

Discussion Paper

New Program Structure

The new program will support activities that contribute to two key outcomes:

1. Parents and caregivers are empowered to raise healthy, resilient children.
2. Children are supported to grow into healthy, resilient adults. We know these outcomes take time – and that many factors shape the lives of children and families.

Funding applications will be assessed under three activity streams:

- National programs and information services – making sure families across Australia have access to trusted advice and resources, wherever they live.
- Prevention and early intervention – supporting families early, before challenges escalate.
- Intensive family supports – for families who need more targeted, wraparound support.

When applying, providers will nominate the stream that best fits their services. If successful, they will receive one grant agreement under the new program – even if they deliver services across multiple streams. This approach gives providers the flexibility to adapt and respond to the changing needs of families and communities over time.

Appendix A – Discussion Questions

Vision and outcomes

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

Yes, the vision reflects what we all want for children and families. It acknowledges the long-term, relational nature of child development and the critical role of safe, supported caregivers. In remote NT communities, children thrive when families feel culturally safe, empowered, and connected to community, culture, and Country.

The two outcomes are appropriate and align with what frontline staff work towards every day. However, it is important to note that reaching these outcomes in remote contexts is significantly more complex due to high mobility, limited services, cultural obligations, environmental barriers, and workforce shortages.

Services often spend considerable time building trust, navigating kinship systems, and engaging families who may have experienced significant trauma.

Program structure

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

A single national program would provide greater flexibility, especially for organisations delivering multiple service types (early intervention, community wellbeing, intensive supports) across diverse locations. This structure reduces administrative burden and supports a holistic, integrated approach.

The three streams do reflect the broad needs of children and families in our communities. Our work fits across prevention, early intervention, and intensive support. However, **remote communities** require more flexibility than metropolitan areas due to:

- sudden changes in community need (e.g., unrest, Sorry Business, weather events)
- fluctuating access to families
- limited workforce availability
- the need to adapt service delivery to cultural protocols

Recommended adjustment:

The program should explicitly acknowledge that remote servicing requires higher per-client funding, more staffing resources, and flexibility in delivery milestones.

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?

The listed priorities are appropriate. Early intervention, young parents, and targeted family support are all critical areas of need. However, remote communities would benefit from additional priorities, such as:

- Cultural healing programs led or guided by Elders and community leaders.
- Mental health literacy and wellbeing initiatives for families and children.
- Safe and stable housing, which is a major driver of family stress and statutory involvement.
- Place-based approaches that respect cultural rhythms, community movement, and seasonal patterns.

Current priorities do not yet fully account for the logistical, cultural, and environmental realities of delivering services in remote NT settings.

Improving family wellbeing

The proposed focus areas align with our service needs. Many families we work with experience social isolation, overcrowding, grief and loss, mental health challenges, and a high risk of child protection involvement.

Additional groups DSS should consider include:

- families impacted by intergenerational trauma
- High rates of Family Domestic and Sexual Violence
- fathers and male caregivers who often lack targeted support
- kinship carers with complex caring arrangements
- families who move frequently between communities and urban centres

Approaches that work best include:

- regular presence in community
- strengths-based, trauma-informed practice
- cultural supervision and guidance
- On-Country activities that promote healing and connection

Connected, co-located, and integrated services

Co-location can be helpful, but in remote communities it is rarely possible due to infrastructure limitations. More effective strategies include:

- shared case conferences across agencies
- joint outreach trips
- strong referral pathways using warm handovers
- community engagement through schools, Elders groups, and community events
- employment of local Aboriginal staff who provide continuity and cultural brokerage

To demonstrate community connection, organisations should be assessed on:

- evidence of co-design with community
- partnerships with ACCOs and Elders
- culturally safe practices
- representation of Aboriginal staff
- long-term presence in the region
- ability to adapt to local cultural protocols

Responding to community need

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

Beyond locational disadvantage, DSS should consider:

- cultural obligations (ceremony, Sorry Business)
- language diversity
- extremely limited service availability
- seasonal access issues such as road closures
- high levels of transience and family mobility
- limited digital access (phones, internet, credit)

To show genuine responsiveness, organisations can provide:

- community-consultation summaries
- local needs assessments
- stakeholder letters of support
- evidence of co-design with families and Elders
- case trends showing emerging community priorities

Improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families

To increase ACCO participation, DSS could:

- simplify application and reporting requirements
- fund grant-writing support and organisational capacity building
- offer longer-term, stable funding
- provide pathways for mainstream organisations to partner meaningfully with ACCOs

Program design could be strengthened by including:

- cultural safety standards
- flexibility to deliver healing-on-country programs
- budgeting for cultural supervision
- requirements for engaging local Aboriginal workers, interpreters, and Elders

Measuring outcomes

Data collection in remote communities is extremely difficult.

Challenges include:

- low literacy and preference for oral storytelling
- lack of phone credit or changing phone numbers
- language barriers
- high mobility
- shame, fear, and mistrust related to child protection involvement
- community engagement occurring informally (shop, oval, school) where formal assessments are inappropriate
- pressing crises where families need help immediately, not data collection

Because of these factors, standardised DEX/SCORE tools do not always capture genuine progress.

What data would help us understand impact?

- narrative case stories
- observations of changes in parenting confidence
- increases in school engagement and attendance
- cultural connection and participation
- improvements in family functioning, safety, routines
- reduced need for crisis intervention
- qualitative feedback from families and Elders

What data is most valuable to share?

Narrative evidence is often more culturally appropriate and accurate than numerical ratings.

What SCORE domain is most relevant?

- Family functioning
- Personal and family safety
- Mental health and wellbeing
- Community participation

What guidance would help?

- templates that allow narrative, story-based evidence
- examples of culturally safe case studies
- guidance on gathering data conversationally rather than through structured interviews

Working Together

Relational contracting means ongoing partnership, open communication, and shared problem solving rather than transactional reporting. It is particularly important in remote regions where service conditions change quickly.

Criteria should include:

- cultural safety
- strong performance history
- community trust
- stability of presence in remote locations
- partnerships with ACCOs
- proven adaptability

Yes, our organisation is interested in relational contracting, as it supports long-term planning, stable workforce development, and deeper community engagement.

Other

DSS should understand that remote delivery comes with:

- significantly higher operational costs
- need for additional staff to maintain consistency
- long travel times, weather disruptions, and limited infrastructure
- cultural obligations that shape availability and engagement
- challenges with recruitment and retention
- the need for flexible targets and culturally appropriate reporting

Most importantly:

Data collection systems must be redesigned to reflect the cultural, logistical, and environmental realities of remote communities. Without this, reported outcomes will never accurately represent the impact services are having.