers to **collect, interpret and use data effectively**. Practical investment in data capability would enable services to generate meaningful insights and use them to guide decision-making, strengthen practice quality, enhance responsiveness to families and improve accountability across the system.

We also recommend **targeted investment in workforce capability and capacity**. Strengthening the FaC program through workforce development would enable practitioners to apply evidence-informed practice, interpret and use data with confidence, engage safely and respectfully with families with lived experience, and maintain fidelity to effective service models while adapting to local community contexts. This may include funding for training, mentoring, reflective practice, communities of practice and access to specialist advisory support.

A further priority is **cultural fitness** - ensuring that services are a good cultural fit for the communities they aim to support. Cultural fitness should be embedded in commissioning, program guidelines, workforce development and evaluation. This includes supporting co-design, strengthening partnerships with community-controlled organisations, and ensuring that service models reflect the values, priorities and lived experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

In addition, organisations would benefit from **flexible funding arrangements** that reflect the real cost of delivering culturally responsive, evidence-informed supports, particularly in communities experiencing multiple forms of disadvantage. Increased flexibility would allow providers to tailor delivery, respond to emerging needs and sustain high-quality supports across diverse contexts. Funding agreements over multiple years also provides security for staff and allows organisations to plan and invest over a long enough period to measure impact and build infrastructure, relationships and staff capability.

There is also significant value in strengthening **partnerships with national universal platforms**. For example, RCN delivers high-quality, evidence-based parenting information at scale, and more intentional alignment between funded programs and RCN would promote coherent, accessible messaging for families. Scaling the distribution of evidence-

based messages across new and emerging channels, including broader digital platforms, social media, big-tech channels, employee assistance programs and community organisations, would improve reach and consistency. Professionals similarly rely on peaks, networks and state and territory systems for guidance; embedding evidence-based messages within these systems requires dedicated effort, resourcing and coordination.

Further enhancements could also be achieved by expanding the program's focus on building the capability of the **child protection and broader frontline workforce**, in partnership with universal platforms such as RCN. Child protection practitioners, foster and kinship care workers, MCH nurses, allied health professionals, navigators, social workers and community development workers would benefit from structured access to RCN's evidence-based resources on child development, health literacy and parenting. Implementation support and coaching would enable practitioners to confidently use and share these tools in their daily work with families.

Together, these changes would strengthen sector capability, improve service quality, and ensure that children, parents and carers, particularly those facing barriers, are more effectively supported across Australia.

Prioritising investment

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

We agree that the four priorities outlined in the discussion paper provide a strong foundation for improving outcomes for children and families. Each priority aligns with current evidence about what supports children's development, strengthens family functioning, and promotes equity across diverse communities.

Investing early is critical, and it is important to recognise that "early intervention" refers to responding early in the life of a problem, not necessarily always early in the life of a child. Families and children may require timely, proportionate support at different stages, including during adolescence or when challenges such as homelessness, mental health difficulties or family violence emerge. Early intervention may need to occur in parallel with tertiary service provision, for instance, providing targeted child mental health supports during family crises such as homelessness or violence.

Investing in existing infrastructure that plays a pivotal role in early intervention and prevention for children and families, such as playgroups, Early Childhood Hubs and local community services, especially those experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage, is ideal. The reach of these services to families and children in the early years is significant and invaluable.

Evidence-based programs could be adopted in a similar way to the funding provided by the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (Victorian Government). This could be replicated at scale nationally and with a multiple year investment to drive long term change and impact in vulnerable and at-risk communities. The Singapore government has taken this approach at a whole of population level, with a cultural adaptation of the *smalltalk*

program and such an initiative could create inter-generational change and capacity building, ultimately benefit families and save downstream costs to Government.

The emphasis on **connected and integrated services** is also well supported by evidence. Families rarely experience challenges in isolation; interconnected needs are best met through systems that communicate, coordinate and reduce the burden on families to navigate multiple services. Integration increases service responsiveness, continuity and the likelihood that families receive the right support at the right time.

We also endorse the priority to **ensure services are informed by and responsive to community needs**. Services are most effective when they reflect the cultures, strengths, aspirations and lived experiences of the communities they serve. Embedding co-design, culturally responsive practice, and community-led decision-making within commissioning and service delivery enables models that are both effective and trusted. This is essential for improving access and reducing long-term disparities.

Improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families requires a structural commitment to increasing the role, number and sustainability of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations. A culturally safe system is not only one that adapts mainstream models, but one that enables Aboriginal-led organisations to self-determine, design, govern and deliver supports in ways that reflect their communities' knowledge, strengths and priorities.

Together, these four priorities provide a coherent direction for reform. They recognise the importance of responding early and proportionately, strengthening service integration and grounding supports in lived experience and community voice.

Improving family wellbeing

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, including support for families at risk of child protection involvement and for young parents, align with the needs and priorities we observe in our work.

Young parents often face the dual challenge of navigating their own developmental transitions while simultaneously supporting the development of their child. Effective service responses must therefore recognise and respond to both sets of developmental needs.

