

Centre for Excellence
in Child and Family Welfare Inc.



State Budget Submission

2018/19

Acknowledgements

We respectfully acknowledge the traditional land of the Kulin Nation and we acknowledge the Wurundjeri people who are the traditional custodians of this land. We pay respect to their elders past and present and recognise that their sovereignty was never ceded and the structural inequality created by colonisation continues to this day.

We appreciate and celebrate diversity in all its forms. We believe diversity of all kinds makes our teams, services and organisation stronger and more effective.



Centre for Excellence
in Child and Family Welfare Inc.



Centre for Excellence
in Child and Family Welfare

Level 5, 50 Market Street
Melbourne VIC 3000 Australia

ABN: 24 629 376 672
RTO: 3696

Telephone: (03) 9614 1577
Facsimilie: (03) 9614 1774

Email: admin@cfecfw.asn.au
Website: cfecfw.asn.au

Find us on Twitter @CFECFW
and Facebook



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About the Centre

For over 100 years, the Centre has advanced the rights and wellbeing of children, young people and families in Victoria.

We advocate for the rights of children and young people to be heard, to be safe, to access education and to remain connected to family, community and culture. We represent over 150 Victorian organisations working across the continuum of child and family services, from prevention and early intervention to the provision of out of home care. Our members are at the forefront of supporting children, young people and families.

Our Vision

Victorian children, young people and families are safe, happy and connected, with access to support when they need it.

Our Purpose

Policy and Ideas

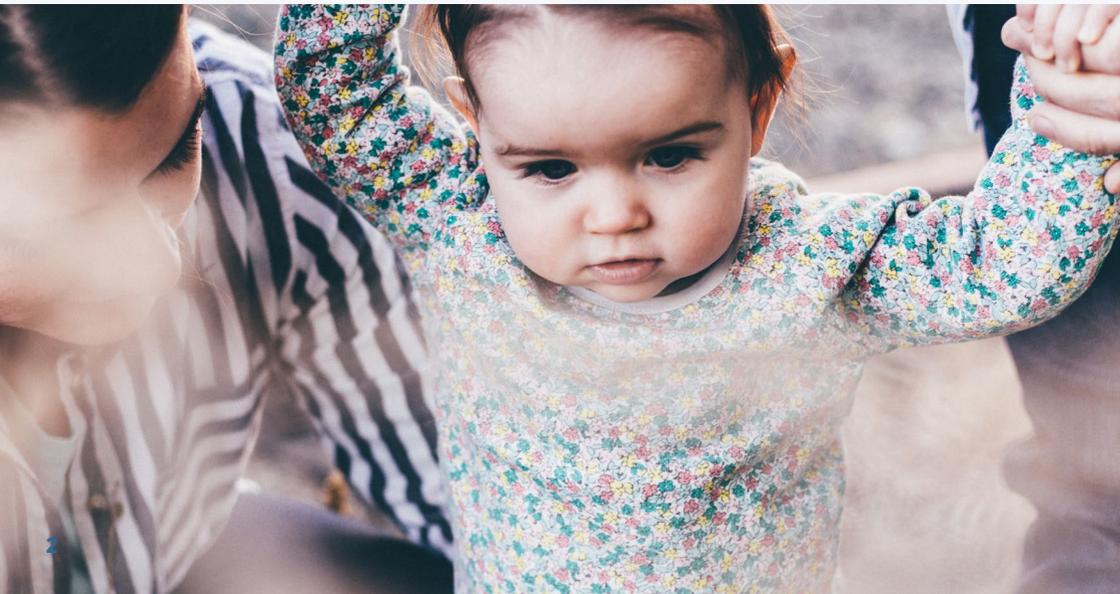
Develop, influence and advocate for public policies that advance the rights and wellbeing of children, young people and families and address the social, economic and cultural barriers to improving their lives.

Research and Practice

Lead and share research to support innovation and evidence-informed practice.

Capacity Building

Strengthen the capacity of organisations to provide services that best suit the needs of vulnerable families and children.



Summary of Recommendations

1 – Funding Support For The Early Years Of Life

PAGES 8 – 12

- Provide all kinship care families with adequate supports, including raising the level of kinship carer allowances in line with higher foster care allowances.
- Provide ongoing, secure funding for family services to meet future demand and make sure early intervention supports are available for children and families as and when they need them.
- Further invest in Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to develop and deliver early years services.
- Increase support for children with disabilities.
- Fund current and future demand to maximise children's early education outcomes.
- Expand the Access to Early Learning program state-wide.

