



**Queensland Kids
Partnership**
every child thriving



aracy

Toward a Family and Child Wellbeing and Safety System

***QKP/ARACY Submission to the Queensland Child Safety
Commission of Inquiry and to the Queensland Government***

March 2026



Queensland Kids Partnership is a partnership of people and organisations working to transform systems, so all young Queenslanders can thrive.

Kids do well when the people and places around them – like their communities, homes, schools and activities – work well together. But if some parts are missing or don't work well together, it can affect how they feel, learn and grow.

Queensland Kids Partnership is a means for changing this. We're bringing together people, communities, decision-makers, change-makers and workplaces across Queensland to improve connectiveness, learning, and support in communities, workforces and organisations. Together, we can do things better, so that every baby, child and young person thrives.

Disclaimer

Queensland Kids Partnership (QKP) is an initiative of Australian Research Alliance for Children and Young People (ARACY), ABN 68 100 902 921, an Australian Public Company registered as a health promotion charity with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC).

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1. Acknowledgements

Queensland Kids Partnership (QKP) and ARACY acknowledge the traditional owners of the lands across Queensland and beyond, upon which we live and work, and their continuing connection to land and sea, and to kin, culture and community. We pay respect to Elders past and present, and to First Nations colleagues. We are thankful to rear our children and support our families in these places. QKP acknowledges the First Nations leaders, caregivers and organisations that have advocated for children and their families and communities for generations.

We acknowledge the consequences of adversity and trauma experienced at the hands of systems over generations, and the resilience, determination, leadership, generosity and innovation these Queenslanders have long demonstrated.

QKP/ARACY acknowledges the lived experience and systems expertise of tens of thousands of young Queenslanders and their families and carers engaged by the Child Safety System across generations. QKP/ARACY acknowledges the systems harm experienced by far too many, often with life-long consequences.

We acknowledge that the flaws, challenges and harms associated with the Child Safety System that we point at in this submission are despite the best efforts and good intent of the vast majority of people – Ministers, Executives, Child Safety staff, families, carers, NGOs, statutory authorities and others engaged in and with the system. These are systems design, resourcing and capability issues that have evolved over generations. They can and should be shifted by this current generation.

QKP/ARACY commend those with lived experience of the Child Safety System who have shared their expertise and voice with the Commission of Inquiry (CoI). We commend the Commission's attention to the submissions and recommendations made by:

- QKP's Brains and Bodies Collaborative
- QATSCIPP, Peak Care, CREATE, QCOSS, NAPCAN, Family Inclusion Network (FIN), Queenslanders with Disability Network (QDN), and Social Services International (SSI)
- the Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC)
- the Office of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Commissioner, and
- the Queensland Mental Health Commission (QMHC).

The draft of this submission was shared with and informed by the feedback of 'critical friends', peak bodies, and members of the Inter-Generational Stewardship Table. This submission is from QKP/ARACY. It is not made on behalf of partners and collaborators.

This submission has been prepared by the QKP team. Michael Hogan is the co-founder and Executive Convenor of the Queensland Kids Partnership. Michael is a former Director-General of the Department of Communities, Disability Services and Child Safety and the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women.

This submission has been authorised by the Management Board of the Queensland Kids Partnership and the CEO of ARACY.

2. Executive summary and recommendations

Summary

Systems deliver the results they are designed, resourced and equipped to deliver.

Queensland's Child Safety System needs a bold, transformative reform and investment agenda to deliver different and better results.

QKP/ARACY urge the Commission of Inquiry and the Queensland Government to embrace a paradigm shift to a **Family and Child Wellbeing and Safety System** — one oriented to:

- a balanced continuum of prevention, early engagement and intervention,
- relational, trauma- and neuro-informed care, healing, connection and development, and
- a strong cultural lens and First Nations governance at its core.

