

# Safe Children, Bright Futures **Strategic Framework**

2011 to 2015

The Northern Territory Government response to the report of the board of inquiry into the child protection system in the Northern Territory



**a safe  
Territory**

A Territory Government initiative



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## Message from the Minister for Child Protection, Minister for Children and Families

*Growing them strong, together* has delivered a clear message – the Northern Territory needs child protection and family support systems that put the safety and wellbeing of children first.

This Strategic Framework demonstrates Government's clear and ongoing commitment to implementing the Board of Inquiry's recommendations. It sets out the action that will be taken by Government, in partnership with the community, to build a new child protection and family support system over the next five years.

Recognising the need for sweeping reform, Government has taken swift action. Over the next five years, \$130 million will be invested in strengthening and rebuilding the Territory's child protection and family support system. Recognising the need for urgent

action, \$9.5 million has been committed in 2010-11 and work has commenced immediately. Since October 2010, we have taken important steps on the journey of reform, including:

- We have commenced work to immediately reduce the backlog of investigations with the assistance of professionals seconded from New Zealand, and the creation of 42 additional frontline child protection worker positions
- We have established the new Department of Children and Families with responsibility for child protection, child safety and family wellbeing. The new Department has its own Chief Executive, reporting directly to me, as Minister for Child Protection



- Work has commenced with the Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory (AMSANT) to establish an Aboriginal Peak Body, which will support future work with the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care to create Aboriginal Child Care Agencies in Darwin and Alice Springs
- We are developing new strategies to care for our workforce, including greater recognition of frontline staff through training and an incentives package that came into effect on 6 January 2011.
- The development of new partnerships with the non-government sector, including an enhanced role for the non-government sector in delivery of family and parent support programs and out of home care, a more transparent grants process and a shared framework for investment in services
- The establishment of community Child Safety and Wellbeing Teams in the Territory Growth Towns to promote a coordinated response to child safety and wellbeing issues
- Amendment of legislation to create a strong and more effective legal framework for protecting the Territory's children

In addition to work already commenced, the Strategic Framework highlights other leading projects that will be at the core of the reforms:

- Increased support for foster carers and additional funding for Foster Care NT to create a stronger foster care system

Our agenda is ambitious, but critical. Through it, we will work for safe children, strong families and thriving communities.

**The Hon Kon Vatskalis MLA**  
Minister for Child Protection  
Minister for Children and Families



## Message from the Chief Executive, Department of Children and Families

The safety and wellbeing of the Territory's children and families is the absolute priority for the Department of Children and Families as it stands on the cusp of fundamental and significant change. We are changing the way we operate, the way support children, young people and families, and the way we engage with our partners, clients and our staff.

At this time of new beginnings, the Strategic Framework outlines how we will create a new child protection and family support system in the Northern Territory. There will be a specific focus on supporting Aboriginal families in rural and remote areas, and investing in strengthening the capabilities of 'home-grown' staff across the Territory – this way we can create meaningful local solutions in local communities.

Improving the quality and capacity of our frontline service delivery, particularly in remote communities, will be achieved by placing child safety and wellbeing officers in each of the Territory Growth Towns, and through increased rigour in policy and process. New internal audit and integrity processes will be introduced to improve the quality of practice on a systemic basis.

We will increase the number of frontline staff to ensure workloads are at benchmarked national levels, and that work practices comply with policies and legislation. In doing so, we will enable supervisors to better manage their staff and their workloads. Staff will be supported throughout these changes with better training to continuously increase their skills.



We will focus on establishing stronger and more supportive partnerships with foster carers, non-government organisations and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, organisations and communities to promote positive, productive and open relationships and enhanced service delivery by the non-government sector.

Investing in non-government organisations to provide parenting support will be key to early intervention, to help families avoid entering the statutory systems. We will establish strong governance arrangements for the new agency, better coordinated and strategically focused systems and processes for engaging with key government and non-government partners, and will improve internal and external communications.

While we all have a role in keeping children, families and our communities strong and safe, the new Department of Children and Families

has a key responsibility to ensure we build public confidence in our delivery of care and protection services across the Territory.

The Department of Children and Families will lead the process of developing detailed child safety and wellbeing plans across government under the Strategic Framework, and reporting progress against these plans annually and publicly.

This is a challenging time for the Department and for those who are our partners in change – other government agencies, the non-government sector and the community. But it's a new beginning, and an exciting opportunity to make a difference in the lives of our children, families and communities.

**Clare Gardiner-Barnes**

Acting Chief Executive  
Department of Children and Families



## Background to the Strategic Framework

In November 2009, in response to growing evidence that the child protection system in the Northern Territory was not working in the best interests of Territory children and families, the Government commissioned a Board of Inquiry into the Child Protection System.

The Board of Inquiry was co-Chaired by Dr Howard Bath, Professor Muriel Bamblett AM, and Dr Rob Roseby, and was wide ranging, receiving more than 200 submissions from organisations and individuals. It incorporated consultation within communities and regional centres and pulled together evidence from a range of reports and a reference panel comprised of experts from around Australia.

In October 2010, the Board of Inquiry presented its report to the Northern Territory Government. The report, *Growing them strong, together* contains 147 recommendations for fundamental reform to all areas of the child protection system in the Northern Territory. All

recommendations were given a level of urgency for the commencement of implementation – urgent (within 6 months), semi-urgent (within 18 months), and important but not urgent (within 2 – 3 years).

The recommendations of the Board of Inquiry are set out in Appendix One.

The Northern Territory Government immediately announced its in-principle support for the recommendations and directed the then-Department of Health and Families to commence implementing these recommendations. It further directed the Department to develop a comprehensive response to the Board of Inquiry recommendations, including a plan for their implementation over the five year period from 2011 – 2015.

Through this Strategic Framework, the Northern Territory Government demonstrates its commitment to implementing the recommendations and outlines the strategies that will be put into place to implement these recommendations over a five year period.

## How Will We Measure Our Success?

The *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020* sets out a range of nationally agreed indicators of change relating to the provision of increased support to children and families. Similar measures are also contained in a number of National Partnerships, including the Indigenous Early Childhood Development National Partnership agreed by states, territories and the Australian Government in 2009.

At the local level, the Northern Territory Government's Strategic Plan, *Territory 2030*, establishes targets for child protection, child safety and wellbeing, and employment, with a particular focus on Indigenous employment. Additional information on the *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020* and *Territory 2030* can be found at Appendix Two.

The Northern Territory Government has established the Child Protection External Monitoring and Reporting Committee to oversight the implementation. The Committee will be chaired by Professor Graham Vimpani AM and report through the Minister for Child Protection to Parliament and the Territory community every six months.

The full list of Committee members can be found at Appendix Three.

During 2011, the Committee will work with the Department of Children and Families to develop a performance measurement and evaluation framework to measure the success of reforms to the child protection and child and family support systems, and to evaluate specific initiatives undertaken as part of the reforms.

In addition to the indicators established in existing national and local frameworks, Government will work with Indigenous organisations and communities to develop new measures that are meaningful for Indigenous children and families, and will involve non-government organisations and communities in the design and process of evaluating programs and services.

The Department of Children and Families will publicly report progress against the reforms annually. Until the establishment of the formal evaluation framework, this progress report will encompass six key measures:

- The timeliness of the Department's response to child protection notifications
- Re-entry into the child protection system following a previous notification, investigation or substantiation
- The level of investment in non-government organisations as a proportion of the Department's overall expenditure
- The proportion of children on long term child protection orders who have stable or permanent placements
- Compliance with legislation and policy
- Staff turnover and frontline staff caseloads.



## Structure of the Strategic Framework

The Government's response to the 147 recommendations has been grouped and will be reported against seven key reform areas:

- Keeping Kids Safe
- Supporting and Strengthening Families
- A Strong and Effective Legal Framework
- Working Together
- Our People
- Healing, Growing, Walking Together
- Building a Better, Stronger, More Accountable System.

Against each of these reform areas a key strategy or strategies have been identified, reflecting the changes necessary to create a new child protection and family support system for the Northern Territory. Actions under each of these strategies give effect to the Board of Inquiry's recommendations, and have been aligned to the time frames for action set out in *Growing them strong, together*.

Given the complex nature and interrelationship of many of the Board of Inquiry recommendations, a number of recommendations appear more than once, and relate to multiple actions.

## Key Northern Territory Government Reforms

### Reducing the backlog of child protection investigations

The significant increases in child protection notifications from 2007 to 2010 created a backlog of matters requiring investigation. Immediate backlog reduction is being addressed through the secondment of experienced child protection workers from New Zealand until June 2011 to conduct these investigations.

Over the next five years, the Department will employ an additional 42 child protection workers across the Territory. The development of a new staffing model and implementing case load ratios will ensure these staff are deployed to areas of highest need as part of a sustainable strategy to manage notifications into the future.

### A new Department and a new structure

The new Department of Children and Families was established on 1 January 2011. As a matter of priority, three operational regions will be established within the structure of the Department and led by Regional Directors: Greater Darwin, Katherine and Northern, and Central Australia.

Regionalisation is designed to improve coordination and integration of services on the ground, giving each region the flexibility to provide services that are relevant and culturally appropriate to local communities.

The regional offices will be established during 2011, and the Department's operational services will move to more integrated regional management over the following 12 months.

### A strong Aboriginal community sector

Early intervention and support for families in need provides the greatest chance of diverting these families from entering the child protection system. Strengthening Aboriginal non-government services is a key way of ensuring these families can access culturally appropriate services to seek the assistance they need.

The Northern Territory Government will fund an Aboriginal peak body through the Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory (AMSANT), which will focus on the wellbeing and safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, youth and families. The peak body will support the development and operation of Aboriginal Child Care Agencies in Darwin and Alice Springs.

The peak body will commence operations in 2011.

### Supporting foster carers

Foster carers and kinship carers are the key to a strong child protection system. Without our dedicated carers we would be unable to provide the care required by children in need of protection. The Northern Territory Government will build a carer system which ensures carers receive the respect they deserve and the practical and financial support they need to carry out their role. This commitment will be reflected in a formal Partnership Agreement between the government and carers, and will be supported by a significant increase in funding for Foster Care NT, the peak body representing foster and kinship carers.



The launch of our Partnering in Care strategy to reform foster and kinship care services includes many groundbreaking and innovative programs. By 2012, the Northern Territory will have a foster and kinship care system delivering a comprehensive Carer Learning and Development program, Carer Consultation and Partnership forums, and a Carer Peer Support Program as the first of our recognition and retention activities.

### New partnerships and ways of working together

With the support of the Australian Government, local governments and the non-government sector, an evidence-based investment framework will be created, setting out the priority services that will be developed, coordinated and funded over the next five years.

Child protection is everyone's business. The Government will work across agencies, and with the Australian Government, local government and the non-government sector, including Indigenous organisations, to develop an investment framework that

will provide a footprint for our investment in the safety and wellbeing of our children, families and communities and their future. The framework will set out an agreed approach for future Northern Territory Government development of and investment in services that support communities, families and children.

### Building community capacity

Government is committed to supporting place-based approaches that emphasise prevention and strengthen families, and to also facilitate access to pathways for more intensive support as needed.