2 – Targeted Support for Families in Need

PAGES 13 – 17

- Strengthen support for families by increasing investment in allied health supports, including mental health, alcohol and other drug services to reduce waiting lists, enable early intervention or reunification for families, and provide equal opportunities for children in care to thrive.
- Invest appropriately in the intensive treatment model for children and young people in residential care and commit to a therapeutic focus for all other residential care placements.
- Provide kinship carers with allowances determined by their child's need, with the same allowance processes for all carer types, and raise the base level of kinship carer allowance.
- Provide foster care families with adequate supports, including raising the foster care direct allowance to reach parity with other states in Australia.
- Provide ongoing investment in *Fostering Connections*.
- Continue implementation of the recommendations of *Always Was, Always Will Be Koori Children* and *In the child's best interests*.
- Adequately compensate victims of abuse.

Summary of Recommendations

3 – Guiding Young People Through Care

PAGES 18 – 21

- Extend the Navigator program state-wide and fund an early childhood worker in all LOOKOUT Centres.
- Continue to support *Targeted Care Packages*.
- Invest in the *Raising Expectations* project.
- Extend the leaving care age from 18 to 21 years and provide appropriate supports to enable successful transition to adulthood, including:
 - Housing and education guarantees to young people leaving care
 - Funding to continue to build the knowledge, skills and understanding of carers and professionals to support young people in care to aspire to complete Year 12 and go on to further and/or higher education
 - Enshrining the change in legislation, and the required funding support to implement this legislative change.

4 – Evidence-Based Programs That Work

PAGES 22 – 24

\$120 million over 4 years to:

- Invest in trialling evidence-based youth justice programs that divert young people from entering or remaining in youth justice.
- Test and evaluate a selection of evidence-based programs for particular cohorts of children and families for potential incorporation into Victoria's service menu, including for children with a disability.
- Expand OPEN to be able to provide evaluation and implementation support and build sector capability in evidence-informed practice.
- Expand the Learning System Grants initiative, with a pool of \$1 million annually, to convert promising practice into evidence-informed practice.

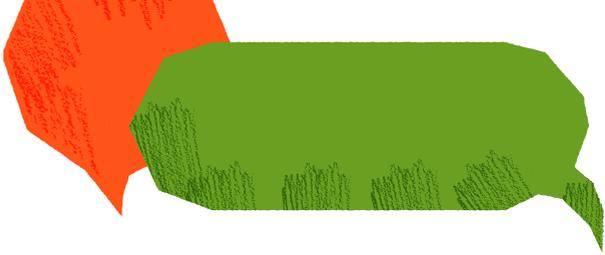
Summary of Recommendations

5 – A Strong and Capable Workforce

PAGES 25 – 27

- Commit to four year funding for industry planning and implementation in child and family services and ensure that funding indexation tracks proportionally to bottom line costs.
- Invest in ongoing training to ensure all workers in child and family services can respond as and when needed to families and carers requiring early or targeted and specialist support and services.
- Fund the information sharing capacity of services working with children.
- Embed early intervention and specialist services for children and families experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage at the core of the Support and Safety Hubs.





Introduction

As Victoria's peak body for services representing children and families, the Centre has high aspirations for all children and young people. We work to ensure no child, young person, or family is left behind.

All children and young people – whether Aboriginal, refugees, migrants or asylum seekers, living in poverty or with a disability, in regional areas or in care – must have the same opportunities to grow, thrive, and connected to family, community and culture.

We need to build socially cohesive and culturally strong communities to support children regardless of ethnicity, cultural background, income and gender identity.

To achieve this, we call upon the Victorian government to invest in five crucial areas:

- Funding support in the early years of life
- Targeted support for families in need
- Guiding young people through care
- Evidence-based programs that work
- A strong and capable workforce

In 2016, the Royal Commission into Family Violence handed a report to government containing 227 recommendations for how government, police and social services sectors should tackle the pressing issue of family violence in

our community. The Commission has thrown stark light on the need for truly integrated, wrap-around services that ensure vulnerable families and children are safer, better supported and have the chance to thrive. It has been the catalyst for a \$572 million package of major reforms and the Centre welcomes the government's intentions to use the Royal Commission into Family Violence as a turning point for Victoria's children and families. The reform process will have far-reaching outcomes for children, young people and families – and the services that support them – but we must ensure these outcomes are meaningful, carefully considered, and sustainable.

