Are you an individual or making a submission on behalf of an organisation?

Organisation

Organisation name

Central Queensland Indigenous Development

Position

Chief Services Officer

Is your organisation….?

- An Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisation

What type of service or support do you mostly provide?

- A national program and/or information service

- Prevention or early intervention services

- Intensive family supports

What state or territory does your organisation deliver services and supports in?

- Queensland

Where does your organisation deliver most of their services and supports?

Regional area

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

The proposed vision broadly reflects what CQID and other Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) strive toward, ensuring children and young people grow up safe, healthy and supported by strong, capable families. The vision's emphasis on parents and caregivers having the skills and confidence to nurture their children aligns closely with our practice and the evidence base showing that strengthened family capability is the most effective long-term pathway to improved outcomes. This focus is consistent with the Family Matters Report, SNAICC policy positions, and findings from inquiries such as the QFCC Child Protection Inquiry, all of which reinforce that the best outcomes occur when families are empowered.

However, while the vision is directionally strong, CQID believes it can be

strengthened by explicitly embedding culture, community, and self-determination as foundational elements. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, "strength" and "capability" cannot be separated from cultural identity, kinship systems, connection to Country, and the involvement of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations in service design and delivery. Cultural continuity is a proven protective factor, and evidence shows it plays a critical role in reducing the risks associated with child protection involvement, family stress, and intergenerational disadvantage*. Although cultural safety is implied, explicit incorporation would signal the Australian Government's commitment to Closing the Gap Priority Reforms*, particularly the recognition that outcomes improve when Aboriginal people have decision-making authority over programs and policies designed for Aboriginal children.

CQID also encourages DSS to strengthen the vision by referencing the structural and systemic factors that shape families' ability to thrive, including housing shortages, youth justice involvement, cost-of-living pressures, intergenerational trauma, and systemic racism. These drivers significantly influence child protection risk and family wellbeing, particularly in regional communities like those CQID serves. A vision that acknowledges both family capability and the systemic environment they operate in would better reflect the lived reality of families and support a whole-of-system approach to change.

Overall, CQID supports the vision but recommends an explicit commitment to cultural identity, ACCO leadership, community voice, and structural reform to ensure the new National program is not simply reshaping service models but shifting the underlying system that continues to produce inequitable outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

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.

CQID agrees that the two stated outcomes, empowered parents and caregivers, and children supported to grow into healthy, resilient adults, are foundational and appropriate. These outcomes align strongly with our practice across Delegated Authority (DA), family wellbeing service, intensive casework, and early intervention. They reflect a shift from program-driven outputs toward long-term wellbeing and developmental trajectories, which is consistent with evidence from Family Matters*, SNAICC*, and the Closing the Gap Framework*.

However, CQID recommends strengthening the outcomes by explicitly embedding cultural identity, self-determination, and structural equity. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, empowerment is inseparable from cultural safety, cultural connection, and access to community-controlled supports. Research has demonstrated that cultural identity, language, kinship networks, and community connectedness are directly correlated with improved resilience, wellbeing, and long-term life outcomes*. Without naming culture as a core component, the outcomes risk unintentionally defaulting to mainstream frameworks that overlook First Nations strengths and definitions of wellbeing.

In addition, achieving these outcomes requires recognition of the structural determinants that influence family functioning and child safety. Many families CQID supports experience challenges rooted not in parental capability but in systemic inequities, such as housing availability, intergenerational trauma, child safety practices, equity, or limited access to culturally safe services. Naming the broader system and aligning outcomes with Closing the Gap Target 12 (reducing over-representation in child protection), would create a stronger line of sight between this national program and Australia's broader commitments.

CQID believes the outcomes would be significantly strengthened by explicitly including:

• Cultural identity and community connection
• Reduction of statutory intervention and over-representation
• Family-led decision making
• Access to culturally safe, community-controlled supports
• Systemic reform in child protection, housing, education, and youth justice

With these enhancements, CQID strongly supports the two outcomes and believes they will drive meaningful long-term change for families, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

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

CQID supports the transition to a single national program in principle, provided the program design genuinely prioritises flexibility, local decision-making and ACCO-led solutions. Consolidating siloed programs into one overarching framework may reduce administrative burden and allow organisations like CQID to respond more holistically to a family's needs, rather than being constrained by fragmented funding contracts or narrowly defined program outputs.

CQID delivers a large continuum of supports, from early years and family support to intensive family preservation, Delegated Authority, and youth programs. These often overlap for families experiencing multiple pressures. A single national program that allows fluid movement across service levels would increase our ability to respond quickly and effectively, especially in regional and remote contexts where service duplication is low and ACCOs frequently act as the primary local provider.