The Government will work with our communities to establish Community Child Safety and Wellbeing Teams in the Territory Growth Towns to promote a coordinated response to child safety and wellbeing issues as a means to strengthen our families and build community capacity.

By 2015 Community Child Safety and Wellbeing Teams will be in place across the Territory Growth Towns.

### A stronger legal framework

Starting immediately, Government will undertake a significant program of legislative reform to:

- Provide guidance and direction to those working to protect children
- Promote information sharing and service coordination
- Define and regulate the quality of services provided to children, young people and families by government and non-government organisations
- Extend the powers and functions of the Children's Commissioner.

By 2012, the Territory will have a stronger and more effective legal framework for protecting children and supporting families and communities.

### Caring for our people

Our staff are our greatest asset. Developing a positive and productive work environment is a critical part of the cultural change that Department leaders need to create. Government will work harder to listen to our staff, to meet their needs and ensure they have the best training, supervision and tools possible to help children and families.

In December 2010, the Northern Territory Government announced a \$6 million staff incentives package for frontline child protection staff. The package, which commenced in January 2011, provides retention and reward incentives for frontline staff who are employed under the Professional classification, and other frontline care and protection staff in a defined range of positions.

Over the next five years, further investment will be made to recruit, train and develop our people – government and non-government staff, volunteers and carers – to create a skilled and supported workforce. The training and support needs and aspirations of Indigenous people will be recognised, and targeted learning and development strategies will be put in place.

A comprehensive workforce strategy will be developed, and measures will be put in place to support the implementation of this strategy over the next five years.

## 1. Keeping Kids Safe

Over the next five years, Northern Territory Government will move to implement the recommendations of the Board of Inquiry through ongoing reform of the statutory system, with renewed focus on the safety and wellbeing of children and young people.

The primary aim of the statutory child protection system in the Northern Territory is to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children who are victims of abuse or neglect, or at risk of becoming so. It does this through responding to community concerns about child safety by conducting formal assessments and investigations, and where required, placing children unable to live at home in a safe and caring environment.

The Board of Inquiry found the Northern Territory child protection system to be one under significant pressure, facing challenges in:

- Receiving and responding to notifications in a timely manner
- Consistently assessing and investigating reports of children at risk
- Recruiting and supporting foster carers
- Monitoring the quality of family-based and residential care services.

Factors contributing to these issues included high staff vacancies and turnover, limited family support services that promote early intervention, and a lack of clarity about sharing information and working collaboratively with other service partners in the government and non-government sectors. Particular focus was placed on the failure to involve non-government services in the statutory system.

The Board of Inquiry made a range of detailed recommendations for reform across the system – from improvements

to the process of making and receiving notifications about children at risk, to increasing the support provided to children exiting the system. At the heart of the Board of Inquiry's recommendations was the principle that the system needs to change to a model where the statutory system operates as just one part of a broader service system, which includes the non-government sector, aimed at supporting and strengthening families.

The Northern Territory Government, through the Department of Children and Families, has tackled the critical issues identified by the Board of Inquiry by moving immediately to:

- Address the backlog of child protection notifications. Nine experienced child protection staff from New Zealand commenced working on secondment with the Department of Children and Families in December 2010, with the aim of clearing the backlog by June 2011
- Review the role and function of existing areas of the child protection system, such as the Central Intake Team and the After Hours Crisis Response, with a view to reform
- Introduce Structured Decision Making tools to assist staff to consistently assess reports of children at risk and make decisions about the level of risk and urgency of response required.

Over the next five years, Government will invest \$29.2 million to reform the statutory child protection system. This reform will be achieved through action against two key strategies, to:

- Create pathways to safety and stability; and
- Engage and retain skilled, supported carers.

Strategy: Create pathways to safety and stability

**Action**

**Deliver accountable and comprehensive statutory protection services to children and young people.**

**Delivery and timeframes**

Commenced within 6 months	Commenced within 18 months	Commenced within 2 years
<p>Reform the notification and intake processes through a review of intake and after hours services across the Territory.</p> <p>Develop initiatives focused on the longer-term safety and wellbeing of infants and young children, such as the Queensland <i>One Chance at Childhood</i> program.</p>	<p>Introduce new intake processes and operating structure to reflect the outcomes of the intake and after hours service reviews.</p> <p>Conduct policy review and development in relation to permanency and stability planning, ongoing management of open cases and case planning.</p> <p>Introduce a comprehensive case management framework for children in the care system.</p> <p>Develop and deliver increased therapeutic services to children and young people.</p>	

**Board of Inquiry Recommendations**

6, 21, 29, 30, 36, 37, 38, 48, 50, 62, 63, 71, 109

**Action**

**Introduce improved assessment tools and processes to ensure better outcomes for children and young people.**

**Delivery and timeframes**

Commenced within 6 months	Commenced within 18 months	Commenced within 2 years
<p>Put in place a new Structured Decision Making tool to consistently assess reports of children at risk.</p> <p>Update policies, procedures and training to support the roll out of the new Structured Decision Making tool.</p>	<p>Work with non-government sector organisations to implement common assessment tools.</p>	

**Board of Inquiry Recommendations**

13, 16, 20

**Action**

**Enhance the provision of intensive family support and preservation services for vulnerable children and families.**

**Delivery and timeframes**

Commenced within 6 months	Commenced within 18 months	Commenced within 2 years
<p>Undertake workforce planning and develop a resource allocation model to support greater delivery of intensive family support services by the Department of Children and Families.</p> <p>Work with the Australian Government to support the introduction of new family preservation services to complement the roll out of Child Protection Income Management.</p>	<p>Develop an investment framework to prioritise the delivery of family support services by Government and the non-government sector.</p> <p>Funding of new intensive family support and preservation services, in conjunction with other community based measures, such as the establishment of Child Safety and Wellbeing Teams.</p>	<p>Further expand service delivery in the Territory Growth Towns.</p>

**Board of Inquiry Recommendations**

61, 62

**Action**

**Develop policy and practice that is inclusive of children, young people and families.**

**Delivery and timeframes**

Commenced within 6 months	Commenced within 18 months	Commenced within 2 years
Develop a revised policy and procedures manual for child protection staff that embeds engagement and collaboration with families as part of normal practice, where the safety of children is not compromised.	<p>Expand Aboriginal Family Group Conferencing across the Northern Territory.</p> <p>Develop a <i>Charter for Children and Young People in Care</i> that is culturally inclusive and meets the needs of young people living with a disability.</p> <p>Implement case planning processes that actively involve children, young people and their families.</p> <p>Establish regular and ongoing mechanisms, such as forums, to listen to the voices of children and young people in the care system.</p>	

**Board of Inquiry Recommendations**

27, 31, 38, 64, 69, 71, 74, 140

**Action**

**Develop an improved statutory out of home care system increasingly delivered by the non-government sector.**

**Delivery and timeframes**

Commenced within 6 months	Commenced within 18 months	Commenced within 2 years
<p>Engage independent consultants to undertake a comprehensive review of existing residential care services and policies.</p> <p>Develop a framework for future investment in the out of home care system, including the move from fee for service to grants-based funding.</p>	<p>Fund new services with a focus on the provision of out of home care to Aboriginal children.</p> <p>Progressively implement the required shift in funding from fee to service to grants arrangements.</p>	

**Board of Inquiry Recommendations**

33, 34, 35, 67, 77, 78, 79

**Action****Support young people transitioning from care to independent living.****Delivery and timeframes**

Commenced within 6 months	Commenced within 18 months	Commenced within 2 years
	<p>Embed the process of developing transition plans in policy and practice.</p> <p>Provide regular and ongoing training to out of home care staff in the development and implementation of these plans.</p>	<p>Support and fund the non-government sector to deliver services for young people leaving care, including a mentoring scheme.</p>

**Board of Inquiry Recommendations**

73, 74, 75, 76

Strategy: Engage and retain skilled, supported carers

**Action**

**Review and increase carer reimbursements.**

**Delivery and timeframes**

Commenced within 6 months	Commenced within 18 months	Commenced within 2 years
Review the carer reimbursement system, including the introduction of appropriate assessment tools and timely processing of payments.	Introduce formal review rights and a complaints mechanism for carers.	Put annual consultative processes in place to respond to CPI and other factors affecting the equity of carer payments.

**Board of Inquiry Recommendations**

40, 41, 42, 43, 44

**Action**

**Create a culture and system that supports and respects foster carers.**

**Delivery and timeframes**

Commenced within 6 months	Commenced within 18 months	Commenced within 2 years
<p>Develop a comprehensive carer learning and development strategy.</p> <p>Create a Partnership Agreement with Foster Care NT, including additional funding to pilot a Carer Peer Support Program and Communities of Practice program.</p>	<p>Support experienced carers to take on significant roles in the recruitment, support and retention of foster carers.</p> <p>Develop a Carer’s Charter.</p> <p>Introduce formal review rights and a complaints mechanism for carers.</p>	<p>Develop and deliver education and training to create advanced practitioner carers, with the skills and experience to provide placements to children and young people with high and complex needs.</p>

**Board of Inquiry Recommendations**

45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51

**Action****Develop a robust kinship care program.****Delivery and timeframes**

Commenced within 6 months	Commenced within 18 months	Commenced within 2 years
<p>Introduce a flexible training package for kinship carers to more readily become registered carers.</p> <p>Review payments to kinship carers in line with the general review of carer reimbursements.</p>	<p>Develop a detailed practice guide for kinship care that provides clear guidance around circumstances where such placements are appropriate and reinforces continuing case management obligations.</p>	<p>Revise and adopt kinship carer training to remote community needs.</p>

**Board of Inquiry Recommendations**

41, 48, 56, 57, 58

**Action****Undertake a Territory-wide information and carer recruitment program to promote the role of foster carers.****Delivery and timeframes**

Commenced within 6 months	Commenced within 18 months	Commenced within 2 years
<p>Create a Territory-wide carer recruitment campaign.</p> <p>Develop targeted strategies to attract Aboriginal carers, with a focus on regional and remote areas.</p>	<p>Recognise the important role of foster carers and the contribution of individual carers through a reward and recognition framework.</p>	<p>Conduct ongoing community education and information sessions.</p>

**Board of Inquiry Recommendations**

49

## 2. Supporting and Strengthening Families

Essential to supporting vulnerable children and their families is the existence of coordinated, integrated and professional services, offered both by governments and the non-government sector. Just as the protection of children at risk is – and should be – a priority for governments, so too is the promotion of strong, healthy and safe families, and this requires Government investment and support.

The Board of Inquiry identified areas within the Northern Territory service system that are fragmented, and other areas where significant duplication of services occurs. In some areas, particularly regional and remote towns, there are insufficient programs and services in place to provide the support needed by families struggling with issues of mental illness, drug and alcohol abuse, and inter-generational abuse and neglect.

The Government recognises that enhanced and integrated models of service delivery are required to address these issues, which will require a move away from rigid entry points and boundaries to a 'no wrong door' approach. The Government will work with non-government partners to build stronger and more effective models of service delivery, and better integration between Government agencies, and with the community and the non-government sector.

The types of services being delivered are also important, with the Board of Inquiry recognising the importance of evidence-based interventions and the increased delivery of preventative and therapeutic services, particularly in remote areas.