As part of the government's response to the Royal Commission, Children and Families Minister Jenny Mikakos released a Roadmap for Reform for child protection. The Roadmap for Reform highlights the importance of early support to prevent problems becoming entrenched and to maximise opportunities for children to be reunited with their families. Child protection, specialist family violence services, family services and out-of-home care services are shifting to work in a much more connected way to support children, young people and families in need of assistance. Services are moving away from discrete programs with their own eligibility – towards an evidence-based menu of interventions with tiers of family support.

The Roadmap for Reform is supporting these changes and outlines a clear focus on strengthening the evidence base of programs and services for children and families. The next stage of reform must be a commitment to demand-funding for family services – to enable babies, infants and children to have the earliest and strongest possible start in their lives, and to prevent vulnerable families from entering the statutory system.

We welcome support for needs-based kindergarten funding and supported playgroups, for more investment in the Maternal and Child Health Service and funding for Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation programs. However we urge much greater government investment to support all children in contact with the care sector. Dynamic funding into family violence, housing and homelessness and drug and alcohol services is crucial to early intervention. All residential care beds for Victoria's children and young people must be therapeutic and parity between the value of kinship and foster carers must be properly recognised by government support.

The Centre calls on the government to build on the great success that we have achieved through *Raising Expectations* in supporting our young people leaving care to go onto further education. More investment is needed to ensure that young people leaving care for independent living have the same opportunities as their peers to develop and achieve, and are not left behind facing unfair disadvantage.

We seek continuing government investment in evidence-based programs that improve outcomes for children, young people and their families.

We call on the government to continue to invest in the child and family services workforce to grow the skills, experience and qualifications required to implement evidence-based programs.

Entering 2018, the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse equipped Australia's decision-makers and institutions with first-hand accounts, information and warning signs. We have a duty to not only protect young people and children, but to ensure that they are heard. The stories of the survivors are no longer secret. We must not only listen to children, we must act. Giving survivors a voice and a formal acknowledgment is just the beginning of justice for those who have experienced institutional abuse. The repercussions of this Royal Commission for victims, their families and the services that assist them will be significant, and they deserve nuanced and progressive support by the government going forward.

Furthermore, we need to challenge Commonwealth policies that punish already disadvantaged parents for non-compliance with demeaning welfare requirements.

This budget submission was developed in consultation with member organisations. It draws on their extensive experience working directly with children and families.

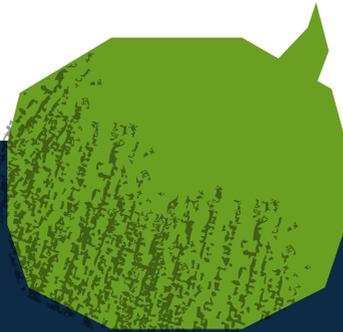
1

Funding Support for the Early Years Of Life

The Centre calls on the government to increase funding for services supporting children and families.

The early years are critical in a child's life for future development.¹

When children do not feel safe, calm or protected, the child's brain places an emphasis on developing neuronal pathways that are associated with survival, before those that are essential to future learning and growth.²



1

Funding Support For The Early Years Of Life Recommendations



Recommendation 1

Provide all kinship care families with adequate supports, including raising the level of kinship carer allowances in line with higher foster care allowances.

We commend the government in its support for kinship carers, including the addition of new child protection staff to streamline the carer application process for allowances.

This will enable kinship carers to deliver better, more flexible support for the children in their care.

The next stage of required support is raising the level of kinship carer allowances in line with higher foster care allowances.

1

Funding Support For The Early Years Of Life Recommendations

Recommendation 2

Provide ongoing, secure funding for family services to meet future demand and make sure early intervention supports are available for children and families as and when they need them.

Integrated Family Service providers continue to operate at capacity with overwhelming levels of demand, affecting their capacity to provide early intervention support that prevents families from entering tertiary systems.

This means that many families struggle to access services early enough to assist with the care of their children.

The Centre is concerned about rising numbers of children entering out-of-home care.

We are keen to see a greater focus on supporting families so that children and young people can remain at home safely.

Recommendation 3

Further invest in Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to develop and deliver early years services.

The Centre welcomes the government's support for Indigenous children's early learning and development through the *Koorie Families as First Educators* program. Continuing this kind of investment in place-based and culturally safe program delivery by Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations is crucial to improving the lives of Aboriginal children in Victoria.³

Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations provide culturally safe and effective services for Aboriginal children in the early years – helping families to heal, thrive and keep their children safe. Culturally safe supports for families to stay together and for children to be connected to culture are essential.⁴

The uptake of early learning programs by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families is improved by community partnerships and culturally relevant practice that values local Indigenous knowledge, and appropriate teacher training and support.⁵

Funding Support For The Early Years Of Life Recommendations

Recommendation 4

Increase support for children with disabilities.