However, this flexibility will only materialise if the national program has contracting mechanisms that explicitly allow ACCOs to reallocate effort and resources across prevention, early intervention, and intensive support without penalty. Traditional grants often restrict innovation and responsiveness, particularly when organisations are assessed on outputs or pre-defined KPIs that don't reflect the nature of relational, culturally led practice.

CQID also emphasises that a single program must not become a "one size fits all" model that inadvertently mainstreams Aboriginal family support. Flexibility must include:

• ACCO-specific commissioning pathways
• Priority access to long-term contracts for ACCOs
• Funding approaches aligned with cultural governance, kinship systems and Delegated Authority models
• Funding that includes infrastructure and capital
• Recognition that ACCOs often deliver activities across all three funding streams due to unique community needs

With ACCO-led commissioning, outcome-based reporting, and relational contracting, a single national program could meaningfully increase flexibility and reduce administrative burden. Without these safeguards, it risks limiting rather than enhancing ACCO autonomy.

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?

CQID's programs align closely with all three proposed funding streams. Our organisation delivers integrated supports across child and family wellbeing, prevention and early intervention, and intensive family support. Majority of our service pathways naturally flow along this continuum, particularly through Delegated Authority, Strong in Family and Culture, Youth Support Services, and targeted Family Supports. As such, the proposed streams accurately reflect the

types of services CQID provides and are responsive to the needs of the communities we operate in across our 8 office locations (Rockhampton, Gladstone, Woorabinda, Emerald, Longreach, Hervey Bay, Bundaberg and Maryborough – geographical service footprint the size of Victoria)

Stream 1 activities (national platforms and system supports) mirror the contributions ACCOs like CQID make to cultural governance, practice development, workforce strengthening and reforms. Stream 2 aligns with our early intervention, cultural strengthening and family wellbeing programs that aim to prevent escalation into statutory systems. Stream 3 reflects our intensive work with families at risk of, or already experiencing, child protection involvement, a space in which CQID has demonstrated leadership through Delegated Authority, Kinship Mapping, and cultural/family led driven casework.

The streams can address current and future needs effectively, provided they incorporate flexibility for families to move between streams as their circumstances change. Regional communities often experience fluctuating demand due to housing pressures, seasonal employment, youth justice patterns and family violence incidents. A rigid stream structure may unintentionally restrict responsiveness unless accompanied by flexible contracting and ACCO-led decision making.

CQID recommends ensuring the streams allow:

• Integrated service delivery under a single contract
• Cultural work, advocacy, and family-led practice to be recognised as legitimate activities
• Resourcing for housing, infrastructure and capital
• Resourcing for outreach models suited to rural and remote communities
• Cross-sector collaboration, including with child protection, education, health and housing

With these considerations, CQID believes the streams will serve communities now and into the future.

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

CQID identifies several critical changes that would strengthen the national program and help overcome persistent challenges faced by children, families and service providers.

The most significant is the need for funding prioritisation for ACCOs, especially in regions where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are disproportionately represented in child protection, youth justice and housing instability. Particularly in the regional/remote areas CQID delivers services. Evidence shows that ACCO-led services achieve better outcomes and higher engagement, yet ACCOs continue to receive a minority share of government funding*. Prioritising ACCOs in commissioning processes, not just encouraging involvement, is essential to achieving the program's goals and Closing the Gap commitments.

Longer-term contracting (7–10 years) is also vital. Short-term grants limit workforce stability, reduce innovation and restrict the ability of ACCOs to build cultural governance structures, evaluation systems and local training pipelines. Long-term relational contracts would allow CQID to plan sustainably and invest in Aboriginal workforce development, including traineeships, specialised practice roles and leadership capacity building.

The national program should also include integrated funding for ACCOs who provide services across domains such as housing, family support, youth justice, and education. Families rarely present with needs that fit within one program, and silos often cause fragmentation and duplication. ACCOs need the ability to tailor supports holistically, not programmatically.

Finally, the program should resource ACCOs for systems reform participation, not only direct service delivery. Genuine shared decision-making requires ACCOs to participate in local governance tables, co-design processes, data working groups, and cross-agency planning, work that is often unfunded despite being critical to improving outcomes.

These changes would significantly reduce barriers and enable ACCOs like CQID to deliver the most effective, culturally grounded, community-driven solutions.

Referenced:
Closing the Gap Priority Reform 2*, Family Matters Report*, SNAICC Workforce/Sector Strengthening Papers*, QATSICPP partnership frameworks*.

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

CQID strongly supports the four priorities outlined in the discussion paper, as they closely align with the core indicators of improved outcomes identified in the Closing the Gap Framework*, Family Matters Report*, and our own practice experience

across our 8 service locations. Investing early, improving service coordination, delivering programs based on community need, and prioritising ACCO involvement are not only appropriate but essential if the system is to achieve meaningful long-term change.