Over the next five years, Government will invest an additional \$27.5 million to implement the key strategy, to expand and support an enhanced child and family service system.

Strategy: Expand and support an enhanced child and family service system

#### Action

**Establish Child Safety and Wellbeing Teams and localised child safety and wellbeing plans in the Territory Growth Towns and elsewhere.**

#### Delivery and timeframes

Commenced within 6 months	Commenced within 18 months	Commenced within 2 years
Roll out Child Safety and Wellbeing teams and child safety and wellbeing planning processes across the Territory Growth Towns.		

#### Board of Inquiry Recommendations

25, 117

#### Action

**Work with the Australian Government to expand the number and scope of the current and planned child and family centres in Territory Growth Towns.**

#### Delivery and timeframes

Commenced within 6 months	Commenced within 18 months	Commenced within 2 years
Negotiate with the Australian Government to expand the role of the existing child and family centres in Palmerston, Yuendumu, Maningrida, Gunbalanya and Ngukurr.	Explore options, with the Australian Government, for the establishment of additional child and family centres in the Northern Territory.	

#### Board of Inquiry Recommendations

8

**Action**

**Explore with the Australian Government the trial use of existing remote area infrastructure to promote child and family safety and wellbeing.**

**Delivery and timeframes**

Commenced within 6 months	Commenced within 18 months	Commenced within 2 years
Negotiate with the Australian Government around the use of remote services, such as safe places, for the location of therapeutic and other child and family support programs.	Develop and fund new therapeutic services for children and young people, with a focus on remote locations.	

**Board of Inquiry Recommendations**

9, 66

**Action**

**Develop an investment framework for child and family services.**

**Delivery and timeframes**

Commenced within 6 months	Commenced within 18 months	Commenced within 2 years
<p>Identify and assess the current range of child and family services in the Northern Territory.</p> <p>Engage the Australian Government, local government and the non-government sector in a strategic review of child and family services.</p> <p>Develop a framework for future investment in child and family services.</p> <p>Increase capacity within the grants management section of the Department of Children and Families.</p>	<p>Review the principles, transparency, accountability and quality assurance of grants to the non-government sector.</p>	<p>Progressively align government funding of services to the investment framework.</p> <p>Implement a three-year funding cycle for grants to the non-government sector.</p> <p>Negotiate with the Australian Government in relation to the future of the Northern Territory Emergency Response.</p>

**Board of Inquiry Recommendations**

8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 114



### 3. A Strong and Effective Legal Framework

An effective child protection system requires a comprehensive legislative framework that balances competing rights and obligations with providing clear guidance and direction for people working with vulnerable children and their families.

The Board of Inquiry recommended a series of reforms to the *Care and Protection of Children Act* and related legislation to remove areas of ambiguity and provide clearer direction to child protection professionals. Other recommendations included greater involvement of families in decision-making and use of alternative dispute resolution and other less adversarial processes.

The Board of Inquiry further identified the need to ensure court processes and practices are family-focused, while retaining as their focal point the safety and wellbeing of children.

Work to amend the *Care and Protection of Children Act* commenced in December

2010, with significant reforms to take place during 2011. These will include the recommended amendments to expand the powers and functions of the Northern Territory Children's Commissioner. Broad consultation will also be undertaken to frame the amendments required to allow greater information sharing and promote coordination of services.

Over the next five years, the Government will investigate ways to improve the legal system's response to at-risk and vulnerable children and families, including options for the establishment of single court for all matters relating to children and young people.

This reform will be achieved through the key strategy, to strengthen the child protection and family support system through legislative amendment and changes to court practice. An additional \$3.2 million will be invested over 5 years to bring about these reforms.

Strategy: Strengthen the child protection and family support systems through legislative amendment and changes to court practices

**Action**

**Establish internal and external structures to support the review of the legislative framework and court practices.**

**Delivery and timeframes**

Commenced within 6 months	Commenced within 18 months	Commenced within 2 years
Establish a non-government sector Reference Group to meet regularly over the life of the reforms to provide advice on the development of amendments to the <i>Care and Protection of Children Act</i> .	Senior Department of Children and Families staff will participate in the Local Court Users Groups.	

**Board of Inquiry Recommendations**

87, 115, 147

**Action**

**Amend the *Care and Protection of Children Act* and related legislation to implement the Board of Inquiry recommendations.**

**Delivery and timeframes**

Commenced within 6 months	Commenced within 18 months	Commenced within 2 years
Amend the Act to increase the powers and functions of the Children’s Commissioner.  Engage the community sector regarding amendments to give effect to information sharing and service coordination requirements of a new system.	Develop and introduce legislative amendments to create greater accountability through the establishment of a complaints process, and a system for monitoring out of home care placements and allegations of abuse in care.  Develop and introduce amendments to create a stronger, more effective statutory child protection system.	Revise policy and practice manuals to reflect the legislative changes.

**Board of Inquiry Recommendations**

4, 72, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 105, 106, 107, 108, 112, 113, 115, 136, 137, 138, 140, 141, 142, 143

**Action****Review and amend court practices and procedures.****Delivery and timeframes**

Commenced within 6 months	Commenced within 18 months	Commenced within 2 years
	<p>Work with Magistrates, Judges and members of the legal profession to develop changes to court practices and procedures.</p> <p>Develop regulations relating to Court ordered mediation in the child protection system.</p>	<p>Review and amend Practice Directions in association with the major reform of the <i>Care and Protection of Children Act</i>.</p>

**Board of Inquiry Recommendations**

86, 87, 100, 101

**Action****Develop options for a single jurisdiction for all matters relating to children and young people.****Delivery and timeframes**

Commenced within 6 months	Commenced within 18 months	Commenced within 2 years
	<p>Review key elements of the youth justice system, including the supervision and management of young people on community corrections orders.</p>	<p>Consider further merger of the child protection and youth justice systems, including the establishment of a single court.</p>

**Board of Inquiry Recommendations**

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## 4. Working Together

The aim of community collaboration is to ensure local communities, non-government and government services join together in partnership with a clear understanding of the role of each partner to actively engage and provide for the safety and wellbeing of children.

Community collaboration is a vital change that needs to be made, to better support stronger and safer families and children. It is through community collaboration and closely working with the non-government sector that families will be more empowered to make safe and healthy decisions for their families, which will in turn divert them away from entering the statutory child protection system in the future.

The Board of Inquiry made a range of recommendations in relation to community collaboration, predominantly focusing on putting systems into place that will promote collaboration and shared visions between the government and non-government sector.

Through improved community collaboration, government and partners will provide better, more integrated services, using combined funding efforts where required to reduce duplication of services and to streamline service delivery to clients.

Over the next five years, Government will invest an additional \$9.9 million to achieve greater collaboration and stronger partnerships as part of the key strategy, to work across agencies, with the non-government sector and the community to implement the reform agenda.

**Strategy: Work across agencies, with the non-government sector and the community to implement the reform agenda**

### Action

**Engage the Department’s workforce, the non-government sector and the community to create a Strategic Plan for the new Department of Children and Families.**

### Delivery and timeframes

Commenced within 6 months	Commenced within 18 months	Commenced within 2 years
Engage an independent consultant to undertake a strategic planning process with government and non-government partners.  Establish baseline measures to inform progress against the strategic plan, including measures of staff satisfaction and morale.	Reassess staff satisfaction against the measures established in the strategic plan.	Review progress against the strategic plan.

### Board of Inquiry Recommendations

**Action**

**Work collaboratively with the non-government sector to achieve better outcomes for children and young people.**

**Delivery and timeframes**

Commenced within 6 months	Commenced within 18 months	Commenced within 2 years
<p>Work with the non-government sector to develop a dual pathway model for notifications, to provide appropriate support services to 'at risk' children and families.</p> <p>Develop a model of consultation and engagement as part of the development of the new Departmental Strategic Plan.</p> <p>Review policies and procedures in partnership with the non-government sector.</p> <p>Provide greater clarity and transparency around departmental decision making, through the publication of relevant policy and procedure manuals.</p>	<p>Establish regular and ongoing consultative processes with the non-government sector, Indigenous organisations and communities.</p> <p>Recognise, in policy and practice, the role of the non-government sector in supporting children, families and communities.</p> <p>Structure a new relationship with the NT Families and Children Advisory Council, including revised Terms of Reference and greater access to information and data.</p> <p>Work with the non-government sector to develop and implement operational guidelines around information sharing and collaborative practice.</p>	<p>Work with non-government organisations to ensure new information sharing arrangements and practices are consistent with privacy legislation.</p>

**Board of Inquiry Recommendations**

7, 18, 26, 27, 37, 52, 102, 114, 115, 116, 117, 139

**Action**

**Establish a Child Safety and Wellbeing Directors' Network.**

**Delivery and timeframes**

Commenced within 6 months	Commenced within 18 months	Commenced within 2 years
<p>Establish a network of senior government officials to improve coordination in the planning and delivery of Government child safety and wellbeing related services.</p> <p>Use the network to progress planning, funding and delivery issues relating to remote service delivery, including remote policing.</p>	<p>Develop agency child safety and wellbeing plans.</p> <p>Adopt a model of cross-sectoral training, with particular focus on education, justice and health staff.</p>	<p>Publish and report annually on departmental child safety and wellbeing plans.</p>

**Board of Inquiry Recommendations**

23, 25, 118, 127

**Action****Establish hospital based inter-agency teams.****Delivery and timeframes**

Commenced within 6 months	Commenced within 18 months	Commenced within 2 years
Work collaboratively to develop a hospital-based model for managing complex child protection cases, involving the Department of Children and Families, the Department of Health and Northern Territory Police.	Establish hospital teams in two Northern Territory hospitals.	

**Board of Inquiry Recommendations**

117

**Action****Develop and implement a comprehensive community education campaign.****Delivery and timeframes**

Commenced within 6 months	Commenced within 18 months	Commenced within 2 years
Develop a comprehensive community education campaign to reinforce key messages about child safety and wellbeing and child development, and create awareness about the role of families and communities in keeping children safe.	Form partnerships with non-government agencies to develop and deliver targeted components of the community education strategy.  Expand the rollout of protective behaviours education in schools and other locations.	Conduct ongoing impact evaluation of the community education strategy.

**Board of Inquiry Recommendations**

146

## 5. Our People

The magnitude of workforce challenges facing the Northern Territory, and the child protection system in particular, are well documented, as are national skill shortages of community workers. These challenges and shortages are one of the greatest risks to the implementation of programs and services to improve child safety and wellbeing in the Northern Territory.

The Board of Inquiry's workforce recommendations focus on the scale of problems that exist across the Northern Territory, and emphasise the prolonged and continuing pressure on the workforce, which is a result of the difficulty in recruiting and retaining appropriately skilled workers in the Territory.

To address these issues, the Northern Territory needs to look at its workforce differently. It needs to recognise the complexity and demands of working within a child protection system, and reward those that do this difficult work. It needs to recognise and support the broader workforce – not just government employees, but those working with community organisations, volunteering, and providing

safe homes for children in care. It needs to work in partnership with the community sector and communities to attract, retain and develop the right people for each of these important roles.