We acknowledge the government's continued investment in expanding the *Kindergarten Inclusion Support* program that ensures more children with disabilities benefit from early education. However, typical education experiences for students with disabilities remain discriminatory, with limited or no funding for support, inadequate expertise of staff, a systematic culture of low expectations, exclusion, bullying and abuse.⁶

Specialist help is essential to students with additional needs, from workforce support to technology such as touch screen monitors and larger keyboards.

The *Children and Young People with Disability Australia* made a series of recommendations to the Victorian State Disability Plan 2017-2020.⁷ These recommendations highlight gaps in the Victorian policy arena, and are an instructive foundation for practical support for children with a disability.

These include:

- Actions to promote the development of inclusive playspaces, as informed by the *National Inclusive Playground Design Guidelines*, in all Victorian communities, through a grant initiative.
- Actions to support children and family playgroups to be inclusive through development of specific information and resources or through the appointment of a specific consultant with relevant expertise to work with playgroup coordinators.
- A specific focus on progressing the development of inclusive cultures for children with disability within organisations and providers of extracurricular and community activities.
- Articulation of requirements to ensure reform to early childhood and school education is developed and implemented with a firm basis in available research evidence regarding inclusive education.
- Development of mechanisms to ensure input of the direct experiences of children and young people with disability and families into all reform regarding early childhood and school education.
- A process for the establishment and use of a publically available inclusion index in relation to disability for each Victorian school.
- A focus on accountability and oversight regarding the rights of children and young people with disability in education settings.

1

Funding Support For The Early Years Of Life Recommendations

Recommendation 5

Fund current and future demand to maximise children's early education outcomes.

The needs of vulnerable and low-income families need to be prioritised when it comes to providing early education support.

There is compelling evidence to show that quality early education can help improve outcomes across a range of developmental domains and assist in overcoming disadvantage,⁸ including reducing the proportion of children who are developmentally vulnerable in their first year of school.⁹

Victorian schools require support and guidance to build their ability to respond to vulnerable children and young people in classrooms, particularly those who have experienced trauma.

Recommendation 6

Expand the Access to Early Learning program state-wide.

The Centre welcomes the government's commitment to needs-based funding for kindergartens and supported playgroups.

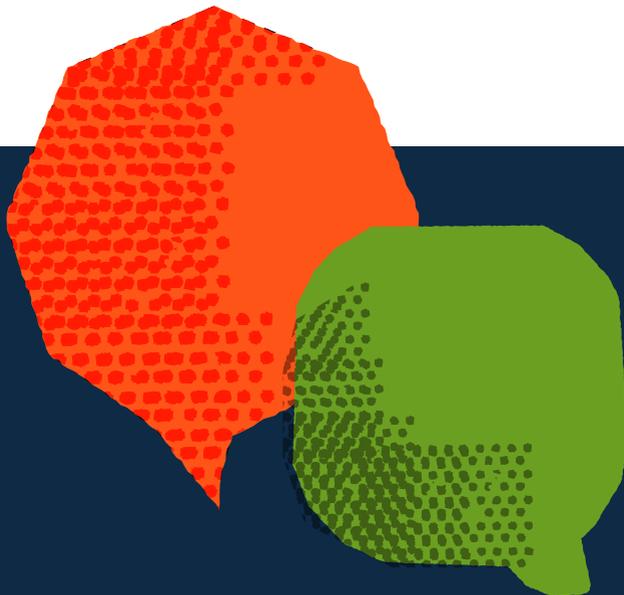
More needs to be done to support access and inclusion state-wide for vulnerable children in existing programs including the Access to Early Learning program and supported playgroups.

2 Targeted Support for Families in Need

Child protection and family services need to provide a joint response targeting the small number of families in need, who comprise the bulk of child protection reports.

Families supported by Victoria's family, child protection, out-of-home care, alcohol and drug, mental health, justice, and police services need targeted and specialist support.

We also need to make sure children living in care arrangements – such as kinship, foster, permanent or residential care – are given the same opportunities to develop and thrive, to access health and education, to be safe and to have wellbeing needs met, as children living in biological families.