The first priority, investing early, is consistent with the overwhelming evidence base demonstrating that early intervention reduces the likelihood of escalation to child protection, justice involvement and poorer long-term outcomes*. CQID's work through Strong in Family & Culture/Delegated Authority, early family support, outreach models, and early childhood demonstrates that culturally grounded preventative approaches are far more effective than reactive statutory responses. Early investment must embed cultural identity, family-led models and ACCO governance from the outset.

The second priority, connected, co-located, integrated services, reflects what many families consistently tell us: fragmented, siloed and duplicated systems are exhausting and often harmful. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, the burden of navigating multiple agencies across child protection, health, housing, education and family services creates unnecessary stress and results in disengagement. Integrated models, when delivered by or in partnership with ACCOs, promote continuity, relational trust and more holistic outcomes.

The third priority, services informed by community need, is critical for regional contexts like the 8 service locations where CQID are based and where demographic patterns, mobility, and local pressures can shift rapidly. ACCOs possess the cultural authority, relationships and local knowledge required to identify needs early and respond effectively. For this priority to be realised, commissioning must involve ACCO-led needs assessments, and DSS must avoid over-reliance on national datasets that do not reflect local lived experiences.

The fourth priority, improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children by increasing ACCOs, is one CQID strongly endorses. This aligns with Closing the Gap Priority Reform 2*, Family Matters recommendations*, and QATSICPP leadership*. However, the language should be strengthened from "increasing ACCOs" to "prioritising, resourcing and sustaining ACCO-led responses," ensuring the investment is not tokenistic. ACCOs must be the default providers where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families are the primary service population.

Overall, the four priorities are the right ones, and they closely mirror the way CQID

has already structured its service delivery and cultural governance. With strengthened commitments to ACCO leadership, flexible commissioning and long-term investment, these priorities can lead to significant improvements in outcomes for children and families nationally.

Referenced:
Family Matters Report*, Closing the Gap PR2*, SNAICC Evidence*, Early intervention evidence base (Family Matters/SNAICC)*.

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

In addition to the four priorities, CQID recommends that the department explicitly incorporate priorities related to structural reform, housing stability, intergenerational trauma, and youth transitions, all critical issues that significantly affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

First, structural and systemic reform should be recognised as a key priority area. Many of the risks that lead to child protection involvement are driven by systemic inequities, not parental deficits, including racism, inadequate housing supply, unemployment, child safety practices and not embedding the Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander Placement Principles. Without addressing these broader determinants, early intervention programs will continue to operate against the tide. Embedding system-level reform as a priority would also align with Closing the Gap Priority Reform 1 on shared decision-making and Priority Reform 4 on shared access to data*.

Secondly, the department should prioritise housing stability and homelessness as core to family wellbeing. Housing insecurity is a leading driver of child protection involvement and family stress. In CQID's service regions, families disproportionately experience overcrowding, poor housing quality and limited availability of culturally safe crisis accommodation. Families who are otherwise capable caregivers may have statutory involvement triggered solely because of housing barriers, a structural issue, not a caregiving one. Housing must be recognised as integral to child and family outcomes.

Thirdly, intergenerational trauma and healing should be included as a priority area. Many families accessing services are navigating trauma that spans generations, including the impacts of forced removals, systemic racism, and community-level disadvantage. Noting that this is still occurring today for some families. Healing, culture, family reconnection, and community-led therapeutic supports should be

funded as legitimate service activities rather than being categorised as "soft outcomes." This is consistent with SNAICC's evidence that healing frameworks significantly reduce long-term risk factors*.

Fourth, DSS should include youth transitions, particularly young people exiting OOHC or youth detention, as a priority. These young people are at extreme risk of early parenthood, justice involvement, homelessness and long-term disconnection from family and culture. ACCO-led transitional pathways, mentoring, cultural reconnection and housing supports can significantly shift their life trajectory.

Including these additional priorities will ensure the program more fully captures the lived realities of families across regional Queensland and strengthens the likelihood of long-term positive change.

Referenced:
Family Matters*, QFCC Over-representation Reports*, SNAICC trauma and healing literature*, National DFV evidence applicable to First Nations families*.

8. 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?

Yes, the proposed focus areas strongly align with CQID's services and the needs we see across the communities we support. The focus on families at risk of child protection involvement, children aged 0–5, and young parents mirrors the highest areas of demand in our programs and reflects critical intervention points where ACCO-led responses have the most impact.

Families at risk of child protection involvement represent a core part of CQID's work under Delegated Authority, family preservation models, and early intervention programs. These families often navigate a complex intersection of systemic factors such as housing pressures, financial stress, and the long-lasting impacts of colonisation and trauma. Culturally grounded, relational and advocacy-focused approaches, the strengths of ACCOs, are essential for reducing statutory involvement and increasing family stability.