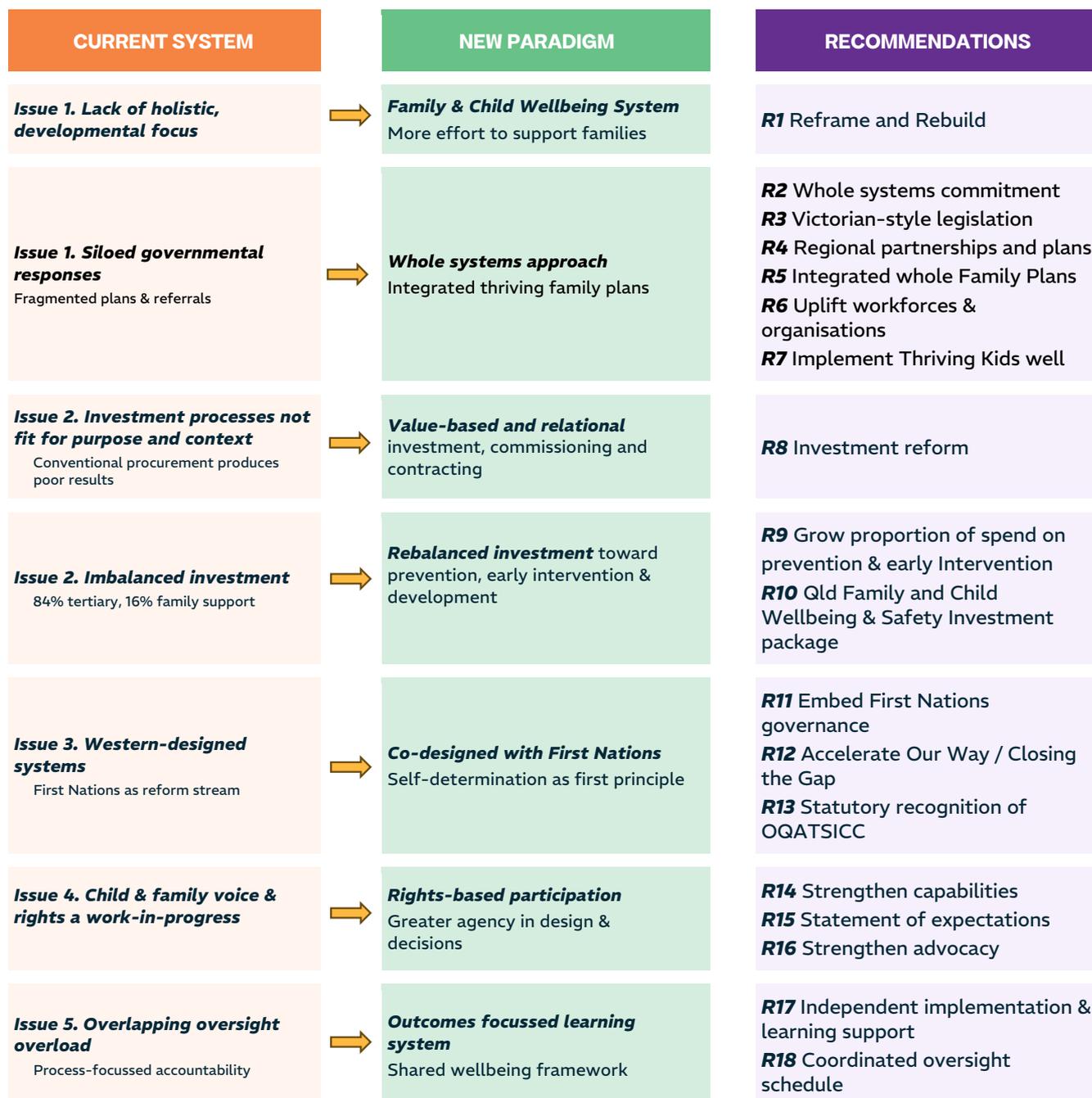
This submission identifies 5 foundational systems issues and reform streams, each with recommendations:

- ***Issue 1 – Whole Systems Approach:*** Queensland lacks an integrated approach to family and child wellbeing. Services are fragmented, plans are disconnected, and there is no shared outcomes framework, no cross-sectoral reform vehicle, limited whole of government infrastructure, and no statewide family strategy.
- ***Issue 2 – Investment Imbalance and Reform:*** an estimated 84% of child safety spend goes to tertiary intervention and only 16% to supporting families. Other investments in prevention and early intervention are not well coordinated and leveraged. This imbalance fails to address the conditions driving families into crisis. Conventional program and procurement processes are not delivering best possible return on investment.
- ***Issue 3 – First Nations Self-Determination:*** despite significant progress, much more is required to shift power and resources to community-controlled organisations and to address the structural drivers of over-representation and enable stronger connections to culture, kin and community.
- ***Issue 4 – Children's Rights and Voice:*** rights-based culture and capability remain a work in progress. Children and families need greater agency in systems design and decision-making.
- ***Issue 5 – Accountability and Learning:*** A complex 'superstructure' of overlapping oversight mechanisms creates overload without a clear, coordinated focus on life outcomes for children and families.

The following diagram depicts the paradigm shift and actions/recommendations proposed to move from current to future state.

The 18 recommendations are organised into domain-specific reforms that nest to each shift.

Figure 1: The paradigm shift and actions — from current to future state



Recommendations

Sections 6-10 outline the issues and insights, and proposed solutions and recommendations in the five system issues and reform streams summarised above.

QKP/ARACY's 18 recommendations are mapped to these reform streams in the consolidated table below, with a proposed time frame for implementation.

Figure 2: Consolidated list of recommendations

R#	Recommendation	Col ToR	Suggested Lead(s)*	Indicative Timeframe
Issue 1: WHOLE SYSTEMS APPROACH (Years 1-4)				
1.	Commit to re-frame and a Family and Child Wellbeing and Safety System over the next decade.	B, C, F	DPC / DFSDSCS with QFCC, DoH/HHSs, DoE	Year 1-10
2.	Commit to a ' Whole Systems Approach ' through a suite of integrated, developmental, relational and cultural reforms that weave services, systems and communities together to work better for Queensland children, young people and families.	C, F	DPC / DFSDSCS with QFCC, DoH/HHSs, DoE	Year 1-10
3.	Introduce legislation based on Victoria's Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2025 and their <i>Children, Youth and Families (Supporting Stable and Strong Families) Bill 2025</i> to strengthen the whole of government and community approach to family and child wellbeing and safety.	G	DFSDSCS	Year 1-2
4.	Convene Regional Thriving Family Partnerships and co-develop Regional Plans to coordinate supports and services and make systems fit for people and context.	B iii, v, viii; F	DFSDSCS with PHNs, DoH/HHSs, DoE, Housing	Year 2-4
5.	Co-develop integrated Thriving Family Plans for families to personalise and coordinate supports and services, and make systems responsive to family circumstances, needs and aspirations.	B iii, B v, B viii	DFSDSCS with DoH/HHSs, DoE, Housing	Year 2-3
6.	Commit to uplift workforce, caregiver and organisational capabilities across the Family and Child Wellbeing and Safety System for high quality relational interactions and trauma and neuro-informed policy and practice.	C, D, F	DFSDSCS with QFCC, QMHC et al	Year 1-10
7.	Implement the national Thriving Kids initiative, in accord with the design of the Advisory Group, with particular focus on families with children with developmental	D, F	DFSDSCS with DoE & DoH/HHSs	Year 1-3