2 Targeted Support for Families in Need Recommendations



Recommendation 7

Strengthen support for families by increasing investment in allied health supports, including mental health, alcohol and other drug services to reduce waiting lists, enable early intervention or reunification for families, and provide equal opportunities for children in care to thrive.

To improve support for families and prevent children from being taken into care, it is crucial that the government invest more in mental health and alcohol and other drug services to reduce waiting lists and enable early intervention with families.

Flexible and creative funding models would permit responsive, person-centred, 'wrap-around' support for families. Young people in and leaving care and young people who have assumed the role of carers for parents, need to be able to access health services, particularly youth mental health treatment and support services.

In addition to specialist services addressing specific needs, families would also benefit from targeted parenting programs designed to reduce the risk of abuse, neglect and entry into the statutory system.

2

Targeted Support for Families in Need Recommendations

Recommendation 8

Invest appropriately in the intensive treatment model for children and young people in residential care and commit to a therapeutic focus for all other residential care placements.

The intensive treatment model of residential care (Intensive Support Service) should be pursued as an option for children and young people currently living in residential care.

All children who are unable to access the Intensive Support Service should be accommodated in therapeutic residential care, and government must commit to making all residential care beds therapeutic.

Recommendation 9

Provide kinship carers with allowances determined by their child's need, with the same allowance processes for all carer types, and raise the base level of kinship carer allowance.

We commend the government in funding more services for kinship carers, including the addition of new child protection staff to assist with the application process for allowances.

The Centre calls on the government to further support kinship carers by:

- allocating kinship carer allowances according to children's specific needs
- simplifying the allowance process across all carer types, and
- raising the base level of kinship carer allowance.

Recommendation 10

Provide foster care families with adequate supports, including raising the foster care direct allowance to reach parity with other states in Australia.

Victoria provides some of the highest allowance rates for foster carers looking after children with complex needs. However, Victoria's general foster carer allowance is one of Australia's lowest.^{10 11}

The Centre calls on the government to raise the foster carer direct allowance to reach parity with other states in Australia.

2

Targeted Support for Families in Need Recommendations

Recommendation 11

Provide ongoing investment in Fostering Connections.

The *Fostering Connections* program has contributed to an increased number of active accredited carers to 1620 (Dec 2017); increased the successful enquiry conversions rate to 8.9% (Dec 2017); and sector-wide improvements in the capture and use of foster care data.

By bringing together all foster care agencies across Victoria one consistent brand, the Fostering Connections project has also enabled a more coordinated approach to foster carer recruitment activities, ultimately improving carer experiences.

This level of collaboration in recruiting foster carers is unprecedented in the sector.

Recommendation 12

Continue implementation of the recommendations of Always Was, Always Will Be Koori Children and In the child's best interests.

Recent inquiries have found poor compliance with existing requirements such as cultural planning and the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle meaning that many Aboriginal children are disconnected from their country, culture and community.¹²

Aboriginal children are significantly overrepresented in the child protection system and were 14.6 times more likely to be in out-of-home care on 30 June 2016 than non-Indigenous children.

The Centre looks forward to continued implementation of the recommendations of the *Always Was, Always Will Be Koori Children* and *In the Child's Best Interests* reports undertaken by the Commission for Children and Young People.

Implementation of these recommendations should align with the Aboriginal Children and Families Agreement.

Adequately compensate victims of abuse.

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse handed down its final report in December 2017. In four years, more than 6000 people came forward to tell their stories. As a country, we have taken the courageous step to shine a light on a culture where abuse was tolerated for decades, and perpetrators were enabled.

It is time to move towards broader cultural change; where governments fund the care of children at full cost, where carers are supported and where children are prioritised in state and federal budgets.

Policies like compulsory Child Safe Standards and the Reportable Conduct Scheme are beginning to drive change in Victoria, with organisations now held to account in the way that they prevent, detect, respond and report child abuse. But that should only be the beginning.

This year, the federal government announced a redress scheme, as recommended by the Royal Commission. While redress is both vital and welcome, the proposed scheme is not good enough. The scheme is not compulsory, meaning states and territories can choose to opt out.

Yet if this proposed scheme goes ahead, equal redress is unlikely to apply to survivors across the board.

Survivors need a redress scheme that is national, transparent, easy to access and available to all victims of institutional child abuse.

The Royal Commission has equipped Australia's decision-makers and institutions with first-hand accounts, information and warning signs. The recommendations made by the Royal Commission must be acted on.