The skills, knowledge and perspectives of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce are vital to improving the system, and improving outcomes for Territory children and families. *Growing them strong, together* calls for direct efforts and resources to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, as well as better and more targeted attraction, retention and development strategies.

Over the next five years, the Northern Territory Government will invest an additional \$34.7 million in creating the workforce we need, with the right capabilities, skills and attitudes, through strategies to:

- Build and support the child and families workforce; and
- Create a strong, supported Aboriginal workforce.

Strategy: Build and support the child and families workforce

**Action**

**Introduce an attraction, retention and incentives package for frontline staff, including Indigenous staff.**

**Delivery and timeframes**

Commenced within 6 months	Commenced within 18 months	Commenced within 2 years
Introduce a staff incentives package for frontline child protection staff.	Maintain regular monitoring of staff turnover, and set performance targets for reducing turnover.	Review the staff incentives package.

**Board of Inquiry Recommendations**

123, 124

**Action**

**Develop a comprehensive strategic workforce plan based on clearly stated values and principles.**

**Delivery and timeframes**

Commenced within 6 months	Commenced within 18 months	Commenced within 2 years
<p>Engage an independent consultant to review the Department of Children and Families as an employer.</p> <p>Establish baseline measures of staff satisfaction and morale, through independently applied and analysed staff surveys, exit interviews and other mechanisms.</p> <p>Undertake an analysis of roles and functions performed across the Department of Children and Families to better meet the needs of new models of services.</p> <p>Develop a model of workforce and resource planning, including benchmarked caseload ratios.</p> <p>Introduce and resource a supervision policy and program, including mechanisms to improve cultural competency and cultural safety.</p>	<p>Develop a Workforce Strategy in partnership with the non-government sector.</p> <p>Establish a Learning and Development Framework, to address the induction, training, supervision and support needs of the workforce.</p> <p>Engage local education and training institutions in the development and delivery of specialist training.</p> <p>Introduce regular “refresher” courses for all staff about legislation, policy and procedures.</p> <p>Review and evaluate overseas and interstate recruitment strategies.</p>	<p>Develop and embed a mentorship program within the Department of Children and Families.</p> <p>Conduct ongoing assessment of staff morale and satisfaction.</p>

**Board of Inquiry Recommendations**

28, 36, 119, 120, 121, 122, 123, 125,126, 127, 128, 129, 130, 131, 132

## Strategy: Create a strong, supported Aboriginal workforce

### Action

#### Develop an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander strategic workforce plan.

#### Delivery and timeframes

Commenced within 6 months	Commenced within 18 months	Commenced within 2 years
<p>Review and formalise the role of the current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reference Group in relation to workforce matters.</p> <p>Develop key performance indicators of Aboriginal workforce planning.</p> <p>Develop targeted Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander attraction, retention and recruitment strategies.</p> <p>Ensure performance and incentive strategies for remote area staff are equitable.</p>	<p>Develop the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce plan in partnerships with Aboriginal people, organisations and employees.</p> <p>Report annually against key performance indicators.</p> <p>Resource Aboriginal Employment Strategy initiatives, including cadetships and apprenticeships.</p>	

#### Board of Inquiry Recommendations

119, 123, 124, 134, 135

## 6. Healing, Growing, Walking Together

The Board of Inquiry identified that for many Aboriginal people the child protection system is an ongoing process of removal of children, indistinguishable from the historical policies that created the Stolen Generation. Additionally, it found that the experiences and interactions of Aboriginal people and communities with the statutory systems are often negative, with little consideration given to cultural security in the delivery of services.

There is a high level of distrust of the government and its related services as a result, and this fear compounds the problems of the child protection system and lessens its ability to effectively support families and protect at-risk children.

Given that more than 75 per cent of children and young people in the child protection system are Aboriginal, *Growing them strong, together* report continually highlights the importance of Aboriginal people, communities and organisations participating in and leading decisions regarding Aboriginal children.

In order to properly support Aboriginal families in the Territory, the Board of Inquiry recognised the need for significant

development of the Aboriginal service sector to support organisations and services to provide assistance to parents and children in a way that is culturally appropriate and recognises the strengths of Aboriginal families and communities.

There is also a role to be played by Aboriginal organisations in the care and protection of children at a community level, to support Aboriginal people as decision makers in regard to the wellbeing and safety of their children and young people.

Through the development of the Aboriginal service sector and increased capacity at community level, Government can collaborate with communities in new ways to develop new culturally appropriate practices that support families in times of need. Key to this is the establishment of an Aboriginal Peak Body to support child safety and wellbeing.

Over the next five years, Government will invest an additional \$9.1 million to reform the system to better respond to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities.

**Strategy: Reform the system to better respond to the needs to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities**

**Action**

**Amend child protection legislation, policies, practices and accountability systems to be inclusive and reflective of Aboriginal culture and communities.**

**Delivery and timeframes**

Commenced within 6 months	Commenced within 18 months	Commenced within 2 years
<p>Reinforce, through training and relevant procedures, the application of the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle.</p> <p>Revise internal procedures of the Department of Children and Families to promote the use of interpreters and the provision of materials in different languages and formats.</p> <p>Commence a thorough overhaul of recruitment, training and supervision policies and practices to build cultural competency in the Department of Children and Families workforce.</p> <p>Develop Key Performance Indicators to demonstrate the goals of Aboriginal policies, including workforce planning, with annual reporting on achievements.</p>	<p>Develop a framework for the greater inclusion of Aboriginal people, communities and organisations in child safety and wellbeing.</p> <p>Complete an Aboriginal child safety and wellbeing plan.</p> <p>Publish a comprehensive practice guide, developed in consultation with Aboriginal people, communities and organisations, around the application of the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle.</p> <p>Work with courts to develop appropriate guidelines around informed consent, where parents or caregivers do not have English as their first language.</p> <p>In consultation with the Australian Government and Aboriginal organisations, review the role of the Aboriginal Community Workers and Remote Aboriginal Family and Community Workers with a view to enhancing their role in relation to the support of children in care.</p> <p>Ensure foster care and kinship care arrangements and associated policies and practices are supportive of culture and connections to community.</p>	<p>Report annually against the framework for inclusion of Aboriginal people in child protection, child safety and wellbeing, as part of the Department of Children and Families Annual Report.</p>

**Action**

**Amend child protection legislation, policies, practices and accountability systems to be inclusive and reflective of Aboriginal culture and communities (cont...).**

**Delivery and timeframes**

Commenced within 6 months	Commenced within 18 months	Commenced within 2 years
	<p>Prioritise the provision of culturally appropriate intensive family support to prevent unnecessary placements, and enable reunification where this is the appropriate outcome.</p> <p>Ensure efforts and resources are directed to support Aboriginal Employment Strategy initiatives.</p>	

**Board of Inquiry Recommendations**

2, 6, 7, 39, 60, 61, 62, 71, 101, 102, 132, 134, 135

**Action**

**Work with Aboriginal families, organisations and communities as partners in child safety and family wellbeing.**

**Delivery and timeframes**

Commenced within 6 months	Commenced within 18 months	Commenced within 2 years
<p>Focus on successful Aboriginal programs and services as part of the development of an investment framework for child and family services.</p> <p>Include cultural plans within the care plans of Aboriginal children.</p> <p>Evaluate the current Aboriginal Family Group Conferencing model and process.</p> <p>Ensure Aboriginal sector participation in key reform activities, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The review and reform of residential care services and the out of home care program</li> <li>• The creation of Child Safety and Wellbeing Teams</li> <li>• The re-shaping of the workforce and</li> <li>• Complaints and appeals processes.</li> </ul> <p>Ensure community education strategies effectively address Aboriginal audiences, in particular those who do not speak English as a first language.</p>	<p>Expand the range of Aboriginal child and family services in Territory Growth Towns, aligned to the roll out of Child Safety and Wellbeing teams.</p> <p>Amend the <i>Care and Protection of Children Act</i> to embed the role of Aboriginal families, communities and organisations, and recognition of Aboriginal culture, in legislation.</p> <p>Introduce a comprehensive case management framework for Aboriginal children in care.</p> <p>Expand the use of Aboriginal Family Group Conferencing.</p> <p>Work with Aboriginal organisations on foster care recruitment strategies, with an emphasis on Aboriginal carers in remote and rural locations.</p>	<p>Fund Aboriginal Family Group Conferencing as part of normal budget processes.</p>

**Board of Inquiry Recommendations**

2, 9, 31, 33, 42, 49, 68, 77, 79, 96, 103, 117, 122, 142, 143, 146

Strategy: Improve Aboriginal child safety and wellbeing through the development of Aboriginal controlled organisations

**Action**

**Support the establishment of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child and Families Peak Body.**

**Delivery and timeframes**

Commenced within 6 months	Commenced within 18 months	Commenced within 2 years
Work with the Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance of the Northern Territory (AMSANT) to establish an Indigenous peak body, focusing on the wellbeing and safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, youth and families.	Establish the Aboriginal Peak body on child protection, child and family safety and wellbeing.	

**Board of Inquiry Recommendations**

5

**Action**

**Support the establishment of Aboriginal Child Care Agencies in Darwin and Alice Springs.**

**Delivery and timeframes**

Commenced within 6 months	Commenced within 18 months	Commenced within 2 years
Fund AMSANT to develop, with the new Peak Body, Aboriginal Child Care Agencies.	<p>Establish the first Aboriginal Child Care Agency.</p> <p>Work with the Aboriginal Child Care Agency to progressively outsource support to kinships carers.</p> <p>Scope the provision of an advice and support program as part of the role of the Aboriginal Child Care Agencies.</p>	Establish the second Aboriginal Child Care Agency.

**Board of Inquiry Recommendations**

3, 4, 60, 144

## 7. Building a Stronger, Better, More Accountable System

The Board of Inquiry identified a child protection system unable to meet community expectations or Government accountabilities.

In response to the Board of Inquiry's recommendations, the Government announced the creation of a new Department – the Department of Children and Families – to support child safety and family wellbeing initiatives. The Department of Children and Families came into existence on 1 January 2011, and is the lead Department for the reform of the child protection system in the Northern Territory.

Within the Department, a Strategic Reform and Accountability Team has been established and is responsible for working within the agency and across Government to drive the reform process.

In order to remain transparent and accountable, it is vital that processes and structures are put in place to measure and report on the progress of the child protection and family support systems.

The Government has invested in a new complaints mechanism. The roles and functions of the Children's Commissioner will be expanded, including the creation of an 'own motion' power of investigation and funding committed to support the Commissioner's new functions.

In addition, a number of mechanisms have been established to support, coordinate, monitor and report on reform process. These include:

- A Child Safety and Wellbeing Directors' Network comprising senior executives from across the Northern Territory Government. The network will be responsible for promoting

collaborative practice and developing and implementing whole-of-Government policy responses to child safety and wellbeing issues arising within Government agencies

- A Chief Executives Child Protection Task Force, chaired by the Chief Executive of the Department of the Chief Minister and with membership from the Departments of Health; Children and Families; Education and Training; Justice; Housing, Local Government and Regional Services; Northern Territory Police, and relevant Australian Government agencies, including the Department of Families and Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
- A Child Protection External Monitoring and Reporting Committee, chaired by Dr Graham Vimpani AM and with expert members drawn from child protection, child wellbeing and Aboriginal organisations. The committee will receive regular reports on progress and outcomes, and will report through the Minister for Child Protection to Parliament and the public every six months.