	delays and disabilities engaged in the Family and Child Wellbeing and Safety System.			
Issue 2: INVESTMENT REBALANCING & REFORM (Years 1–10)				
8.	Commit to advance Investment, Commissioning and Contracting Reform for child, youth and family development, wellbeing and safety services provided through government agencies and non-government organisations.	F, G	Qld Treasury / DFSDSCS	Year 1-5
9.	Commit to continuing to grow the proportion of investment in evidence-informed primary and secondary prevention and development social infrastructure and services to achieve better child, youth and family development, safety and wellbeing outcomes, including a Queensland Prevention and Early Intervention Investment Framework led by Treasury.	F	Qld Treasury / DFSDSCS	Year 1–10
10.	Commit to an integrated cross-portfolio Queensland Family Wellbeing and Safety Investment package , led by the Minister for Families, to progressively grow the amount invested in child wellbeing and development through parenting supports, family wellbeing, young parents, hubs, and place-based initiatives.	F	Qld Treasury / DFSDSCS	Year 1–5
Issue 3: FIRST NATIONS SELF-DETERMINATION (Ongoing)				
11.	Embed First Nations governance, cultural safety and cultural accountability across all reform streams, not only First Nations-specific ones, continuing to engage constructively with and invest in the Queensland First Children and Families Board, the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak, the Office of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children’s Commissioner, and First Nations community organisations.	F	DFSDSCS / QATSCIPP	Year 1-10
12.	Accelerate implementation of Our Way and Closing the Gap strategies, including maintaining the legislated Child Placement Principles, First Nations-led systems design, and transfer of more statutory functions and resources to community-controlled organisations.	F	DFSDSCS / QATSCIPP	Year 1-5
13.	Legislate statutory recognition of the Office of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children’s Commissioner as an independent safeguard.	G	DJAG	Year 1–2

Issue 4: CHILDREN'S RIGHTS & VOICE (Years 1-3)				
14.	Strengthen capabilities and processes to enable the agency and voice of children and young people, and their families, in systems design and implementation, in decision-making, and in evaluation and accountability processes.	F	DFSDSCS with QFCC / CREATE	Year 1-3
15.	Co-develop a Statement of Expectations with children and young people with care experience articulating what they expect of the system.	F	DFSDSCS with QFCC / CREATE	Year 1-2
16.	Strengthen independent, peer and legal advocacy for children in care and their families and extend support for parents under the Charter of Parents' Rights.	F	DFSDSCS with DJAG / QFCC / CREATE	Year 1-3
Issue 5: ACCOUNTABILITY & LEARNING (Years 1-3)				
17.	Establish an independent cross-sectoral vehicle, hosted by the QFCC, to support transformative reform implementation and learning.	F	DPC with DJAG / DFSDSCS	Year 1-2
18.	Adopt and operationalise <i>The Nest</i> child and youth wellbeing outcomes framework as a shared systems, commissioning, contracting and accountability tool.	A, F	DFSDSCS / QFCC	Year 1-2

**Suggested leads:*

- *DPC - Department of the Premier and Cabinet*
- *DFSDSCS - Department of Families, Seniors, Disability Services and Child Safety*
- *DoJ - Department of Justice*
- *DoE - Department of Education*
- *DoH - Department of Health*
- *HHSs - Hospital and Health Services*
- *QATSICPP - Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak*
- *QFCC - Queensland Family and Child Commission.*

3. About Queensland Kids Partnership and ARACY

The Queensland Kids Partnership (QKP) was initiated in late 2020 by ARACY - the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth which was founded by Professor Fiona Stanley, nearly 25 years ago - in conjunction with Queensland leaders and organisations.

QKP (originally known as the Thriving Queensland Kids Partnership) was sparked by the shared insight among leaders of the need for a systems-focused coalition and broker that could facilitate collective efforts to change the odds for young Queenslanders, who lag national averages on key measures of child and youth wellbeing.

QKP's design was informed by the ANZSOG and the Every Child Coalition joint project on [*Systems Leadership for Child and Youth Wellbeing*](#), and a Paul Ramsay Foundation Fellowship.

From the outset, QKP has purposefully focused 'up stream' on shifting the systems and environmental conditions and life circumstances for all young Queenslanders, especially for those whose families experience the greatest adversities and inequities, including systems-related harms.

