



Improving outcomes for all Australian children

Submission on the Fourth Action Plan for the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020.

March 2018

Save the Children Australia

Save the Children is a leading independent international organisation for children. Our vision is a world in which every child attains the right to survival, protection, development and participation. Our purpose is to inspire breakthroughs in the way the world treats children and to achieve immediate and lasting change in their lives. We work towards this vision in Australia in urban, regional and remote settings and in more than 120 countries across the globe.

For further information about this submission, please contact: Georgia Goldsworthy, Australian Social Policy and Advocacy Adviser at georgia.goldsworthy@savethechildren.org.au

Introduction

Save the Children Australia welcomes the opportunity to comment on issues raised in the Discussion Guide on the Fourth Action Plan for the National Framework to Protect Australia's Children 2009-2020 (National Framework).

Our comments and recommendations relate to Priority Areas 1 and 2 on the proposed action areas, respectively, to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children at risk of entering, or in contact with the child protection system and to improve protection and early intervention through joint service planning and investment.

Background

Save the Children Australia has been active in Australia for nearly one hundred years. We work in almost every State and Territory of Australia to improve the lives of the hardest to reach and most marginalised children, young people and families.

Our work focuses on the continuum of development for children – ranging from early childhood education through supported playgroups, intensive family support, place-based community development, child-friendly family violence refuges, and mentoring for young people in contact with the justice system.

We work in more than 200 sites in urban, regional and remote settings and reached over 31,00 children and families in 2017. We have approximately 600 staff of whom 26 per cent identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.

We strive to ensure all Australian children and young people have the capabilities, connections, and confidence for success in their future regardless of their background, location or circumstances.

Comments and Recommendations

Priority Area 1: Improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children at risk of entering, or in contact with the child protection system.

Priority Area One: Action 1: Develop a nationally consistent approach to report on State and Territory support for Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) to have a role and responsibility towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are now 10 times more likely to be admitted to out-of-home care than non-Indigenous children.¹ The over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the child protection system is a national crisis that requires a coordinated response from States, Territories and Federal Government, as well as the non-government sector. Save the Children welcomes the approach taken in the proposed Fourth

¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2018. Child protection Australia 2016–17. Child welfare series no. 68. Cat. no. CWS 63. Canberra: AIHW., pg. 44. Accessed at: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/66c7c364-592a-458c-9ab0-f90022e25368/aihw-cws-63.pdf.aspx?inline=true>

Action Plan to include outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children as a stand-alone priority to ensure government's focus remains actively seized to address this outcome.

We are a proud partner of the Family Matters² campaign which calls for action to address the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the child protection system. We are calling for the inclusion of additional targets in the Closing the Gap Refresh to reduce this overrepresentation, particularly out-of-home care. This includes the co-design of a national strategy to achieve such targets together with State/Territory governments, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled organisations and leaders. We would propose that there is capacity to align national targets and strategy within a refreshed Closing the Gap agenda with the strategy of the Fourth Action Plan to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

This has the advantage of ensuring ACCOs as well as other non-Indigenous service providers have clarity from Government through a nationally consistent approach with agreed measurable outcomes. As highlighted by the Redfern Statement, this sector has already seen a number of reports and recommendations, in addition to changes of Minister and machinery of government, which has hindered implementation of policies to deliver positive change on the ground.³ This is one step forward to ensure different elements of government remain on the same page to address an escalating issue of national significance.

Recommendation: Save the Children recommends that the Fourth Action Plan for the National Framework include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families as a stand-alone priority, consistent with the Family Matters campaign to include a new target in the Closing the Gap framework to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home-care, and sub targets that address the underlying causes of child protection intervention.

We further recommend that the strategy and evaluation metrics for the Fourth Action Plan should be aligned with those that may be adopted for the proposed target in the Closing the Gap Refresh. This will help States and Territories support ACCOs to deliver services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Families and communities in a coordinated and efficient manner.

Priority Area One, Action 2: Develop measures and reporting mechanisms on the application of the five domains of the ATSI CPP (prevention, partnership, placement, participation and connection).