3

Guiding Young People Through Care

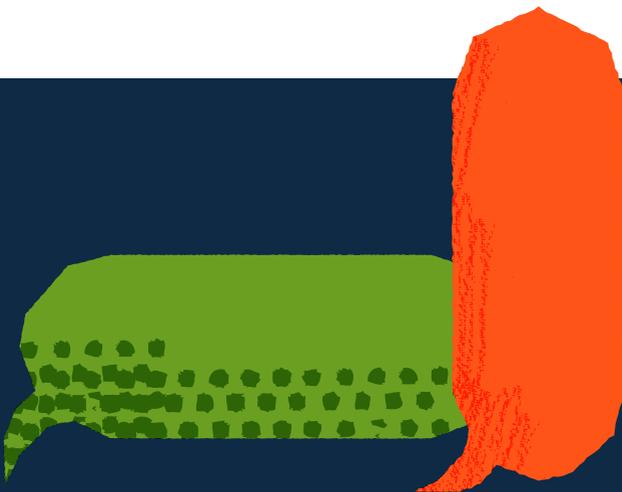
Recommendation 14

Extend the Navigator program state-wide and fund an early childhood worker in all LOOKOUT Centres.

The Navigator program and LOOKOUT Education Centres are promising programs showing early signs of beneficial effects, including the presence of an early childhood worker in one LOOKOUT Centre, which is reporting positive results in enrolments and engagement of children in early childhood services.

We call on the government to extend the Navigator program state-wide, and for the LOOKOUT Centres to support the educational engagement of all children and young people in out of home care up to 21 years. Government must also fund an early childhood worker role in all LOOKOUT Centres to increase the potential for successful early intervention.

Furthermore, the Child Youth Area Partnerships have been important in bringing together shared priorities across service systems, and the Centre acknowledges the capacity building that the Partnerships have enabled.



3

Guiding Young People Through Care Recommendations

Recommendation 15

Continue to support Targeted Care Packages.

The 2017-18 Victorian Budget funded an extra 100 Targeted Care Packages (TCPs) and nearly 2,000 out-of-home care placements to reduce the number of children living in residential care.

Organisations consider the TCPs to be an effective means of enabling children and young people in, or at risk of being in, residential care to achieve better outcomes.

The Centre calls on the government to continue its support for TCPs, specifically for placement prevention and reunification, including funding to cover administration costs and cross system collaboration between child and family services, specialist services and child protection services.

Recommendation 16

Invest in the Raising Expectations project.

Preliminary results from the Centre's *Raising Expectations* project – a three-year collaboration between the Centre, Federation University and La Trobe University, which is funded by the Sidney Myer Fund – show a significant increase in higher education enrolments from young people with a care background.

In 2017, the number of care leaver students enrolled at Federation University and La Trobe University more than doubled.¹³ This highlights the difference that targeted supports can make in assisting young people who have been in care to access and remain at university.

We call on the government to invest in the Raising Expectations project to enable it to further build the knowledge, skills and understanding of carers and professionals to support young people in care to aspire to complete Year 12 and go on to further and/or higher education.

Extend the leaving care age from 18 to 21 years and provide appropriate supports to enable successful transition to adulthood, including:

- Housing and education guarantees to young people leaving care

- Funding to continue to build the knowledge, skills and understanding of carers and professionals to support young people in care to aspire to complete Year 12 and go on to further and/or higher education

- Enshrining the change in legislation, and the required funding support to implement this legislative change.

There is a strong body of research to show the positive impact that extending care supports beyond 18 years can have on the lives of young people.¹⁴ Such investment also addresses intergenerational disadvantage, reducing the likelihood of ongoing involvement in child protection and the need for crisis intervention.¹⁵

The child and families services sector strongly supports extending the leaving care age from 18 to 21 years,

and providing housing and education guarantees to improve outcomes and better prepare young people for young adulthood.

Furthermore, the Centre calls on the government to extend and expand services and supports for care leavers at Victorian universities. This could be done by:

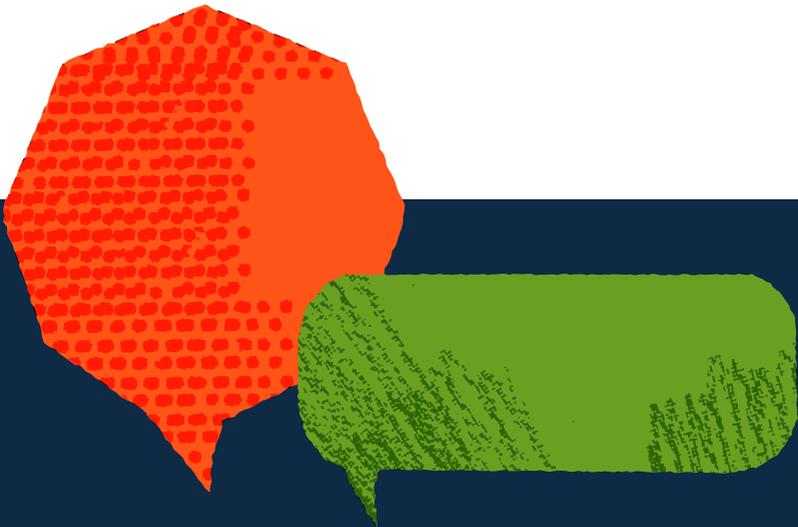
- Developing and funding partnership arrangements with other Victorian universities to provide supports and services for care leavers to assist them in their study.
- Providing all care leavers aged 16 to 21 years who are enrolled in further education with a one-off bursary (up to 250 bursaries of \$4000 each in each fiscal year) to support their higher education study and cost of living expenses.
- Invest in education and support for carers, teachers, case workers and other professionals involved with young people in out-of-home care regarding the impact of harm and educational issues and the importance of educational aspirations and access to higher education.

4 Evidence-Based Programs That Work

With rising numbers of children entering out-of-home care, strong investment is needed in placement, crisis prevention and reunification programs – with an ultimate aim to reduce demand on the service system.

The Roadmap for Reform highlighted the importance of a menu of evidence-based programs and practices to inform decisions in Victoria’s child and family services.

The Centre calls on the government to invest \$120 million over four years in research, implementation and evaluation in child and family services.



4

Evidence-Based Programs That Work Recommendations

Recommendation 18

Invest in trialling evidence-based youth justice programs that divert young people from entering or remaining in youth justice.

The government needs to develop a strategy to explicitly address the over-representation of young people from out-of-home care in the youth justice system.

It needs to invest in pilot programs to improve educational outcomes for refugee and migrant young people through culturally targeted mentoring, community-based programs and diversion programs.

The Youth Justice Review found that Aboriginal young people are 14 times more likely¹⁶ to be placed on a youth justice order. The Centre calls on the government to provide diversion support services for Aboriginal young people.

We also call on government to invest in evidence-based youth justice programs divert young people from CALD communities from entering or remaining in the youth justice system. This is particularly critical for young African-Australians who are over-represented in the youth justice system.

Recommendation 19

Test and evaluate a selection of evidence-based programs for particular cohorts of children and families for potential incorporation into Victoria's service menu, including for children with a disability.

The Centre welcomes the government funding announced in January 2018 for evidence-based trials to support families at risk of involvement with child protection or out-of-home care.

The funding will establish and maintain programs that are evidence-based, and seek to improve outcomes for Victorian children, young people and families.

The next stage of support needed for evidence-based programs is comprehensive investment in testing and evaluation over three years to embed the most effective models across the highest risk areas.

This will reduce demand, build service provider capacity and capability, divert children from out-of-home care, and strengthen families.

This testing and evaluation will enable the government to determine what works, for who, in what circumstances, and will enable those programs that prove effective in a Victorian context to be incorporated into a menu for all service providers.

4 Evidence-Based Programs That Work Recommendations



Recommendation 20

Expand OPEN to be able to provide evaluation and implementation support and build sector capability in evidence-informed practice.

OPEN brings together service providers and tertiary institutions, practitioners and researchers, to build and disseminate evidence of what works to engage with and support families and carers to provide safe, nurturing environments for children.

It is well placed to strengthen the evidence base underpinning the three pathways of Victoria's new family services model: early help, targeted and specialist care, and continuing care.

Currently, OPEN is funded for one year only, yet is it a critical mechanism for building Victoria's evidence base, providing implementation support, and improving outcomes for children, young people and families.

The Centre calls on the government to invest \$3 million over three years to cover implementation support activities, further development of the menu, and encourage the dissemination and take-up of effective practice.

4 Evidence-Based Programs That Work Recommendations



Recommendation 21

Expand the Learning System Grants initiative, with a pool of \$1 million annually, to convert promising practice into evidence-informed practice.

The Learning System Grants have attracted several strong proposals that, with the support of OPEN, are being developed to become part of Victoria's menu of evidence-informed practice and programs.

The Grants have allowed the sector to partner with researchers on sector-driven initiatives aligned with the Children and Families Research Strategy, and with clear benefits for children, young people and families.