Over the next five years, Government will invest an additional \$17 million to create a better and more accountable child protection and family support system through work to:

- Revise the organisational structure and roles to meet the needs of the reform agenda
- Audit policies and programs to ensure compliance with legislative and organisational requirements and
- Improve the internal and external accountability and transparency mechanisms of the Department of Children and Families.

Strategy: Revise the organisational structure and roles to meet the needs of the reform agenda

**Action**

**Create new departmental structures to drive and support the reforms.**

**Delivery and timeframes**

Commenced within 6 months	Commenced within 18 months	Commenced within 2 years
<p>Establish the Department of Children and Families with responsibility for child protection, child safety and family wellbeing across the Territory.</p> <p>Create a Strategic Reform and Accountability Team with responsibility for implementing the reform agenda.</p> <p>Establish three operational regions led by Regional Directors: Greater Darwin, Katherine and Northern, and Central Australia.</p> <p>Review and reform the Central Intake and After Hours Services.</p>	<p>Transition responsibility for ongoing delivery of reform initiatives to operational areas of the Department of Children and Families.</p> <p>Move service delivery to regional management.</p> <p>Locate specialist practice advisors in the regional offices to monitor and maintain quality, evidence-based practice.</p> <p>Review the Workforce Development Unit to align its role and functions to the new Workforce Strategy.</p> <p>Create a kinship care unit to assist with the recruitment, assessment, registration, support and training of kinship carers.</p> <p>Review and reform the Out of Home Care branch.</p> <p>Establish a team with responsibility for strategies to reunite children and young people with their families.</p>	<p>Cease operation of the Strategic Reform and Accountability Team.</p>

**Board of Inquiry Recommendations**

32, 35, 60, 65, 121, 133, 147

## Strategy: Audit programs and policies to ensure compliance with legislative and organisational requirements

### Action

#### Clean up the backlog of unallocated cases.

#### Delivery and timeframes

Commenced within 6 months	Commenced within 18 months	Commenced within 2 years
<p>Immediately address the backlog through the secondment of child protection workers from New Zealand.</p> <p>Develop and implement a new staffing model and case load ratios to manage notifications into the future.</p> <p>Recruit an additional 17 child protection workers.</p>	<p>Recruit an additional 8 child protection workers.</p>	<p>Recruit an additional 17 child protection workers, with 42 additional workers in place by 2015.</p>

#### Board of Inquiry Recommendations

14

### Action

#### Audit and improve the performance of identified statutory child protection programs.

#### Delivery and timeframes

Commenced within 6 months	Commenced within 18 months	Commenced within 2 years
<p>Review current out of home care and 'Family Way' placements to ensure compliance with legislation and policy.</p> <p>Continue implementation of recommendations arising from previous reviews and evaluations, including the <i>High Risk Audit</i>, the <i>Report in Respect of Baby BM</i> and <i>The Interim Progress Report on Intake and Response Procedures</i>.</p>	<p>Review the Department of Children and Families family support program.</p> <p>Undertake a joint review of the Child Abuse Taskforce.</p> <p>Review entry points and arrangements for the placement of children with a disability in out of home care.</p> <p>Report annually against the implementation of recommendations from previous reviews and evaluations.</p>	

#### Board of Inquiry Recommendations

15, 17, 19, 24, 32, 53, 54, 68, 70, 73, 103, 104

**Action**

**Update information technology and communication systems.**

**Delivery and timeframes**

Commenced within 6 months	Commenced within 18 months	Commenced within 2 years
<p>Review and amend the Community Care Information System (CCIS) to reduce duplication and improve data.</p> <p>Amend CCIS to improve recording and reporting in the out of home care system.</p>	<p>Introduce further changes to CCIS to meet the requirements of the new legislative framework.</p>	

**Board of Inquiry Recommendations**

109

Strategy: Improve the internal and external accountability and transparency mechanisms of the Department of Children and Families

**Action**

**Improve external accountability and oversight mechanisms.**

**Delivery and timeframes**

Commenced within 6 months	Commenced within 18 months	Commenced within 2 years
<p>Develop a complaints management process for clients of child protection services.</p> <p>Establish an appeals process for professional decisions, independent of the agency's normal line management structures.</p> <p>Develop and implement the role of complaints officers in each of the regional offices.</p> <p>Establish a Practice Audit and Investigations Unit to embed systemic improvements in training, practice and procedures.</p>		

**Board of Inquiry Recommendations**

142, 143

## Action

### Improve internal accountability mechanisms.

#### Delivery and timeframes

Commenced within 6 months	Commenced within 18 months	Commenced within 2 years
<p>Expand the role and powers of, and increase funding to, the Children's Commissioner.</p> <p>Develop key performance indicators for the new Department of Children and Families, and for child safety and wellbeing.</p> <p>Establish an evaluation framework for the reform of the care and protection system.</p>	<p>Further increase funding to the Children's Commissioner.</p> <p>Monitor and report performance of the care and protection system against national and Territory standards.</p> <p>Report annually against key performance indicators, including measures of Aboriginal child safety and wellbeing, the safety and wellbeing of children in care, and workforce development.</p>	

#### Board of Inquiry Recommendations

2, 16, 22, 48, 53, 54, 55, 59, 110, 135, 145

## Taking Action Now and in the Future

Government is committed to reform of the child protection system, and through the actions outlined in this Strategic Framework, a new system will be developed in partnership with non-government organisations and with the support of the broader community.

Over the next five years, the Northern Territory Government will invest an additional \$130 million in strengthening and rebuilding the Territory's child protection and family support system.

This investment will be targeted towards the key priorities identified by the Board of Inquiry including a major reform of the statutory child protection and out of home care systems, creating a strong and supported workforce and building new partnerships with the non-government sector.

Throughout the life of the reform, Government will release annual implementation plans that have been developed in collaboration with all relevant agencies, and in consultation with key strategic partners, such as the new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, youth and families peak body and the Northern Territory Council of Social Services. The annual implementation plans will outline not just Government's actions against the Strategic Framework, but against the broader child safety and wellbeing agenda of Government.

Government will ensure transparency in implementation and monitoring of the reforms, by regularly reporting on progress against the Framework. The Child Protection External Monitoring and Reporting Committee will report to the Minister for Child Protection and Minister for Children and Families, and through the Minister to the Northern Territory Parliament and the community, every six months.

## Appendix One: Board of Inquiry Recommendations and Urgency Rating

Rec #	Recommendation	Urgency
1	That Northern Territory Families and Children undertakes a process of engaging its entire workforce to commit to a strategic plan which clarifies its mission and includes the articulation of values and principles under which it will operate.	2
2	That the Northern Territory Government develops a clear framework for the inclusion of Aboriginal people in child welfare as the basis of an Aboriginal child safety and wellbeing plan and that measures are developed against each key component of the framework with progress reported annually.	2
3	That an Aboriginal Child Care Agency or Agencies be developed in stages, and that such an agency or agencies is funded by Government with a major role in child safety and wellbeing, with consultation to determine how the Aboriginal community should be represented. Alternatively, the agency functions may be developed as part of an existing Aboriginal controlled organisation.	1
4	That there is recognition in the <i>Care and Protection of Children Act</i> of the functions of an Aboriginal agency or agencies or other recognised entities.	2
5	That the Northern Territory Government funds the development, establishment and ongoing work of an Aboriginal peak body on child and family safety and wellbeing, and child protection. This peak body would support the process of the development of Aboriginal child and family wellbeing and safety, and child protection agencies.	2
6	The Inquiry endorses the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle and recommends that it is interpreted and applied in such a manner that the safety of the child is paramount.	1
7	That in consultation with Aboriginal people including relevant service providers, Northern Territory Families and Children should publish a comprehensive practice guide around the application of the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle to be made available to all stakeholders.	2
8	That the planning processes around the development of integrated child and family centres in remote areas specifically address the service delivery needs of vulnerable and at-risk children and families and promote collaborative practice amongst government and non-government service providers relating to these targeted groups.	1

Rec #	Recommendation	Urgency
9	<p>That the Northern Territory Government explores with the Commonwealth the (trial) development (or expansion of) existing infrastructure in remote areas (e.g. women’s safe houses, day care centres, health clinics) to provide on-community therapeutic residential options for mothers and small children where the latter have been identified as being at risk of removal into foster care because of ‘failure-to-thrive’, neglect, or otherwise inadequate parenting. The trial of such options would need to include the development of a therapeutic intervention model and staffing/supervision options.</p>	3
10	<p>That the Northern Territory Government makes a very significant and sustained investment in the development (and expansion) of a suite of secondary prevention, tertiary prevention, therapeutic and reunification services for vulnerable and at-risk children, families and communities. The majority of these services should be provided by the non-government sector and administered through an enhanced Northern Territory Families and Children grants program. The investment in such services should involve new rather than redirected funding and within a five year period, should match or exceed the combined Northern Territory Families and Children expenditure in statutory child protection and out of home care.</p> <p>The investment program should be based on an analysis of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The reasons that children are coming into contact with the child protection system in the Northern Territory</li> <li>• Service models that may be relevant to the unique cultural, demographic and geographic realities of the Northern Territory</li> <li>• Successful Aboriginal-specific programs and services within the Northern Territory and interstate to inform the service development process</li> <li>• Workforce and training needs in both the statutory and NGO sectors</li> <li>• The development of these services should be underpinned by the principles outlined in Chapter 6.</li> </ul> <p>The suite of service options should include intensive maternal and child support, therapeutic services for children, youth and families, substance abuse treatment, parenting skills development, intensive family preservation, targeted family support, and community development and healing (around issues such as sexual abuse, alcohol abuse, neglect, domestic violence and gambling).</p>	2

Rec #	Recommendation	Urgency
11	That the Northern Territory Government seeks the cooperation of the Commonwealth in undertaking a strategic review of child and family wellbeing services in the Northern Territory. The review should inform the development and implementation of a joint strategic plan around service planning and funding in order to overcome fragmentation, inefficiencies and duplication and to target services where they are most needed.	2
12	That the Northern Territory Government undertakes a review of the Northern Territory Families and Children grants program and secretariat with a view to ensuring that the provision of service grants aligns with the goals and strategic priorities of Northern Territory Families and Children, that funding grants are determined by way of a transparent process, that all grants include robust quality assurance and accountability measures, that there is a commitment to progressively implementing a three-year funding cycle, and that the grants section is adequately resourced to administer a substantially enhanced program.	2
13	The Northern Territory Families and Children either extends the 'outcome' timeframe from 24 to 48 hours for matters that do not appear to require an immediate response; or retains the current 24 hour target but intake workers make an initial assessment based only on the information at hand, as is the case in some other jurisdictions.	2
14	That Northern Territory Families and Children immediately develops and implements a strategy to clear up the backlog of unallocated child protection investigations whilst ensuring all notified children are safe. Furthermore, that Northern Territory Families and Children develop a longer term sustainable approach based on a resource allocation model to ensure that such backlogs do not re-emerge.	1
15	That Northern Territory Families and Children formally reviews its internal family support program. This should result in a clear practice framework and accountability measures including the collection and reporting of service data relating to family support.	2
16	That Northern Territory Families and Children immediately reviews the response targets for the commencement of investigations for the various risk categories and considers whether other targets may be more realistic. Once updated policies/guidelines have been agreed, ongoing timeliness data should be calculated on all matters that have been 'outcomed' (processed by Central Intake) not just those for which an investigation has commenced.	1