With respect to developing measures and reporting mechanisms, we recommend that the identified gaps in data collection outlined by Family Matters in their recent Report Card 2017 be addressed.⁴ This will enable systematic collection of important information on the placement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's entry and re-entry in the child

² Family Matters: Strong Communities. Strong Culture. Stronger Children is Australia's national campaign to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people grow up safe and cared for in family, community and culture. It seeks to eliminate the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care. Led by SNAICC – National Voice for our Children, it partners with prominent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, noted academics and other leading groups including Save the Children.

³ Redfern Statement, 9 June 2016. <https://nationalcongress.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/The-Redfern-Statement-9-June- Final.pdf>

⁴ SNAICC, *Family Matters Report 2017*, Melbourne, pg 30. Accessed at: <http://www.familymatters.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Family-Matters-Report-2017.pdf>

protection system. This information will inform the co-design of interventions to prevent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from coming into contact with the child protection system.

Currently, data collection on this issue is inconsistent between each State and Territory. For example, data primarily reports on prevalence, not incidence. Family Matters proposes presenting data in a longitudinal format which allows calculation of length of stay by Indigenous status and includes time to exit by exit type (e.g. order ends, reunification).⁵ The recent publication of previously unpublished statistics on out-of-home care on the number and rate of children admitted to OOHC by age and Indigenous Status from 2011-12 to 2015-16 by Australian Institute of Health and Welfare is a welcome step forward.⁶

Similarly, further information on reunification rates and investment in community controlled intensive family support and reunification services can assist in providing measurements for adherence to the ATSI CPP, particularly for engagement with the connection and partnership principles.⁷

Recommendation: Save the Children recommends additional data be collected and published to better measure the situation of, causes and responses to over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the child protection system. This includes:

- Longitudinal data by Indigenous status: including length of stay; time to exit by exit type and information on re-entry to care.
- Data to report on reunification rates with families by Indigenous status.
- Data to report on investment in community-controlled intensive family support and reunification services.

This could be led by either the Productivity Commission or the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, which both report annually on a number of relevant existing data sets.

Priority Area One, Action 3: Develop actions to improve Indigenous participation in decision-making processes for children and families in child protection systems.

As part of work of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Working Group for the National Framework, SNAICC – a National Voice for our Children, developed a set of resources to assist practitioners and policymakers in the implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (ATSI CPP). Save the Children has drawn on this important resource for the below recommendations.⁸

Save the Children supports greater Indigenous participation in decision-making processes for children and families in child protection systems. We draw attention to recommendations by SNAICC that improving participation requires high cultural competency of professionals who are working with families on decisions around child protection processes. This would include building in family participation in case planning. In addition, culturally appropriate family

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 'Children admitted to out-of-home care 2014–15', Bulletin 142, November 2017. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/41ca92ec-dbb4-4d5e-b6fa-ee559e10b5ac/aihw-aus-217.pdf.aspx?inline=true>

⁷ Ibid

⁸ SNAICC, Understanding and applying the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle, p1. Accessed at: http://www.snaicc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Understanding_applying_ATSI_CCP.pdf

conferencing and legal services are mechanisms which can empower families and children to have greater agency to participate in decisions affecting them.⁹

As noted in Key Action 1, this would also require States and Territories to support ACCOs, in this instance to build the capacity of their staff, including through training and mentoring programs. For example, Indigenous facilitators in a family wellbeing program were critical to its success due to their life experiences and emphasis on culturally appropriate values.¹⁰ This analysis found that staff development is crucial to support organisations towards success.¹¹

Recommendation: Save the Children recommends the National Framework include the principles outlined by SNAICC in their resource on 'Understanding and Applying the ATSICPP'. This includes investing in culturally appropriate family conferencing and legal services to help improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family participation in decision making.

We further recommend that the Fourth Action Plan support the maintenance of funding streams at a State, Territory and Federal level, for organisations to provide targeted and culturally appropriate professional development opportunities, including relevant training/certifications and development of mentoring programs to develop capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and ACCOs in providing family support services.

Priority Area 2: Improving prevention and early intervention through joint service planning and investment

Priority Area 2, Action 1: Jointly invest in up to ten place-based sites across Australia to improve children's safety, wellbeing and readiness to learn at the community level by working with local families and stakeholders to identify their needs and improve service planning, coordination and delivery.