The focus on children aged 0–5 is particularly important. Early childhood development, cultural identity formation, attachment, and early learning experiences heavily influence long-term wellbeing. CQID's early years programs consistently demonstrate that ACCO-led approaches increase engagement, strengthen parenting confidence, and improve developmental outcomes. This focus is also strongly supported by SNAICC's early years evidence and national policy

recommendations*.

Young parents under 25 represent another key group requiring targeted support. In CQID's experience, young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents are disproportionately impacted by housing instability, intergenerational trauma, and system interactions. Early, culturally safe and non-judgemental support is essential to breaking cycles of statutory involvement. ACCOs are uniquely positioned to deliver this support in a way that respects cultural obligations, kinship systems and the young person's developmental stage.

CQID recommends that the department expand the focus areas to include:

• Young people transitioning from OOHC
• Young people exiting youth detention or youth justice orders
• Kinship carers, particularly those providing informal care
• Families experiencing family and domestic violence
These groups represent high-need populations within our regions and are central to reducing over-representation.

Referenced:
SNAICC Early Years Papers*, Family Matters Report*, Youth justice over-representation data (QFCC)*.

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

Yes. CQID recommends the department strengthen the program by explicitly recognising additional groups and approaches that are essential for improving family wellbeing, particularly in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Kinship carers are a critical but often overlooked group. Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are cared for informally by relatives who receive little or no support, despite bearing significant caregiving responsibilities. Formal funding and recognition for kinship-led support models are essential, consistent with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle*.

Additionally, families in rural and remote communities face unique barriers, including limited-service access, travel costs, workforce shortages, and the absence of mainstream supports. ACCO-led outreach, mobile service models, community hubs and locally recruited staff are critical in these communities. Funding must include loadings for remoteness and regional service delivery to

ensure sustainability.

Families impacted by domestic and family violence (DFV) require dedicated, culturally safe responses. Aboriginal women are disproportionately affected by DFV*, yet mainstream models often fail to recognise the intersecting cultural, systemic and housing-based factors that shape safety decisions. ACCO-led FDV responses, men's behaviour change models, and family healing programs should be included as recognised activities.

CQID also recommends a stronger emphasis on healing and culture, including culture camps, language programs, identity workshops, on-Country activities, and intergenerational healing initiatives. These are not supplementary add-ons, they are central to long-term wellbeing and reduce risk factors associated with child protection involvement.

Finally, the department should explicitly consider Delegated Authority and transfer of decision-making approaches as recognised strategies for improving outcomes. Evidence shows that when ACCOs hold authority within statutory systems, decisions are more culturally informed, less punitive and more effective at keeping children safe within family.

Referenced:
ATSICPP Guidance*, Family Matters*, SNAICC kinship care and healing frameworks*, DFV literature*.

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

CQID's experience has shown that while co-location can be beneficial, several other approaches are often more impactful, particularly in regional and Aboriginal community contexts where trust, cultural governance and relationship-based practice are essential.

One highly effective method is the establishment of ACCO-led local governance groups. These bring together child protection, youth justice, education, housing, health and community organisations to jointly plan responses, share information and monitor service system performance. When ACCOs leads these, government and non-government agencies operate with clearer accountability and stronger cultural guidance, resulting in more consistent and less punitive decision-making.

Joint home visits and warm referral pathways are also powerful. These reduce

duplication, build family trust, and ensure families do not need to retell their story multiple times. For Aboriginal families who often experience assessment fatigue and fear of statutory intervention, coordinated visits with ACCO involvement significantly increase engagement. CQID have seen the benefit and impact this has through Delegated Authority.

Data sharing is also key. Shared outcomes dashboards, co-designed with ACCOs, help all services see the same picture of child and family wellbeing. This supports prevention and reduces reliance on reactive, crisis-driven decision-making. Collaborative contracting models also strengthen coordination. When ACCOs are funded to lead multi-agency partnerships, service alignment improves significantly. This ensures the system is built around families, not organisational boundaries.

Referenced:
QATSICPP Cultural Practice Frameworks*, ACCO-led governance models (sector evidence), Data sharing frameworks (PR4).

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?

For CQID, demonstrating community connection begins with cultural governance and local leadership. A service connected to its community must be accountable to that community in practice, decision making, workforce, and cultural authority. In a grant application, CQID would highlight its status as an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation with board representation from across our footprint, strong cultural governance structures, and longstanding relationships with Elders, Traditional Owners and community leaders. These factors ensure our services are shaped by cultural knowledge, kinship structures and local priorities rather than external organisational agendas.