Rec #	Recommendation	Urgency
17	That the recommendations from the two reports from the Office of the Children's Commissioner: <i>'Report in respect of baby BM'</i> and <i>'The interim Progress Report on Intake and Response Process'</i> be implemented as a matter of priority, subject to any over-riding proposals from the current inquiry.	2
18	That Northern Territory Families and Children develops guidelines to the effect that professional notifiers with follow-up information on an open case (i.e. a case formally under investigation of a matter that has been substantiated) have the option of directly contacting the regional office rather than needing to be processed through Central Intake.	2
19	That Northern Territory Families and Children and the Northern Territory Police review the large numbers of apparently incomplete investigations from CAT North to determine the accuracy of the data and whether action needs to be taken to address the apparent backlog in completing investigations.	2
20	That Northern Territory Families and Children ensures that its investigation processes and instruments are sensitive to the possibility that notified children (particularly for reasons of neglect) may be provided with the basic necessities but not be meaningfully bonded with a caring adult or adults, and that they can experience significant developmental harm as a result.	1
21	That Northern Territory Families and Children urgently implements an initiative focused on the longer-term safety and wellbeing of infants and young children who come to its attention. This might be modelled on the 'One Chance at Childhood' initiative of the Department of Communities in Queensland but should also include guidelines for case classification at intake as well as ongoing case support and management.	1
22	That Northern Territory Families and Children develops an indicator based on the provision of feedback to be used in reporting on performance.	2
23	That the Northern Territory Government in considering the impact of the phased withdrawal of AFP by the Commonwealth, ensures that adequate planning and funding is in place to respond to the issues of serious abuse in remote areas.	1
24	Given that a number of issues have been raised in submission touching on strategic goals, resourcing, communications and governance, that a joint review of CAT is undertaken by Northern Territory Families and Children and the NT Police during the first phase of child protection reforms resulting from this Inquiry.	2

Rec #	Recommendation	Urgency
25	Given that there has been a significant increase in the number of 'reportable offenders' on the sex offenders register, and that many such offenders are paroled to their home communities, that the Northern Territory Government ensures there are resources available to maintain the effectiveness of the Reportable Offender Management Unit and to implement a community-based 'child protection watch' scheme linked with the development of Community Safety Plans.	2
26	That the Northern Territory Families and Children Policy and Procedures Manual be formally reviewed with a view to actively encourage workers to adopt a collaborative approach to practice with respect to intake assessment, investigations and case planning.	2
27	That the Northern Territory Families and Children Policy and Procedures Manual be reviewed and reworded to embed the principle that engagement and collaboration with the family and extended family should be considered part of normal child protection practice where the child's safety is not compromised.	2
28	That Northern Territory Families and Children evaluates current intake and assessment functions to determine the skills, qualifications and training that are required and whether these are functions that need to be performed by P2 classified workers.	2
29	That Northern Territory Families and Children engages in a community consultation process to develop a formal policy on permanency and stability planning and consider whether any legislative changes are required.	2
30	That Northern Territory Families and Children reviews its policy relating to the ongoing risk management of open cases (as initially recommended in the High Risk Audit report – recommendation 7) in light of the new Structured Decision-Making risk assessment instruments that are being introduced, with a view to ensuring that regular assessments are undertaken, the results recorded and the appropriate action taken.	2
31	That an Aboriginal Family Group Conferencing model and/or other culturally appropriate models be developed and progressively implemented to cover all key service regions of the Northern Territory; that the programs are formally evaluated; and that they are funded (in time) as part of the normal budget process.	2
32	That Northern Territory Families and Children develops and implements a comprehensive response plan (as detailed in Chapter 8) around the needs of protected young people who come to its attention as recommended in this Report and in the High Risk Audit, including the creation of a new 'youth at risk' outcome category for Central Intake.	2

Rec #	Recommendation	Urgency
33	<p>That Northern Territory Families and Children undertakes or commissions a comprehensive review of its residential care services with a view to addressing the serious concerns identified in recent internal reports, updating current demand trends, determining the optimal service mix, developing realistic costing models, and clarifying the role of non-government service providers. The review should also:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• consider, in particular, the demand for and approaches to the provision of out of home care for Aboriginal children in remote areas to include safe houses and multi-service approaches that have been established in other jurisdictions that provide for family support and restoration programming as well as out of home care.</li> <li>• focus on issues of service quality, covering the development of policy and procedure manuals for services, clear program models, the role of care and behaviour management plans, recruitment requirements, specialist training requirements, physical plant, equipment, the supervision and support of workers and accountability measures.</li> <li>• lead to a comprehensive 3-year plan around the development and management of residential care services.</li> </ul>	1
34	That Northern Territory Families and Children considers partnering with another jurisdiction in the development and implementation of its residential care plan.	2
35	That Northern Territory Families and Children reviews the organisational structure of Out of Home Care and Alternate Care services with a view to consolidating and rationalising them into a single policy and practice entity.	
36	That regular 'refresher' courses are held for all staff about the application of legislation, policy and procedures with respect to children in care.	2
37	That Northern Territory Families and Children progressively adopts the Looking After Children framework (or an amended version appropriate for Aboriginal children) to provide a comprehensive case management framework for children in the care system, to help ensure their developmental needs are addressed.	2
38	That Northern Territory Families and Children develops a charter for children and young people in care.	2

Rec #	Recommendation	Urgency
39	That the Northern Territory Families and Children reviews the roles played by the Aboriginal Community Workers and the recently appointed Remote Aboriginal Family and Community Workers, to assess whether they might play a more specific role in the case management and support of children in care.	2
40	That the allowances and other payments to all carers be reviewed and an ongoing process be established, taking into account: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>that the foster care allowance should be based on the child's level of need, their age and the location of the placement.</li> <li>that an additional allowance should be made to carers in remote areas in order to account for extra costs required to maintain standards.</li> <li>the need for clear guidelines around discretionary payments to reduce the inequitable use of this form of allowance.</li> </ul>	1
41	That a validated tool of assessment for children entering out of home care be developed and implemented which will assist with the matching of a child with a carer and will determine the rate of allowance to be paid. The assessment process must provide for review and reconsideration.	2
42	That kinship carers be provided with the allowance at the same rate as general foster carers.	1
43	That where 'Family Way' arrangements are facilitated by Northern Territory Families and Children, the carers are eligible for establishment or discretionary payments and that they be assisted and connected to other financial supports available through the Commonwealth and Northern Territory Governments. The needs of the children and care providers should be assessed when the arrangement is negotiated.	2
44	That a process be developed and implemented which will ensure all allowances/payments to carers are processed quickly and carers receive their entitlements promptly.	2
45	That the development of a professional stream for home based carers, who are highly skilled and trained, be considered to provide placements for children and young people with high and complex needs.	3
46	That Northern Territory Families and Children immediately acts to address the need for a shift in culture from a focus on carers as providers to carers as partners.	1

Rec #	Recommendation	Urgency
47	That Northern Territory Families and Children adequately funds Foster Care NT to ensure that the organisation is able to develop an effective mentoring and support role for foster carers and to assist in the provision of foster care recruitment, training and advocacy within the Department.	1
48	That Northern Territory Families and Children implements measures to monitor quality of practice and decision-making based on existing guidelines for foster and kinship care (Northern Territory Families and Children Policy and Procedures Manual) for foster and kinship care.	2
49	That recruitment strategies continue with an emphasis on Aboriginal carers in remote and rural locations to increase the number of children remaining close to their families. Strategies such as nominating a few carers in the community to provide placements for children at short notice, should be trialled.	2
50	That a plan be developed around the resourcing and up-skilling of existing carers to assist with the retention of existing carers.	2
51	That Northern Territory Families and Children facilitates the development of a 'charter' for all carers which sets out expectations, rights and responsibilities. A charter will confirm the important role all those involved in out of home care play in the child's life. It can also be used to determine policy, standards and procedures and for training of carers and staff.	2
52	That the portions of the Northern Territory Families and Children Policy and Procedures Manual pertaining to out of home care be available online to the public.	2
53	That Northern Territory Families and Children continues with its implementation of recommendations from recent Coronial Inquests and reports of progress in its annual report.	1
54	That Northern Territory Families and Children continues with its implementation of recommendations from the High Risk Audit and reports on progress in its annual report.	1
55	That Northern Territory Families and Children continues to support and influence the introduction and implementation of the National Standards for Out of Home Care and reports progress in its annual report.	1
56	That the Northern Territory Families and Children Policy and Procedures Manual is worded to support the requirement that, unless it is demonstrably in the best interests of a child, a child who has been deemed to be in need of care should be placed in a kinship care placement rather than a 'Family Way' arrangement.	2

Rec #	Recommendation	Urgency
57	That clear policies and procedures need to be developed to guide staff about the circumstances in which informal 'Family Way' placements are acceptable and what continuing case management obligations exist.	2
58	That Northern Territory Families and Children develops a detailed practice guide around kinship care recruitment, assessment, support and training that includes the 'enabling' principle, details of support options available to carers, and baseline requirements for all kinship/specific carers.	2
59	That Northern Territory Families and Children collects a range of care provider data as outlined in this Report and annually report on progress towards 'closing the gap' in standards of care provided for relative and non-relative care providers.	2
60	That Northern Territory Families and Children develops a kinship care unit to assist with the recruitment, assessment, registration, support and training of kinship and specific carers and that consideration is given to progressively outsourcing these functions to local ACCAs as their capacity is developed.	2
61	That the provision of intensive family support to prevent unnecessary placements be prioritised by the Northern Territory Government and that services are developed and funded accordingly.	2
62	That where reunification is the intended outcome, then support and therapeutic services to birth families should be provided whilst their child is in placement to enable this outcome to be realised.	2
63	That if it is clear that reunification is going to the goal, this should be written into the case plans from the start to help determine the nature of the support services needed by the parent/s and to provide clarity and focus for the foster carers.	2
64	That if reunification is a goal of a child's case plan and this changes for any reason, a case conference involving the child's family must be held to discuss and formulate a new plan.	2
65	That a unit or group of staff within out of home care be created to focus on developing reunification services and strategies and to provide expert advice to work units across the Northern Territory.	2
66	That Northern Territory Families and Children develops and appropriately funds specifically therapeutic options for children and young people with high needs such as therapeutic residential care, secure care, therapeutic foster care and a range of therapeutic counselling and treatment services (including Tier 3 services).	2