Save the Children supports the proposal to invest in place-based sites to improve children's safety, wellbeing and readiness. As an organisation, we believe that place-based approaches ensure that communities have the framework and capacity to articulate their agenda and decide the priorities that matter to them. In addition, with respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, and in alignment with the Closing the Gap Refresh, place-based approaches offer a means to deliver self-determination at the regional level.

In designing place based sites, we would suggest the Fourth Action Plan have regard to the following principles which also informs Save the Children's work on the ground:

- engaging with community leaders and individuals to deeply understand the aspirations and strengths of the community;
- co-defining objectives and co-designing activities that build upon the aspirations of the community;

⁹ Ibid, pgs 9-11.

¹⁰ Tsey et al., 2009 in Morley, S., (2015), 'What works in effective Indigenous community-managed programs and organisations', CFCA Paper No. 32, Australian Institute of Family Studies, May 2015. Accessed at: <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/what-works-effective-indigenous-community-managed-programs-and-organisations>

¹¹ Ibid

- the rigorous use of data to target services and determine the full nature and extent of the issues;
- interventions at the universal, secondary and tertiary service continuum which target the protective, risk and stress factors which young people and families experience;
- strong governance structures that cut across levels of government and involve non-government organisations and communities to collaborate and develop action plans and;
- a recognition that lasting change won't come overnight, with a need to establish reasonable timeframes and milestones along the way in partnership with the community¹²

Importantly, for the purposes of evaluation, is the recognition that whole of government or partnership approaches require long term commitments of 10-20 years to succeed.¹³

Although Save the Children fully supports the proposal to invest in place-based sites, we believe the suggested target of up to 10 place based sites across Australia is not ambitious enough.

Many service providers, both Government and non-Government, adopt a place-based approach in their work. A review produced by the Centre for Community Child Health shows a range of existing place-based approaches already used across Australia focussing on children, many of which could align with the key outcome of the National Framework to keep children safe and well.¹⁴

Save the Children operates a number of place based projects across Australia, including in regional and remote locations. For example, our Children's Wellbeing Initiative in East Gippsland works with children, parents, organisations and service providers to collaborate, identify shared priorities develop better services for young people. The use of datasets such as the AEDC provides key indicators to track developmental progress.

Similarly, we are also supporting the operational build-up of the unique, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander conceived and led "First 1000 Days Australia" initiative (which focuses on the pre-conception to age two period to stimulate systems change and improve intergenerational outcomes, and emphasises local, evidence-driven, and collaborative ways of working).¹⁵ Red Cross, another organisation that works with communities, operates 10 place-based programs in communities in Australia.¹⁶

¹² See also: The Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne Centre for Community Child Health (2011), 'Place based approaches to supporting children and families', Policy Brief, Vol 23, pg 3. Accessed at: https://www.rch.org.au/uploadedFiles/Main/Content/ccch/Policy_Brief_23_-_place-based_approaches_final_web2.pdf, pg 3.

¹³ Australian Public Service Commission, 'Tackling Wicked Problems: a Public Policy Perspective', Commonwealth of Australia, 2007, pg 23. Accessed at: http://www.apsc.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/6386/wickedproblems.pdf

¹⁴ Laidlaw, B., Fong, M., Fry, R., & West, S. (2014). A snapshot of place-based activity promoting children's wellbeing. Parkville, Victoria: Murdoch Childrens Research Institute and The Royal Children's Hospital Centre for Community Child Health.

¹⁵ For more on our collaborative partnership with the University of Melbourne in support of the First 1000 Days Australia initiative, see *First 1000 Days Australia: Save the Children and University of Melbourne partner to improve life outcomes for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander peoples* (Media Release, 4 August 2017), <http://www.savethechildren.org.au/about-us/media-and-publications/media-releases/media-release-archive/years/2017/first-1000-days-australia-save-the-children-and-university-of-melbourne-partner-to-improve-life-outcomes-for-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples> Additional background on this initiative is available online at: <http://www.first1000daysaustralia.org.au>

¹⁶ <https://www.redcross.org.au/news-and-media/news/the-power-of-connecting-with-community-and-country>

Given that Save the Children alone already implements place-based approaches in almost every State and Territory in which we work, we believe the Fourth Action Plan should have a more ambitious target for investing in place based sites, having regard to identifying shared principles, definitions and measurements of success.