Applicants should be assessed on their demonstrated history of community engagement, experience and outcomes. This includes evidence of ongoing consultation processes, such as community engagement, cultural advisory groups, youth leadership forums and family feedback loops. Services must be able to show how community input has tangibly shaped program design, staffing models, hours of operation, and intervention. Having a community advisory mechanism on paper is insufficient without documented examples of how feedback has influenced practice.

Assessment should also prioritise the extent of local workforce representation, especially for families with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Services

that employ local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, including in leadership, governance, casework and frontline roles, inherently operate with stronger relational trust and cultural relevance. Workforce pathways, traineeships and commitments to building cultural capability should be core assessment criteria.

Additionally, applicants should demonstrate strong partnership with ACCOs and other Aboriginal-led organisations. This includes evidence of service agreements, shared protocols, warm referrals and coordinated case planning. Services that operate independently of local ACCOs should be assessed more critically, particularly where they serve high proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

Finally, DSS should assess providers on cultural safety capability, accountability mechanisms for poor practice, and commitments to Closing the Gap Priority Reforms. Providers must be required to show cultural governance structures, cultural supervision frameworks, and transparency in responding to community feedback and complaints. Without these elements, connection to community is superficial and does not translate into improved outcomes.

Referenced:
Closing the Gap PR1 & PR2*, ACCO Sector Strengthening Frameworks*, Cultural Safety Standards (SNAICC/QATSICPP)*.

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

Locational disadvantage is only one component of community need. To allocate funding equitably and effectively, DSS must consider multiple overlapping social, cultural and systemic factors that drive risk and influence outcomes, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

A key factor is over-representation data, especially in child protection, youth justice and OOHC systems. Funding should be weighted according to rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child removals, intervention with parental agreement, recurrent notifications and youth detention admissions. These indicators are strong proxies for systemic stress and unmet need, and ACCOs in these locations require higher investment to deliver culturally embedded prevention and early intervention supports.

Another critical factor is housing and homelessness pressure, including rates of overcrowding, unstable accommodation, and difficulty accessing crisis housing. In

many of CQID regions, housing barriers are a direct driver of child protection involvement. Families may face intervention not because of caregiving capacity but because they lack stable housing, a structural issue that should inform funding allocations.

DSS should also consider family and domestic violence prevalence, particularly in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities where systemic and intergenerational drivers create heightened risk. Regions with high rates of FDV need enhanced investment in culturally safe family supports, perpetrator interventions, and trauma-informed healing programs.

Access to culturally safe services is another significant factor. Some communities, especially rural and remote areas, have limited or no access to ACCO-led early intervention, youth, or family support programs. Funding should be used as a lever to expand ACCO presence in areas where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations are high, but ACCO service availability is low.

Demographic indicators such as youth population proportion, birth rates, and families movements should also inform funding, as these influence demand for early years and family support services. Regions with younger populations or high mobility often experience service gaps that require flexible, outreach-based models.

Finally, DSS should incorporate Closing the Gap performance data, including indicators related to child development, school readiness, connection to culture, and family wellbeing. These metrics provide a broader understanding of community need that extends beyond economic disadvantage.

Referenced:
Family Matters over-representation data*, QFCC data on CP/Youth Justice*, DFV prevalence data*, Housing stress data (cited within FM)*.

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

The most effective way for organisations to demonstrate they are meeting community needs is by presenting a combination of quantitative data, qualitative evidence and clear examples of how community voices have shaped service delivery. It is vital that providers show not only what they do, but how they adapt in response to evolving community priorities.

Organisations should provide evidence from community-led assessments, community feedback, local consultations and ongoing feedback mechanisms. This includes clear documentation of issues raised by families, Elders, youth and community partners, and critically, how the service changed as a result. For example, adjusting operating hours, shifting to outreach models, modifying program content, redirecting resources or introducing cultural responses in direct response to community input.

However, quantitative data alone is insufficient. Narrative evidence, case stories, quotes, family feedback, cultural connection stories, and examples of restored kinship relationships, is essential to demonstrating impact in Aboriginal communities. These stories provide a deeper understanding of how culturally grounded practice influences safety, belonging and resilience.

Organisations should also highlight workforce capability, including local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, cultural advisors, Elders, and lived experience practitioners. This shows that the service reflects the cultural context of the community it serves.

Finally, providers must demonstrate accountability mechanisms, such as cultural governance groups, community advisory bodies and transparent complaints processes, showing that the service is continuously shaped and held accountable by local communities, not just external funders.

Referenced:
SNAICC Evaluation and Yarning Frameworks*, DEX SCORE Manual*, ACCO cultural governance literature*.

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

To genuinely increase the number of ACCOs delivering services, DSS must move beyond encouraging ACCO participation and instead design a grant system that structurally prioritises, resources and sustains Aboriginal community-controlled organisations. This includes shifting from competitive tendering models, which historically favour large mainstream NGOs, toward commissioning pathways that recognise cultural authority, community trust and long-term investment in ACCO capacity.