In our work with organisations that support young parents, we have seen the importance of approaches that are grounded in evidence, informed by lived experience, and shaped by practitioner insight. Through evidence reviews, consultation with young parents, and engagement with practitioners, we have contributed to the development of practice frameworks that strengthen young parents' skills, confidence and connection to support and culture.

These frameworks emphasise developmental considerations, such as the need for scaffolding when goal-setting or forward planning, and the importance of sensitive, non-

judgemental support when learning new parenting skills. Approaches that integrate these elements are more likely to build young parents' capacity, enhance their child's development and help reduce the risk of child protection involvement.

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

Parents of children with disability and parents with an intellectual disability are groups who require specific, tailored support to ensure family wellbeing. Evidence indicates that these parents face distinctive stressors and are at heightened risk of poor wellbeing, social isolation and reduced access to informal support networks. Many of these issues relate not to parenting capability, but to the additional time, energy and skills required to care for a child with complex needs, combined with structural barriers such as poverty, health challenges and limited service responsiveness.

Parents of children with developmental concerns reported poorer mental health, lower parenting confidence, greater frustration and fatigue, and fewer opportunities to rest and re-energise compared to other parents. They were also more likely to feel guilt or shame about their parenting and less likely to have trusted people to turn to for advice, relying instead on professionals and online sources. For parents with intellectual disability, the challenges are compounded by stigma, assumptions about their capacity, and inconsistent access to tailored, evidence-based supports - factors that contribute to their over-representation in child protection systems.

Given these realities, it is essential that the model for government-funded family and child supports includes **dedicated, accessible, and developmentally appropriate supports for:**

1. Parents of children with disability and developmental concerns

These parents require support not only within NDIS or the proposed Thriving Kids model, but also within **mainstream family support systems**. Parenting support is a critical mechanism for child wellbeing. Parents are children's primary agents of change, and strengthening parent capability improves developmental outcomes across childhood. Services should reduce stigma, be available early in the life of a problem, and recognise that families may need parenting support alongside more intensive interventions.

2. Parents with an intellectual disability

Parents with an intellectual disability can and do parent effectively, particularly when teaching and support approaches are tailored to their learning needs. A large body of evidence demonstrates what works: competency-based teaching, tailored pacing, home-based learning, scaffolded skills practice and respectful, strengths-focused engagement. There is currently a **service gap**: many families with a parent with intellectual disability struggle to access appropriate parenting support, and professionals often lack training or tools to provide it. Rebuilding a national practice infrastructure, such as the former Healthy Start network coordinated by PRC, would strengthen capability and reduce preventable child protection involvement.

In summary, parents with disability and parents of children with disability are not a homogenous group. Supports must be:

- co-designed with parents and carers
- culturally safe for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families
- responsive to families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- embedded within communities rather than added on as specialist adjuncts

This aligns with the principles of cultural fitness and ensures relevance and accessibility.

Other groups worth consideration include two developmental periods that stand out in the evidence as requiring targeted, developmentally attuned support: early adolescence (9-12-years-old) and young adults in transition from school to work/further study. These are well-documented stress points that influence long-term wellbeing, family functioning and long-term outcomes.

Research shows that the preteen years represent a **second developmental window of opportunity**, during which timely support can meaningfully alter trajectories in mental health, behaviour and social development. Early adolescence is a period of rapid neurological, emotional and social change that corresponds with changing parent-child relationships. Parents often need support in adjusting boundaries, communication and supervision. Secure relationships remain critical for positive youth development.

The **transition for young adults from school to work/further study** is recognised internationally as one of the most challenging transitions in the lifespan, both for young people and their families. It is a peak period for psychological distress, and contrary to popular opinion, parents and carers continue to play a critical role in supporting and advising young adults. Evidence shows that long-term wellbeing is shaped by success at this transition.

Measuring outcomes

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

To understand impact and continuously strengthen practice, organisations need access to timely, easy-to-use data that can be fed back to agencies in a practical, actionable format. A national approach that provides the support, tools and skills to collect, interpret and apply data meaningfully would help practitioners understand what is working, identify emerging needs and refine practice in real time. This would embed continuous improvement into everyday service delivery.

This must sit alongside strong investment in workforce capability. Practitioners and organisations need confidence and skills in data capability, evaluation, reflective practice and ethical reporting, alongside building capacity to assess community needs and translate these to solutions. Building these skills requires structured training, supervision, coaching and practical resources, and includes an understanding of how to include family and community knowledge, particularly in rural/remote areas and within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

All data collection and use must also uphold Indigenous Data Sovereignty, ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples maintain ownership, control and authority over data relating to them. Culturally safe approaches include community governance, consent-based data processes, choice in how families share information, and culturally led interpretation of findings. For Aboriginal communities, meaningful data is defined and interpreted within cultural contexts, not solely through mainstream indicators.

Services also require holistic implementation and impact data, including information on fidelity of practice or program delivery, client engagement and outcomes measures such as parenting confidence, parent wellbeing, family functioning and connection to community and culturally relevant supports. Combined with place-based and demographic insights, this enables services to plan more effectively, adapt to community needs and address service gaps. However, the value of this data is only realised when it is returned to services in accessible, practical formats that practitioners can use with confidence.