Recommendation: Save the Children recommends the investment in up to 10 place-based sites across Australia should be increased to 20 sites by connecting with service providers at State, Territory and Federal level who run existing place-based sites.

This approach helps address issues attached to the long lead time involved in establishing place-based sites, and the need for predictable, multi-year funding to support these sites.

We further recommend that the Fourth Action Plan includes common principles or at least definition for what constitutes a 'place-based site' to ensure objective measurements of investment and success in each site.

Priority Area 2, Action 2: Undertake joint service planning to enhance family and children service coordination, reduce service duplication and fill service gaps.

Joint service planning can assist to minimise service duplication and lack of clarity about what services can be accessed by families and communities. Save the Children would stress however, that the most effective way to develop joint service planning which results in more effective service delivery is by drawing on place-based principles and implementing a structured engagement of co-design with community to identify and then develop appropriate future services which are needed by local families and community.

Central to this approach are “collective impact” methodologies which work with communities experiencing multifaceted problems by systematically harnessing stakeholder collaboration across sectors.¹⁷ In short, place-based collective impact as outlined by Kania and Kramer has five key elements for participating local organisations:

- a common agenda for change including a shared understanding of the problem and solutions;
- consistent data collection and measurement of results;
- a plan of action which ensures mutually reinforcing activities for each participant;
- open communication between participants to build trust; and
- a backbone organisation which includes staff and specific skillsets to support participating organisations.¹⁸

Save the Children has implemented this approach in practice, including through a commitment to ensure the pre-conditions for adopting a collective impact approach are agreed in community. In Western Australia, on the Dampier Peninsula, we have joined together with Aarnja, a Kimberley Aboriginal membership organisation and local lead for Empowered Communities, through the Dampier Peninsula Family Empowerment

¹⁷ J Smart, 'Collective Impact: evidence and implications for practice', CFCA Paper, No. 45, Published by the Australian Institute of Family Studies, November 2017. Accessed at: <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/collective-impact-evidence-and-implications-practice/export>

¹⁸ Kania, J., & Kramer, M., 'Collective Impact', *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 9(1), 2011, pp. 36-41.

Partnership. This is a project which involves planning and co-design in partnership with the Dampier Peninsula communities and State and Federal Government on the required management structures, Aboriginal governance and program logic. It is underpinned by an agreement to collectively build Aarnja's capability over time to take on a project lead from Save the Children.

The partnership is currently focusing on collective collaboration across agencies with service providers working alongside Dampier Peninsula communities and families to develop targeted and tailored support, which meets their vision, key priorities and expectations. Building quality data and evidence to measure and evaluate what works is imperative for driving informed community decision-making processes. This also requires ensuring on-going communication and sharing information with the communities and families. Its overall purpose is to realise better outcomes for vulnerable Aboriginal children and families and shift the dial on intergenerational disadvantage in Australia.

In addition to the above comments, we also welcome the proposal to use consistent terminology for prevention and early intervention family and children services. This is relevant for improved joint service planning. We would add from a service provider perspective that there is a need to more clearly identify and understand the different funding sources from different levels of government for services on the child and family support continuum (universal-targeted-tertiary).

For example, Save the Children accesses funding at different levels of government (and from non-government sources) On occasions, funding priorities from government may shift, creating uncertainty for families which are supported by these programs. As suggested in the discussion guide, agreement on future funding responsibilities may provide a way to better target investment in prevention and early intervention family and children services.

Recommendation: Save the Children recommends using collective impact methodologies, as outlined above, to ensure families, communities, government and service providers are engaged not only in mapping service offerings, but the active co-design of services which meet their needs on the ground. Reaching out to existing collective impact sites may assist in developing best practice for this approach.

We also support the proposal to agree common terminology for prevention and early intervention family and children services. This should include consultation with the non-government sector through the National Forum, as suggested, to better understand the practical implications of current funding and program arrangements.