QKP has not substantially engaged with the operations of the Child Safety System; instead, we have worked to 'disrupt disadvantage' and 'turn down the flow' of families and kids ending up in tertiary systems. QKP and ARACY recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children experience disproportionate systems-related harms due to colonisation, discriminatory policies, racism and inter-generational trauma. We also recognise that 'upstream' for First Nations families includes cultural, historical and structural determinants that differ from non-Indigenous families. QKP and ARACY are committed to supporting First Nations leadership, knowledge systems, and community-led solutions as foundational to systems transformation.

QKP/ARACY brings together people, communities, decision-makers, change-makers to be better connected, informed, and able to do more than they can do by themselves, by:

- amplifying the voices of lived expertise of children, young people and families
- creating a strong community of partners and collaborators
- taking 'science to service' in the synthesis and translation of science, evidence, lived experience and expertise
- facilitating helpful ways and resources to support families and communities, in all their diversity, and
- providing practical opportunities for collective systems work and learning.

QKP is guided by an Inter-Generational Stewardship Table. QKP is primarily funded by Queensland and national philanthropic bodies. ARACY also hosts the Investment Dialogue for Australia's Children. QKP is a 'critical friend' to the Queensland Kids Funders Alliance. QKP is also a 'critical friend' to peak bodies, such as QCOSS' *Raising Queensland* campaign and the Preventative Peaks Alliance.

More detail about QKP is available at www.qkp.org.au. More information about ARACY can be found at: www.aracy.org.au.

4. Evidence-based frames and tools

QKP/ARACY takes an inter-generational and ecological approach, considering all the systems and environments, that shape the lives of Queensland families and children.

The science, evidence and lived experience is clear: what surrounds and happens to us shapes us.

Kids do better when the people and places around them – their families, communities, schools, health services, sport and other activities – work well and work well together.

However, when the conditions for children and young people and their families to thrive aren't conducive, and if some parts are missing or don't work well together, it can adversely affect child and young people's health, development and wellbeing, often with life-long and inter-generational consequences.

In particular, when systems aren't well designed, resourced and equipped to prevent or reduce escalating and compounding adversities, and aren't able to disrupt inter-generational cycles of trauma and grief, then children, families, communities and the public pay a high price.

Those adversities – such as domestic, family and sexual violence, drug misuse, mental ill-health, housing stress and homelessness, financial stress and gambling addictions, badly disrupted family life – are often the precursors of child maltreatment.

Core frames and tools

QKP/ARACY's work is grounded in three core science- and evidence-informed frameworks, augmented by First Nations knowledge systems and universal rights statements such as the UN Conventions on the Rights of the Child and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

These frames and tools are not just conceptual guides.

Together with the UN Conventions, they:

- synthesise the best available science, evidence, lived experience and practitioner expertise
- provide a common, core and contemporary way of seeing and relating to children, young people and natural and caregiver families,
- articulate rights and responsibilities and the criticality of relationships, and
- create coherence and alignment across systems, sectors, organisations and disciplines.

These frames, tools and knowledges need to be adopted and operationalised in Child Safety and related systems through investment, policies, programs and practice, including workforce and organisational development.

In section 5, we provide as an example how Scotland's *Getting it Right for Every Child* whole of government initiative has deployed like frames and tools, and more, to systematically transform family and child wellbeing and safety, and to substantially reduce the number of children in care.