One key mechanism is ACCO-prioritised funding streams, where grants for services predominantly supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are reserved

for ACCOs wherever they exist. This aligns with Closing the Gap Priority Reform 2*, which commits all governments to building the ACCO sector. In regions without an ACCO, DSS should require mainstream providers to partner with or transition services to ACCOs over time.

Grant processes should also include simplified application requirements, recognising that ACCOs often operate with leaner administrative teams despite delivering high-quality, culturally grounded services. Overly complex grant applications disadvantage community-controlled organisations. Instead, DSS should provide streamlined templates, longer lead times, and optional video or verbal submissions for elements such as case studies or community evidence.

Long-term contracts (7–10 years) should be standard for ACCOs, enabling stable workforce development, infrastructure investment and sustainable growth in service delivery. Short-term funding cycles have historically undermined ACCO stability and capacity building.

DSS should also invest in ACCO sector development, including leadership training, evaluation systems, digital capability, cultural governance strengthening and workforce pipelines. These investments ensure ACCOs are not only competing for grants but are positioned as long-term system leaders.

Finally, grant assessments should weight cultural expertise, community trust, governance structures and alignment with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle. When these criteria are applied meaningfully, ACCOs naturally rise to the top as the preferred providers for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

Referenced:
Closing the Gap PR2*, SNAICC Sector Strengthening Papers*, Family Matters*.

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

To improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, program design must embed cultural rights, community authority, and trauma-informed, family-led decision-making at every level of service delivery and governance.

The program should explicitly embed the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (ATSICPP), including its five core elements of prevention, partnership, placement, participation and connection. Embedding ATSICPP

ensures that cultural identity, family relationships and kinship systems guide all decisions about children's wellbeing. This aligns with recommendations from SNAICC*, Family Matters*, and QATSICPP*, as well as CQID's practice within Delegated Authority.

Cultural healing and trauma recovery must be recognised as legitimate, fundable activities. Many families CQID supports are impacted by intergenerational trauma, racism, and systemic disadvantage. Healing programs, on-Country activities, cultural mentoring, identity workshops and cultural reconnection initiatives are essential for long-term wellbeing and must not be considered supplementary or optional.

Program design should also require formal partnership with ACCOs, not optional consultation. Mainstream organisations delivering services to Aboriginal families should demonstrate agreements, cultural governance structures and shared decision-making with local ACCOs. This ensures cultural integrity and prevents harmful or culturally unsafe interventions.

Additionally, DSS should build in mechanisms that enable transfer of authority, such as Delegated Authority models where ACCOs hold decision-making responsibility within statutory systems. Evidence shows that outcomes improve when Aboriginal organisations make decisions about Aboriginal children, leading to more culturally safe pathways and reduced removals.

Finally, the program should ensure data sovereignty, requiring that data about Aboriginal children is governed, interpreted and shared in partnership with ACCOs. This supports better planning, earlier identification of need and culturally informed decision-making.

Referenced:
ATSICPP Guidance*, Delegated Authority and Transfer of Authority literature (SNAICC/QATSICPP), Closing the Gap.

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

CQID would benefit most from access to linked, real-time, locally disaggregated data that reflects the complex realities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families across our regions. Currently, significant gaps exist between what is reported, what is visible to services, and what families experience. Access to comprehensive data would strengthen decision-making, program design and

resource allocation.

Linked datasets across child protection, youth justice, education, housing, health and early childhood would provide a more holistic picture of family wellbeing and risk factors. Often, CQID supports families navigating multiple systems, but fragmented information makes it difficult to identify patterns early or intervene pre-emptively. For example, early childhood developmental data linked to family support and child protection involvement would help identify children who may benefit from additional cultural, developmental or therapeutic support.

Timely, localised data is essential. Many datasets available to service providers are outdated or aggregated at state or national levels, masking regional variations. CQID requires sub-regional data for the 8 service locations to tailor services effectively. For instance, youth justice trends in Rockhampton differ significantly from those in Emerald or Bundaberg, and funding or program design must reflect that nuance.

CQID would also benefit from measures of cultural connection, belonging and cultural safety. While these are currently difficult to quantify, co-designed indicators that reflect language use, connection to family, participation in community events, and cultural identity could greatly enhance the understanding of long-term wellbeing.
Data on service pathways, duration of engagement and transitions would also be valuable. Understanding how families move between early intervention and intensive supports, or from youth programs into adult services, would assist in designing more seamless and preventive service systems.

Finally, access to evaluation tools and data visualisation platforms would allow CQID to regularly monitor progress and share findings with communities, staff and external partners. This is particularly important in the context of Delegated Authority, where transparent data sharing strengthens trust and supports accountability.