Rec #	Recommendation	Urgency
67	That negotiations for fee for service placements should be conducted by specialist staff within the out of home care unit in order to centralise and standardise this function to staff who have relevant knowledge and expertise.	2
68	That in consultation with a child's extended family and cultural advisors, all children who are recognised within the category of being under 'Ambiguous guardianship' are urgently and thoroughly assessed and that resolutions are finalised as soon as possible in relation to their guardianship.	1
69	That there is specific reference in the Northern Territory Families and Children Policy and Procedures Manual to issues arising in work with children who have a disability.	2
70	That a review be undertaken of children with a disability in out of home care focusing on the reasons for entry into this type of care and the appropriateness of Northern Territory Families and Children, rather than Aged and Disability, providing for their needs.	2
71	That proposals for interstate transfers be assessed by a panel in the relevant Northern Territory Families and Children office comprising at least the Interstate Liaison Officer, the caseworker, and where appropriate, family members and current foster or kinship carers.	2
72	That an independent body is auspiced to review investigations into allegations of 'abuse in care' undertaken by the Department of Health and Families. The Office of Children's Commissioner would be an appropriate body to take on this role.	2
73	That the newly developed transition from care policy be implemented consistently with respect to all young people leaving care and a formal reporting program on After Care Services and compliance with legislation and policy to be developed.	2
74	That transition plans be developed jointly with the young person, their case manager and the relevant out of home care staff member.	2
75	That specific training for all out of home care staff be made available to ensure best practice in transition from care.	2
76	That the After Care Service including a mentoring scheme be moved, when appropriate, to the non Government sector.	3
77	That the Northern Territory Government makes a clear policy commitment to the progressive implementation of the outsourcing of significant elements of the out of home care program.	1

Rec #	Recommendation	Urgency
78	That Northern Territory Families and Children develops a plan which determines which parts of the out of home care system would benefit from outsourcing, what type of organisations will provide services (e.g. non-government agencies, private organisations or companies), mechanisms for regulations and monitoring of services, risk-management strategies, how funding levels for services will be determined etc.	1
79	That given the rapidly increasing costs associated with the placement of children in fee for service placements and the varying levels of placement oversight that are entailed, the plan around outsourcing needs to include a strategy (with targets and timelines) to shift the current fee for service arrangements to negotiated grant-based service agreements with approved providers.	1
80	That the <i>Act</i> be amended to make clear what powers, rights and responsibilities are included as part of 'daily care and control' and 'parental responsibility'.	2
81	That the <i>Act</i> provide for parental responsibilities to be divisible with some parental responsibilities able to be retained by parents while other parental responsibilities are able to be assigned to other people.	2
82	That the <i>Act</i> be amended to provide for division within the orders. That is, a distinction in the order between daily care and control and parental responsibility. Parental responsibility should not include daily care and control.	2
83	That the <i>Act</i> enshrine as a principle that only in the most extreme circumstances should parents be excluded from exercising all parental responsibilities and that the making of such an order should be a last step and only granted when it is clear that reunification is not possible and that the child is to remain in out of home care permanently.	2
84	That the <i>Act</i> be amended to provide that the Court must not make an order allocating parental responsibility unless it has given full consideration to the principles set out in sections 7 to 12 and is satisfied that any other order would be insufficient to meet the needs of the child or young person.	2
85	That the <i>Act</i> be amended to provide a protection order that may only be granted if the Court is satisfied that the granting of the order would ensure the resulting standard of care of the child would overall be significantly higher than the standard presently maintained in respect to the child.	2
86	That regulations relating to the convening of Court ordered mediation be made and that both CEO and Court ordered mediations form an active part of the child protection system across the Northern Territory.	2

Rec #	Recommendation	Urgency
87	That a senior officer of the Northern Territory Families and Children, or their legal representative, be a permanent member of the Local Court Users Group.	2
88	That the <i>Act</i> be amended to provide that the Court can make an order that a child has contact with a parent or other person significant to the child.	2
89	That the introductory clause of Section 12(3) of the <i>Act</i> should be amended to read 'An Aboriginal child should, as far as practicable, and consistent with Section 10, be placed with a person in the following order of priority...'	2
90	That the <i>Act</i> be amended to allow undertakings by parties to proceedings to be recorded by the Court.	2
91	That Subdivision 3 of Division 4 of Part 2.3 of the <i>Act</i> clearly distinguishes between short-term and long-term protection orders and specifies that the focus of a short term order is reunification with the family.	2
92	That the <i>Act</i> more prominently recognise the importance of reunification in Part 1.3 of the <i>Act</i> and expressly that the Court must have regard to the principles in Part 1.3 in making orders.	2
93	That the <i>Act</i> be amended to include the concept of 'safety' in the definition of 'wellbeing'.	2
94	That the <i>Act</i> be amended to provide that short-term orders be made for a maximum of two years, with one possible extension of one year, and that care plans submitted to the Court should include detailed reunification planning.	2
95	That the <i>Act</i> be amended to provide that if, at the end of the period of the short term order(s), reunification was not possible, then a long-term order shall be made for out of home care with the care plan to reflect this.	2
96	That the <i>Act</i> provide for Aboriginal children or young people to have a report prepared by a culturally appropriate person for inclusion in the care plan, detailing how the child or young person's connection to their community, culture and spirituality is to be maintained.	2
97	That the <i>Act</i> be amended to provide that, in the absence of any application having been made under sections 136 or 137, a short term protection order under Subdivision 3 of Division 4 must be reviewed by the Court annually, or at least at any lesser interval determined by the Court.	2
98	That the <i>Act</i> be amended to provide for the Court review of any long term order in the discretion of the Court, and having full regard to the protected child's need for stability.	2

Rec #	Recommendation	Urgency
99	That the <i>Act</i> be amended to remove the prohibition on the Department from taking a child into provisional protection if a protection order or temporary protection order is in force for the child.	
100	That the Court consider making practice directions in relation to situations where parental consent is relied on, to ensure that information provided to parents is accessible, comprehensive, timely and consistent with the provisions of the <i>Act</i> .	2
101	That the Court consider making Practice Directions in relation to obtaining informed consent from parents where English is not a parents' first language.	2
102	That Northern Territory Families and Children review its policies and procedures concerning communications with parents, kinship carers (and others) who do not have English as their first language. This should result in directives around the issue of interpreters and the provision of written materials in different formats and languages, to ensure that the intentions, proposals and actions of NTFC are clearly understood, particularly where these involve the obtaining of consent.	1
103	That Northern Territory Families and Children review all placement arrangements facilitated by case workers and, where children are found to be in improperly arranged 'Family Way' placements, their circumstances are assessed and they should either be returned to their parents or have their placement arrangements formalised.	1
104	That Northern Territory Families and Children takes immediate action to ensure that no officers participate in any placement arrangements that might be considered contrary to the intent and provisions of the <i>Act</i> .	1
105	That the <i>Act</i> be amended to provide that each protection order must be reviewed by the Court within 3 months but not less than 1 month prior to the date on which it would otherwise cease to be in force (and that the order remains in force until the review has occurred).	3
106	That the <i>Act</i> be amended to provide that, subject to the Court's review, upon a protection order ceasing to be in force, Northern Territory Families and Children must return the child to his or her parent(s).	2
107	That, if necessary, the <i>Act</i> be amended to provide that in all cases, children cannot be removed from the Northern Territory with the intention of residing interstate without the consent of their parent(s). Where this consent is not forthcoming or the parents cannot be contacted, an order of the Court is required for such removal.	2
108	That the <i>Act</i> be amended to make it clear that the removal interstate of children in care for purposes of holiday, schooling, sporting or medical care does not require parental consent or a court order.	2

Rec #	Recommendation	Urgency
109	That CCIS be modified to enable care plans with a fundamental and mandatory structure and content be quickly and easily produced by practitioners.	2
110	That Northern Territory Families and Children annually reports on compliance with sections 70, 71, 73, 74 and 76 of the <i>Act</i> with respect to care plans.	2
111	That the Northern Territory Government establish a single court with jurisdiction to hear and determine both child protection and youth justice matters in isolation from adult courts.	2
112	The <i>Act</i> be amended to provide that Northern Territory Families and Children can accept a notification of concern about an unborn child and make provision for the immediate care and protection of the child when born.	2
113	That the <i>Act</i> be amended to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. provide a workable framework that permits and encourages the exchange of information between public sector organisations, between these organisations, the non-government sector and, where appropriate, individual community members, where that exchange is for the purpose of making a decision, assessment, plan or investigation relating to the safety and/or wellbeing of a child or young person; and</li> <li>2. provide that, to the extent that provisions are inconsistent, that the <i>Information Act</i> (NT) should not apply.</li> </ol>	2
114	That where government-funded agencies providing for safety and/or wellbeing of children or young people develop codes of practice in accordance with privacy legislation, their terms should be consistent with the new legislative provisions and consistent with each other in relation to the discharge of the functions of those agencies.	3
115	That Northern Territory Government agencies work with the non-government sector to jointly develop information sharing principles to guide the development of legislative amendments and inform practice changes.	2
116	That government agencies and non-government organisations work jointly to develop cross sector operational guidelines around collaborative practice and information sharing, and that related training programs reflect these guidelines. The guidelines should be publicly available, including on government agency websites.	2

Rec #	Recommendation	Urgency
117	<p>That the Northern Territory Government immediately move to implement the major reforms outlined in the body of this Report (Chapter 11) around the delivery of child safety and wellbeing services and interagency collaboration. These include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Development of a 'dual pathway' process for the referral and assessment of vulnerable children and families</li> <li>2. Creation of Community Child Safety and Wellbeing teams for the 20 Growth Towns, and elsewhere</li> <li>3. Expansion of the scope of the current and planned children and family centres to include targeted and indicated services for at-risk children and families</li> <li>4. Development of further children and family centres (as child wellbeing and safety centres) in areas of need</li> <li>5. Establishment of interagency, hospital based Child Safety and Wellbeing teams in urban areas</li> <li>6. Enhancement of the child safety and wellbeing roles of other government agencies and personnel.</li> </ol>	1
118	<p>To further the principle that child wellbeing and safety is 'everyone's business', that a senior officer in each Northern Territory Government department be responsible for relevant policy development, as well as the oversight of child safety and wellbeing issues arising in the business of that department.</p> <p>Further, that the precise child safety and well being roles of these officers be negotiated with the implementation unit to be established following this Inquiry and should include the promotion of collaborative practice.</p>	2

Rec #	Recommendation	Urgency
119	<p>That Northern Territory Families and Children develops a comprehensive workforce strategy based on clearly stated values and principles that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reflects the required progressive move to a strong early intervention focus and service provision that covers the continuum of universal, secondary and tertiary services;</li> <li>• involves the employment and continued training of well qualified, culturally aware and competent child safety and protective personnel who can identify risk and work in situations where there is significant risk to children as well as being able to utilise community development approaches for early intervention and preventative services</li> <li>• promotes an Aboriginal workforce employment and engagement strategy developed in partnership with Aboriginal advisers and agencies that creates 'on-country' employment, education, training and employment development pathways for Aboriginal people working in family support and protective services from volunteer through to postgraduate level</li> <li>• is characterised by a strong partnership engagement with the non-government sector in planning and implementation.</li> </ul>	2
120	<p>That Northern Territory Families and Children develops a model of workforce and resource planning in partnership with the Northern Territory Treasury, Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment and relevant discipline groups at Charles Darwin University, Bachelor Institute, Centre for Remote Health and other relevant training organisations around child safety and wellbeing services.</p>	2
121	<p>That Northern Territory Families and Children's Workforce Development Unit be reviewed in the light of other recommendations, restructured and accordingly resourced in order to enable a culture of excellence.</p>	2

