

Strong Communities Ltd – Response to Proposed Funding Changes

Strong Communities Ltd is a not for profit, place-based, social enterprise organisation based in Central Queensland, dedicated to strengthening families, empowering parents, and creating thriving, connected multicultural communities. Our work is grounded in early intervention, social inclusion, and practical supports that build family capability and long-term resilience. We partner closely with local families, schools, community groups, other organisations and service providers to deliver programs that are responsive, culturally aware, and tailored to the unique needs of regional and rural communities.

As a small but highly trusted organisation, we are deeply embedded in the communities we serve, ensuring families feel safe, respected, and supported. Through evidence-informed practice, relational approaches, and a commitment to continuous improvement, Strong Communities helps children grow up safe, supported, and connected, while empowering parents and caregivers to thrive in their role.

We are currently a funded Community Partner, under the Communities for Children Program in the Gladstone and Rockhampton Central Queensland Region, since 2019, and participate in research activities on our parenting programs with Restacking the Odds and CQ University/ Gladstone Region Together.

The Communities for Children (CfC) program has been central to Strong Communities ability to build capacity, deliver high-impact services, strengthen relationships with other providers and communities, co-design supports with families and others providers, deliver community strengthening initiatives that align with our regional communities needs, not just funding cycles. We have been able to participate in working groups, data reflection and ensure that place based initiatives meet our communities needs.

Our support for the reform, and our concern:

We welcome the Governments intention to reduce fragmentation, strengthen outcomes and create more flexible and streamlined national program. We agree that we need to prioritise prevention, early intervention, cultural responsiveness and local decision making. Our organisation has waitlists for parenting programs and supported

playgroups across our region, and we would welcome more resources to be able to reach those that need it the most. Our hope is that new programs will build on the success of current programs in our region for children, families and communities.

Vision and outcomes

- The new vision aligns strongly with Strong Communities' commitment to early intervention, place-based support, and strengthening family capability.
- Both outcomes are appropriate and reflect what families in Central Queensland tell us they need.
- The outcomes reinforce our core purpose; empowering parents, building resilience, and supporting children to thrive from early childhood through adolescence and into adulthood.

Program structure

- A single national program may give us greater flexibility to tailor activities around local needs and reduce administrative burden. However, we do not believe we have been provided with enough information to answer this confidently.
- Our programs fit across stream 2, particularly early support, community-based activities, and targeted family strengthening.
- Future improvements should include streamlined reporting, flexible budgeting, and recognition of the unique challenges faced by smaller, place-based organisations in regional areas.

Prioritising investment

- The four priorities are appropriate and align with what we see across Central Queensland.
- Additional considerations: transport disadvantage, digital exclusion, community isolation, and culturally responsive service models.
- Recognising the distinct contribution fathers make to child development, father-inclusive approaches should also be prioritised.
- Investment should prioritise organisations with deep local relationships and proven community trust.

Improving family wellbeing

- The proposed focus areas mirror our current work, especially early intervention, young parents, and families at risk.
- Further needs include neurodivergent families, rural/remote parents with limited service access, and migrants.
- Strengthening peer-led models and lived-experience involvement would increase impact.

Coordinated services

- Effective approaches include warm referrals, shared care-planning, multidisciplinary networking, and co-designed pathways with families.
- Grant applications should demonstrate genuine community involvement, partnerships, cultural capability, and local workforce investment.
- Assessment should prioritise community trust, place-based presence, and evidence of collaboration. Co-location does not always guarantee collaboration. We also know that in regional Queensland, travelling to a 'Centre' is not always possible, and our services need to have the ability to travel to where families are. Strong Communities currently delivers in multiple locations in Central Queensland.
- Although there are many benefits of co-location of services, we encourage the focus also be on relationships and connection. Applications should not be awarded merits purely on the capacity of co-location.

Responding to community need

- Beyond location, factors include cost-of-living pressures, cultural diversity, domestic and family violence prevalence, transport barriers, and limited youth supports.
- Organisations should show community voice through data, consultation, co-design, and demonstrated flexibility in adapting programs to emerging needs.

Improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families

- Co-design with Elders and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders should be embedded from program design to evaluation in each community.
- Funding must support cultural healing models, local workforce development, and shared decision-making.
- The process should prioritise ACCOs through set-aside streams, simplified applications, and longer-term contracts.

Measuring outcomes

- Useful data: wellbeing measures, family capability indicators, engagement patterns, longitudinal outcomes, and qualitative feedback.
- We can share data on participation, protective factors, family resilience, and community connection.
- Relevant SCORE domains: Circumstances: Family Functioning, Community Participation, Social Connectedness, Wellbeing.
- Templates should guide clear structure, include prompts for context, change stories, family voice, and outcomes over time.

Working together

- Relational contracting means shared goals, trust-based partnership, flexible delivery, and reduced compliance burden.
- Criteria should include community trust, local presence, collaboration, cultural capability, and demonstrated outcomes.
- Strong Communities is interested in a relational contract, we are a stable, place-based organisation with deep community relationships and proven impact. We have worked under the CfC Facilitating partnership model, and strongly support this approach.
- Long Term contracts are encouraged to ensure stability in services for children and families, and allow the service to participate in long term data collection and interpretation.

Other

- Smaller, place-based organisations must have equitable access to funding, not overshadowed by large national providers, particularly in regional areas.
- Program design should recognise regional workforce shortages, rising complexity in family needs, and the importance of flexible, community-led delivery.