Referenced:
QFCC reports*, Closing the Gap Data Dashboard*, DEX SCORE Manual*, Data Sovereignty Principles*.

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?

Firstly, changes in DEX SCORE Circumstances domains, particularly family functioning, personal/family safety, housing stability, community participation and

material wellbeing, provide meaningful indicators of family strengthening. These domains reflect real improvements in daily life and are more aligned with ACCO practice than outputs such as session counts or referrals made.

Secondly, we would share data on child protection trajectories, increase in family connection, increased family preservation, reduced entries to OOHC, shorter timeframes in care and examples identifying barriers of CSSSC practice.

Because CQID operates under Delegated Authority, this data is especially powerful in demonstrating the impact of shifting decision-making closer to families and communities.

Narrative and qualitative evidence would also be central. Case stories, family testimonials, cultural connection journeys, and examples of restored kinship relationships illustrate the deep relational work that underpins successful outcomes.
These stories provide cultural context and give voice to families, complementing the quantitative data.

CQID would also share community-level outcomes, such as increased engagement with ACCO-led services, reduced service duplication, improved interagency collaboration, and strengthened community governance.

Referenced:
DEX SCORE Manual*, Child protection trajectory data (CP system reporting), Closing the Gap indicators.

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

Although not all CQID programs currently report directly into the DSS Data Exchange (DEX), our Family Wellbeing Service and early intervention programs report through ARC, which captures equivalent outcome domains aligned with SCORE Circumstances. These domains mirror the intent of SCORE by measuring changes in family functioning, safety, stability and connection — and therefore accurately reflect the impact of our work.

Across CQID's family support, early intervention and youth programs, the most relevant domains (whether through DEX or ARC-equivalent measures) are:

• Family functioning

• Personal/family safety
• Housing stability
• Material wellbeing
• Community participation and connectedness

These domains represent the core areas of change CQID seeks to influence in partnership with families. While the specific reporting platform differs (DEX vs ARC), the underlying outcome measures are consistent with SCORE's focus on relational strength, cultural connection, stability and wellbeing.

Family functioning remains central to our practice, particularly as we support parents to strengthen relationships, stabilise routines, build parenting confidence and reconnect kinship networks.

Personal and family safety is critical in contexts involving DFV, system stress, or complex family dynamics.

Housing stability often determines whether families can safely care for children, and CQID frequently advocates and coordinates supports in this space.
Material wellbeing reflects financial stressors that significantly impact parenting capacity and family functioning.

Community participation and cultural connectedness are foundational for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, supporting identity, belonging and resilience.
Although our systems differ, the domains we measure align closely with SCORE, meaning CQID's reporting is fully compatible with the intent of the DSS framework.

Referenced:
DEX SCORE Manual*, DEX Circumstances Domains*.

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

CQID would benefit from templates that balance narrative and structured elements, making it easier to capture culturally and contextually rich stories while aligning with DSS reporting requirements. Useful templates would guide practitioners to document both observable changes and deeper cultural or relational shifts that are often missed in standard reporting formats.

Templates should include prompts on:

- Family background, cultural identity and local context
- presenting issues and systemic barriers
- Culturally informed engagement strategies and relationships built
- Embedding the ATSICPP
- Changes observed over time, including emotional, relational, cultural and practical outcomes
- Family voice and direct quotes, where appropriate and with consent
- How ACCO-led approaches differed from mainstream interventions
- What long-term impacts are anticipated

Guidance should also highlight ethical storytelling, ensuring informed consent, culturally safe representation, and protections for families' privacy and dignity. CQID often works in small communities where anonymity is challenging, so guidance on safe de-identification is essential.

Examples of strong case studies from ACCOs would be valuable, illustrating to services what a high-quality case narrative looks like and ensuring consistent expectations across providers. Templates should allow for multimedia formats (e.g., audio yarning, video storytelling), recognising that Aboriginal families may express their experiences in ways that differ from traditional written formats.

Clear expectations about length, structure, consent and use of cultural content would help CQID produce case studies that genuinely reflect the impact of our work while meeting DSS requirements.

Referenced:
SNAICC Storytelling & Ethical Practice Guidance*, ACCO evaluation frameworks*.

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

For CQID, relational contracting means moving beyond traditional, transactional funding agreements toward partnerships built on trust, shared decision-making, and long-term commitment. Relational contracting recognises that outcomes cannot be achieved through short-term or output-driven models, especially in communities with complex historical and systemic challenges.

In practice, relational contracting would involve DSS and CQID jointly setting goals, agreeing on outcomes and regularly reviewing progress as equal partners. It would provide flexibility to adapt programs based on evolving needs and emerging

evidence rather than rigid activity schedules. This approach aligns with ACCO practice, where relationship-based work, cultural healing and advocacy often fall outside conventional "deliverables" yet are essential to achieving outcomes.