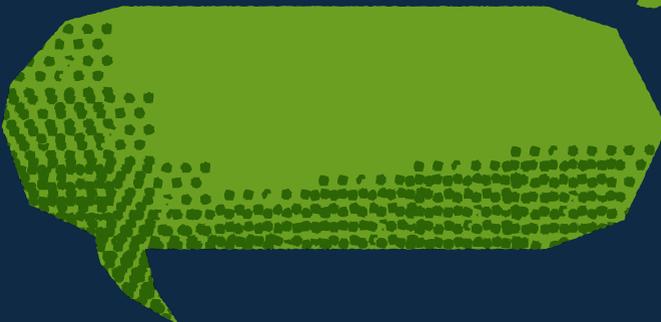
The Centre calls on the government to provide an annual pool of \$1 million over three years for Learning System Grants to turn promising practice into evidence of what works, including evaluation of the funded proposals.

5

A Strong and Capable Workforce

The 2017 Family Services Workforce Survey shows a well-qualified and skilled workforce in the child and family sector.

However, the survey also highlighted the increasing risk and complexity of the cases practitioners are working with, despite low remuneration. It also showed a need for longer term funding for industry planning and implementation in child and family services. A strong and capable workforce requires fair and consistent funding that keeps pace with rising cost pressures across the sector.



5 **A Strong and Capable Workforce** Recommendations

Recommendation 22

Commit to four year funding for industry planning and implementation in child and family services and ensure that funding indexation tracks proportionally to bottom line costs.

Many child and family services workers have told us their positions are uncertain – because they are based on insecure and short-term funding arrangements.

Organisations emphasise the difficulties they face in recruiting staff, particularly in regional areas and growth corridors. Staff burnout is affecting sustainability of service models for families with complex needs. Agencies also face continually compounding strains on their budgets from rising wages and WorkCover premiums that are not adequately compensated for in yearly funding increases.

Appropriate, proactive, preventative and structured wellbeing support for staff needs to be built into the service design to be effective, maintain the workforce and ensure continuity of care and good outcomes for clients.¹⁸

Industry planning must ensure that workers with appropriate skills and qualifications are available in the locations where they are needed to meet existing and future demand.¹⁹

The Centre calls on the government to commit to four-year funding for industry planning and implementation in the child and family services sector. The government must also ensure that indexation in funding sufficiently covers the sector's rising costs of running a strong and capable workforce.

Recommendation 23

Invest in ongoing training to ensure all workers in child and family services can respond as and when needed to families and carers requiring early or targeted and specialist support and services.

The Centre calls on the government to provide greater investment in organisations to enable them to upskill staff to:

- the earliest possible intervention for children, young people and families
- provide targeted and specialist support for families with high, multiple and complex needs and vulnerability, including knowledge and skills around managing family violence, de-escalating situations, cultural safety and awareness, trauma-informed practice, and vicarious trauma
- provide continuing support for children leaving care and/or living in permanent care arrangements
- improve the completion of Leaving Care Plans well in advance
- develop leadership in the sector: including mentoring, learning opportunities, and respected positions for current and emerging leaders.

5

A Strong and Capable Workforce Recommendations

Recommendation 24

Fund the information sharing capacity of services working with children.

Better information sharing between organisations and services that work with children enables better safeguarding of the children – as concerns which initially appear to be of a low level when seen in isolation, are sometimes recognised as part of a long standing pattern of abuse and neglect which needs a response when information is pooled together.

The Centre welcomes the introduction of the *Children Legislation Amendment (Information Sharing) Bill 2017* that simplifies and improves information sharing arrangements between trusted professional entities, such as Maternal and Child Health, hospitals and schools.

The next stage of required funding must include support for organisations and services, including appropriate training and guidance, to their information sharing capacity and ensure that no child in their care falls between the cracks of the system.

Recommendation 25

Embed early intervention and specialist services for children and families experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage at the core of the Support and Safety Hubs.

Child First provides a vital early intervention point for vulnerable and disadvantaged families needing additional intensive support to care for their children.

The Centre, based on advice from its members, recommends that the government resource Child First adequately to meet demand, including within the Support and Safety Hubs.



References

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Centre for Excellence
in Child and Family Welfare Inc.

cfecfw.asn.au

Centre for Excellence
in Child and Family Welfare

Level 5, 50 Market Street
Melbourne VIC 3000 Australia

ABN: 24 629 376 672
RTO: 3696

Telephone: (03) 9614 1577
Facsimile: (03) 9614 1774

admin@cfecfw.asn.au

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