Rec #	Recommendation	Urgency
122	<p>That Northern Territory Families and Children reshape its workforce by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• developing a transparent resource allocation methodology across Northern Territory Families and Children;</li> <li>• undertaking a comprehensive analysis of roles and functions required and a review of current position descriptions in order to determine the appropriate and most effective role and function for service delivery, paying attention to the: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of personnel</li> <li>• Skills, qualifications and disciplines of personnel</li> <li>• Level of knowledge and skills required</li> <li>• Professional development needs of workers</li> <li>• Training and education provision</li> </ul> </li> <li>• developing a range of new positions to meet the requirements of the new model of service delivery.</li> <li>• ensuring the presence and visibility of multiple entry points to and pathways through service delivery for a range of people at various stages of their education and development.</li> </ul>	1
123	<p>That Northern Territory Families and Children reviews the specific demands of urban, regional and remote area service delivery and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• establishes benchmark caseload ratios to enable acceptable staff levels and appropriate and manageable caseloads.</li> <li>• formulates specific ratios for the three practice areas noting the current benchmarks that have not been calibrated for jurisdictions that include remote area practice - Out of home Care 1:15; Family support 1:10; Child Protection 1:6 to 1:15.</li> <li>• develops specific proposals for remuneration and innovative performance and incentive based strategies (such as provision of housing, rental subsidies, travel allowances, retention bonuses, salary packaging, etc.) and that proposals for remote practice that are equitable for people regardless of their original domicile.</li> </ul>	1
124	<p>That in conjunction with the Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment, Northern Territory Families and Children:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reviews all locations where there is a 'higher than usual' turnover of staff and immediately reviews the circumstances in that region or office.</li> <li>• Maintains regular monitoring of staff turnover utilising a mechanism for obtaining regular staff feedback, with a view to setting performance targets for reducing turnover.</li> </ul>	2

Rec #	Recommendation	Urgency
125	That Northern Territory Families and Children reviews and evaluates the overseas and interstate recruitment strategies.	2
126	That Northern Territory Families and Children reviews and implements the Northern Territory Families and Children Learning Development Framework and associated strategies to address induction, training, supervision and support needs of the workforce and ensures that induction is compulsory and is conducted before practice staff commence duties.	2
127	<p>That Northern Territory Families and Children adopts a model of cross sectoral and cross disciplinary education and training to promote collaboration, relationships and continuity of care that includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education for education, justice and health staff working with children about the role of Northern Territory Families and Children</li> <li>• Education for Northern Territory Families and Children staff about the role of child and family health nurses and Aboriginal health workers</li> <li>• The utilisation of funded cadetships and traineeships</li> </ul> <p>Further, that the Department of Health and Families considers making a joint appointment with the Discipline of Social Work in the School of Health Sciences at Charles Darwin University in order to encourage practice support and research between the two organisations and facilitate the development of career pathways.</p>	2
128	That Department of Health and Families organises for an independently conducted morale survey with all Northern Territory Families and Children staff (possibly to be conducted in conjunction with the Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment) and establish performance measures by which to calculate the improvement of staff morale and use as a benchmark for regular re-assessments.	2
129	That Northern Territory Families and Children undertakes exit interviews of all departing staff and that these are audited by the Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment.	2
130	That an independent review of Northern Territory Families and Children is conducted with a focus on care and support of workers, work conditions, treatment of staff and workplace protection.	2
131	That a mentorship program with senior members of Department of Health and Families staff is developed and 'implanted' to promote a supportive work environment for new or junior members of Northern Territory Families and Children.	3

Rec #	Recommendation	Urgency
132	<p>That the Department of Health and Families endorses and resources the proposed Northern Territory Families and Children supervision policy and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensures that time is allocated to supervision and training of staff by allocating service closure times</li> <li>• Monitors its application by inviting regular feedback from all staff</li> <li>• Includes a CCIS staffing marker regarding worker supervision which is used in management reports</li> <li>• Ensures that aggregated information from supervision is recorded and conveyed to dedicated senior personnel who can utilise it for refinement of policy, practice, training and workforce development</li> <li>• Ensures that all staff in senior/supervisory positions have the advanced qualifications and experience to fulfil their role and meet organisational performance requirements</li> <li>• Instigates a program of supervision training for all senior staff – including team leaders, managers and directors</li> <li>• Augments supervision with a mentorship model that sends a strong message that staff are valued, supported and assisted to do the work they are required to do</li> <li>• Develops a comprehensive mechanism for cultural competence that includes an ethical and values framework and that is cross-sectoral, cross divisional and cross departmental</li> <li>• Ensures that team leaders do not carry case management responsibilities so that they can support staff learning and performance and the development of quality services.</li> </ul>	1
133	That Northern Territory Families and Children develops and implements the role of Practice Advisors in all operational offices.	2
134	That direct efforts and resources to support Aboriginal Employment Strategy initiatives are implemented.	2
135	That Northern Territory Families and Children develops Key Performance Indicators to demonstrate the goals of Aboriginal workforce planning, with annual reporting on achievements.	1

Rec #	Recommendation	Urgency
136	<p>That the Northern Territory Government reviews the roles and functions of the Children's Commissioner in the light of this Inquiry with a view to amending the legislation to address the needs for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An 'own motion' investigation capacity</li> <li>• extension of his/her advocacy and complaint management responsibilities to other identified groups of vulnerable children in Northern Territory Government-funded care</li> <li>• Specific powers for the Children's Commissioner to obtain documents, examine persons or carry out any type of investigations as part of his/her monitoring functions</li> <li>• A broader role in monitoring the implementation of Northern Territory Government decisions arising from any inquiries in relation to the child protection system or the wellbeing of children under the <i>Inquiries Act</i>.</li> </ul>	1
137	That the Northern Territory Government ensures that the Children's Commissioner is adequately funded to carry out any additional functions.	1
138	That the Office of the Children's Commissioner be funded to employ an Aboriginal person dedicated to investigating issues raised by and affecting Aboriginal children in particular. This position needs to be resourced in addition to roles currently undertaken by the office.	2
139	That the Northern Territory Government review the terms of reference of the Northern Territory Families and Children Advisory Council and its access to data so as to enhance its capacity to advise the Minister.	2
140	That Northern Territory Families and Children establishes mechanisms for regularly listening to the voices of children and young people regarding their experiences in the care system, for determining their needs, and for implementing improvements to the standard of care and support that is provided.	2
141	That a community visitor model be implemented to involve a sampling of children in out of home care (OOHC) with a view to informing the Children's Commissioner about OOHC issues from the perspective of the visitor, and also from the children being visited.	2
142	That Northern Territory Families and Children develops an effective complaints management process for clients of the service (and others affected by decisions) that provides for the speedy resolution of complaints. The procedural guidelines for the process should be made available on the Northern Territory Families and Children website.	1

Rec #	Recommendation	Urgency
143	That Northern Territory Families and Children develop an appeals process (either as part of the internal complaints process or separately) that provides for an appeal process for professional decisions independent of the normal line management structures. The procedural guidelines for the appeal process should be made publicly available on the Northern Territory Families and Children website.	1
144	That the Northern Territory Government funds the development of an advice and support program for vulnerable families who come into contact with the statutory services of Northern Territory Families and Children in both the Top End and Central Australia. This might be developed as part of the service offered by an Aboriginal Child Care Agency, family service or legal agency.	2
145	That a framework involving performance measures in the domains of input, process, outcome and impact is adopted and appropriately resourced.	2
146	<p>That the Northern Territory Government develops and implements a comprehensive community education strategy to highlight key messages about child protection and child wellbeing and to accompany the service delivery enhancements contained in this report. The strategy should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• have at least a five-year life span</li> <li>• must be multi-modal (involving radio, TV, printed materials, training programs and discussion forums)</li> <li>• use materials translated into local languages, and</li> <li>• address a range of issues relating to child safety and wellbeing.</li> </ul> <p>The strategy should include a review of the various child wellbeing/protection education programs currently in place with a view to preventing fragmentation and duplication. The strategy should include an ongoing impact evaluation component.</p>	1
147	That the Northern Territory Government creates a planning, coordination and implementation unit (or team) to be responsible to the Chief Executive of the Department of the Chief Minister, in order to develop, drive and coordinate the reforms in the manner proposed in Chapter 14 of this Report.	1

## Appendix Two: Key National and Local Strategies

### *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children*

The *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children* consists of the actions and strategies that governments have agreed to take in order to achieve the high level outcome:

*Australia's children and young people are safe and well.*

As a measure of this outcome, governments and the non-government sector have set the following target:

*A substantial and sustained reduction in child abuse and neglect in Australia over time.<sup>3</sup>*

To demonstrate progress towards achieving the target the following measures have been identified:

- Trends in key national indicators of children's health, development and wellbeing
- Trends in hospital admissions and emergency department visits for neglect and injuries to children under three years
- Trends in substantiated child protection cases
- Trends in the number of children in out-of-home care.

Source: *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009 – 2020*

### *Territory 2030*

The Northern Territory Strategic Plan, *Territory 2030*, establishes a number of measures of child safety, such as:

Target	Action
Keep Territory children safe from all forms of abuse.	As per the national target, substantiated cases of child abuse in the Northern Territory will decrease by 20% by 2030.
Increase the number of Territory families who can remain together.	By 2030, the Northern Territory rate of children placed in out-of-care arrangements is similar to the national rate, with similar rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children.

In addition, *Territory 2030* sets out clear targets for increased improved education and Indigenous employment, as key to the social and economic development of the Northern Territory. These measures are also relevant to Government's investment in education and training and building a child and families workforce, as recommended by the Board of Inquiry.

Target	Action
Improve Indigenous employment rates.	Halve the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians by 2018, and equivalent rates of participation by 2030.
Improve participation in Vocational Education and Training (VET).	Continue to exceed the national average for participation in VET across AQF levels 1–6.
By 2030, double the number of people undertaking higher-education study at a Territory institution.	In 2007, Charles Darwin University saw an 8.2% increase in the number of higher education students, from 5494 to 5947. A doubling of the student population will require new thinking and innovative approaches.

Source: *Territory 2030 Strategic Plan 2009*

## Appendix Three

### Membership of the Child Protection External Monitoring and Reporting Committee

**Professor Graham Vimpani AM**

Professor of Community Child Health and Head of the Discipline of Paediatrics and Child Health at the University of Newcastle; Clinical Chair of Kaleidoscope: Hunter Children's Health Network within the Hunter New England Area Health Service; and Medical Director of the Child Protection Team of the John Hunter Children's Hospital in Newcastle.

**Mr Charlie King**

Sport Broadcaster, ABC Darwin and child protection advocate

**Dr Sven Silburn**

Director Developmental Health and Education, Menzies School of Health Research

**Terry Murphy**

Director General, Department for Child Protection, Western Australia

**Donna Ah Chee**

Deputy Director, Central Australia Aboriginal Congress

**Frank Hytten**

Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC)

**Teresa Neihus**

President, Foster Care NT

**Jacqui Reed**

Chief Executive Officer, Create Foundation