Criteria for relational contracts should include:

• Long-term contract periods (7–10+ years)
• Flexibility to adjust activities without contract variation
• Joint governance structures, including ACCO representation
• Shared data access and collaborative interpretation
• Commitment to cultural safety and ACCO sector strengthening
• Funding for workforce development, evaluation and cultural governance
• Measures aligned with community-defined priorities, not just administrative KPIs

Relational contracts should explicitly recognise the cultural and relational labour unique to ACCOs, including the time-intensive work of building trust, supporting kinship systems and navigating statutory interfaces such as Delegated Authority.

Referenced:
DSS Relational Contracting Model*, Closing the Gap Priority Reforms*, ACCO sector governance frameworks*.

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

Relational contracts should be offered based on an organisation's cultural authority, demonstrable community trust, track record of outcomes and strategic importance within the local service ecosystem and reforms.

ACCOs should be the primary candidates for relational contracts when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children represent a significant proportion of the service population. This aligns with Closing the Gap Priority Reform 2, which emphasises building the community-controlled sector through stronger, more stable funding arrangements.

Selection should be guided by:

• The organisation's governance model (e.g., Aboriginal community-controlled governance)
• Demonstrated community connection and long-standing local presence
• Strong outcomes, engagement patterns and cultural safety performance

• Delivery of multiple service types across the continuum (e.g., early intervention to intensive support)
• Ability to demonstrate collaborative partnerships with government and community organisations
• Evidence that families trust and prefer the provider

DSS should consult with local ACCO peaks, community leaders and existing governance bodies to determine which organisations hold cultural legitimacy and are well positioned for long-term relational contracts.

Importantly, relational contracts should not be awarded solely based on administrative or grant-writing capacity, doing so would favour large mainstream organisations and undermine the intent of the reform.

22. Is your organisation interested in a relational contracting approach? Why/why not?

Yes. CQID is strongly interested in relational contracting. As a large regional ACCO with a proven track record delivering Delegated Authority, early intervention, youth supports and family wellbeing programs, CQID requires long-term, flexible funding arrangements that recognise the intensive, relational and culturally grounded nature of our work.

Fast-changing contract cycles and output-focused models undermine ACCO stability, workforce development and the ability to implement long-term cultural and community strategies. Relational contracting would allow CQID to invest in local Aboriginal workforce pipelines, evaluation frameworks, cultural governance structures and community leadership, all of which are crucial for achieving better outcomes.

CQID's existing partnerships with Queensland Government agencies and State/National Peak Bodies demonstrate our ability to operate within shared decision-making models. Delegated Authority is itself a form of relational governance, where CQID makes decisions traditionally reserved for statutory agencies. This positions us well for relational contracting at the federal level.

CQID's strong community trust, geographical footprint, cultural governance and multi-stream service delivery make us an ideal candidate for relational contracting under the new national program.

Referenced:

Family Matters*, ACCO sector strengthening literature*, SNAICC governance papers*.

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

CQID strongly supports the intent of this reform and welcomes DSS's explicit commitment to early intervention, community-led responses and strengthening the ACCO sector. However, to ensure the reform achieves its goals, DSS should consider several broader issues.

First, implementation must match the ambition. Many previous reforms have had strong conceptual frameworks but were hindered by inflexible contracting, insufficient funding, or lack of ACCO involvement in decision-making. DSS must co-design implementation with ACCOs and peak bodies such as SNAICC and QATSICPP to avoid repeating past mistakes.

Second, the reform must address system-level drivers of family vulnerability. Without changes in child protection practices, housing availability, youth justice responses and cross-departmental coordination, early intervention programs alone will not reduce over-representation. DSS can play a powerful role in advocating for whole-of-government alignment, particularly in regions with rapid population growth, housing shortages and high statutory involvement.

Third, the department should recognise that ACCOs require growth funding, and not just program funding. As demand increases, CQID must invest in workforce development, infrastructure, regional offices, vehicles, cultural supervision, leadership training, evaluation systems and data capability. Without adequate growth funding, ACCOs are forced to stretch limited resources across expanding community needs.
Fourth, DSS should ensure that reform outcomes are measured in ways that reflect cultural, relational and community impact, not only Western indicators or administrative outputs. A strong outcomes, co-designed approach with ACCOs, is essential.

Finally, DSS must ensure that ACCOs are seen not just as service providers but as partners in system reform. This includes meaningful participation in governance, policy development, data sharing and long-term decision-making. CQID stands ready to lead and contribute to these roles.

Referenced:

Family Matters*, QFCC*, Closing the Gap PR1–PR4*, Housing/structural determinant evidence (as cited in FM/SNAICC)*.