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 demonstrate impact in ways that align with the themes outlined earlier in this submission, the most valuable information to share includes clear indicators of change supported by culturally grounded narratives. Quantitative data can show improvements in parenting capability, parental wellbeing, child development, family functioning and connection to supports – all areas we have identified as central to strengthening family resilience and achieving the program’s intended outcomes.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, practices must reflect Indigenous Data Sovereignty principles noted earlier, including community governance, consent-based processes and culturally led interpretation. Meaningful data for these communities must be defined within cultural contexts, not only through standardised metrics.

Engagement and access data, such as service reach, reduced wait times and uptake of culturally safe supports, also help assess whether services are responsive, equitable and aligned with community needs. Qualitative insights, including lived-experience accounts and reflections on cultural safety, provide essential context and capture outcomes that matter to families but may not be reflected numerically.

Practice-level evidence showing how organisations use data to refine services is also critical. Examples such as feedback loops, reflective practice tools and real-time dashboards demonstrate the continuous improvement approach emphasised throughout our submission and show how services adapt in response to emerging needs and community voice.

Strengthening practitioner and organisational data capability, collection and use will ensure shared data is accurate, meaningful and ethically applied. With appropriate support, data becomes a driver of high-quality, culturally safe and responsive service delivery rather than an administrative burden. In terms of data collection, a line often used to reflect best practice is no data without the story and no story without the data. Any system should incorporate both elements to ensure the full picture is represented.

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

We suggest a standard case study template, based on our previous work that has elicited case studies from key populations, with prompts such as:

- Context: the family's starting point, community context and presenting needs
- Actions: the supports provided, including culturally responsive or evidence-informed practices
- Changes: outcomes observed for the child, parent or family, linked back to SCORE or other outcome domains
- Enablers: what helped the change occur (e.g. culturally safe practice, collaboration, navigation support)
- Client voice: culturally appropriate quotes or lived-experience reflections (with consent)
- Practitioner reflections and learnings: insights that show how staff used data, supervision or continuous improvement to tailor support

Support for staff confidence

Helpful resources may include:

- Examples of high-quality case studies
- Short training modules on ethical storytelling and the safe use of client narratives
- Advice on how to protect privacy, particularly in small communities
- Guidance on linking narrative examples to measurable outcomes

Integration with continuous improvement

We suggest templates that encourage practitioners to describe:

- How practice changed based on data or client feedback
- What was learned and applied
- How insights will shape future service delivery

This helps shift case studies from being simple “success stories” to meaningful examples of impact, reflection and improvement.

Other

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

Fund the Glue. The cost of back of house activity such as supervision of staff, training, governance, administration and essential infrastructure is fundamental to the success of any service. Dedicated and adequate **glue funding** is integral to effective functioning of

services, but it is often unfunded or reliant on short term grants. Funding the glue also reduces red-tape and administrative burdens by streamlining contracting, reducing the number of contracts and funding for longer periods to ensure sustainability.

Ensure gateways between State and Commonwealth systems are not barriers. Children and families too often fall through the cracks. Any new system must be designed with multiple pathways, built-in safeguards, and easy entry points so that those who can least afford to navigate complexity are not left behind.

Funding. A long term, flexible funding model sufficient to meet the full costs of program delivery (which includes glue and infrastructure) is required to ensure the ongoing sustainability and viability of services to children and families.

Test the new model before going “live” with the final approach. The modern parenting landscape is diverse, and complex and any system must make sense for families living with complexity. It is not linear and there should be multiple redundancies to catch families who fall through the cracks. The Parenting Research Centre and Raising Children Network would be very happy to “trial or review” any approaches to road test prior to going live with the final approach.

Online information and digital service options are essential components of a modern family support system. As mentioned earlier, with 74% of parents accessing online parenting information in a 12-month period, trusted digital resources ensure families can obtain evidence-based guidance at a time and in a format that suits them. This aligns strongly with **Stream 1: National Programs and Information Services**, which is well placed to support consistent, high-quality online information for all families.

Extending accessibility via online service delivery is equally important. PRC’s consultations with parents¹ show that telepractice is generally well received, particularly for its convenience, reduced travel burden and suitability for families in rural, remote or pressured urban contexts. A blended model also supports continuity of care and improves engagement for groups that may find traditional service formats less accessible, aligning with the preventative aims of **Stream 2: Prevention and Early Intervention**.

Evidence from the NGO Telepractice Venture, coordinated by PRC in partnership with Karitane, demonstrates that coordinated capacity-building, such as Communities of Practice and standardised telepractice frameworks, **strengthens practitioner capability and reduces variability in service quality**. Embedding telepractice as part of a virtual continuum of care can help services respond earlier, reduce fragmentation and prevent escalation into acute systems. This reinforces the intent of **Stream 3: Intensive Family Supports**, ensuring families with complex needs can maintain connection even during crisis or transition.

Taken together, digital resources and blended service delivery provide a scalable, equitable and evidence-informed way to improve access, responsiveness and continuity across all three funding streams.

¹ <https://www.parentingrc.org.au/tools/telepractice/telepractice-research/>