4.1 The Nest Wellbeing Framework

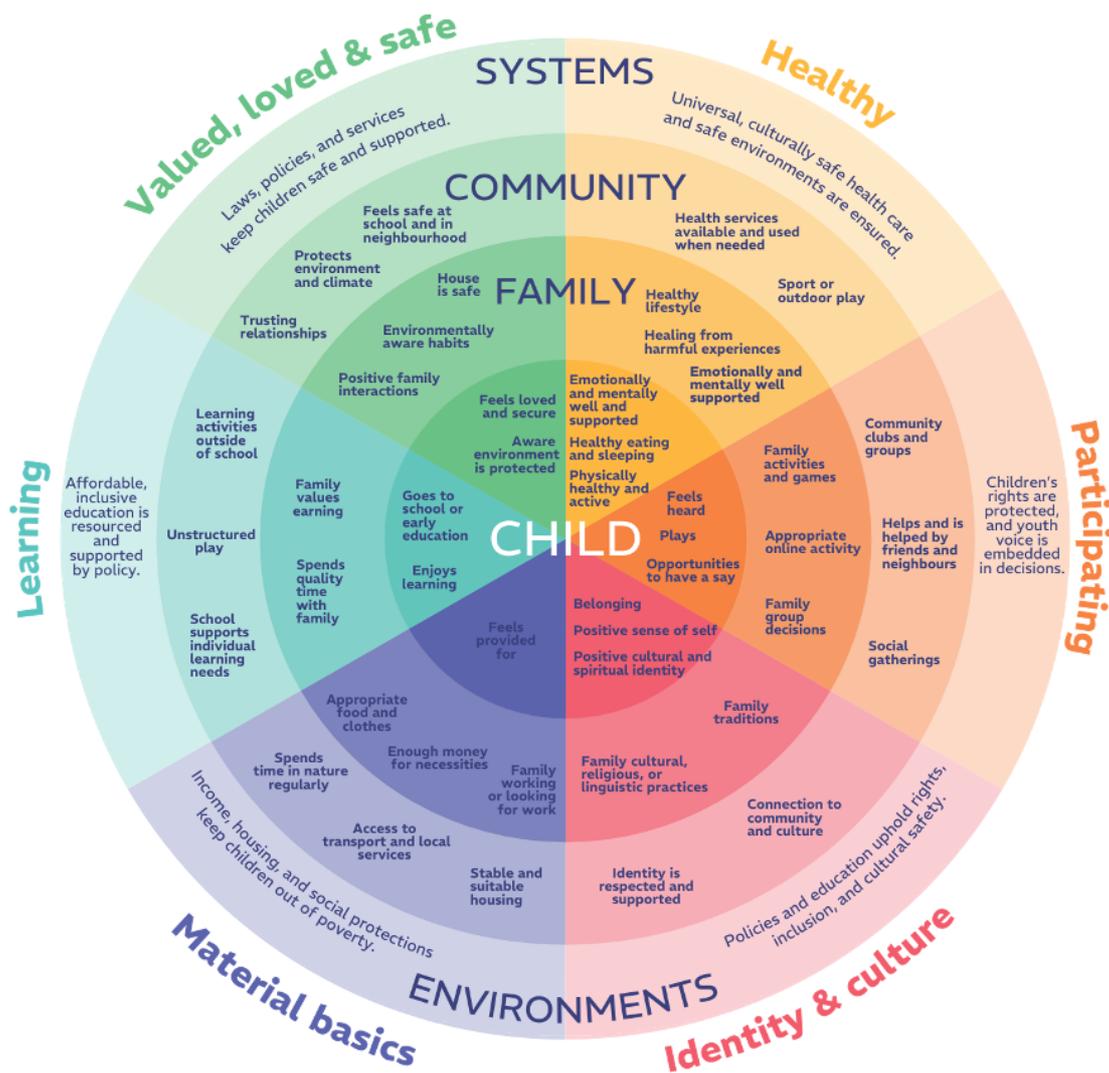
The Nest (see Figure 3 and more [here](#)) encapsulates what families want, and our community aspires to, for children. It identifies 6 inter-connected wellbeing domains: health and development, learning, participation, material basics, culture and identity, and being valued, loved and safe. These interact in the family and community contexts, and the systems and environments, in which children live.

The Nest is increasingly being adopted by governments and organisations, for example, by:

- the QFCC in *Growing Up in Queensland 2024*
- the 2024 *Putting Queensland Kids First* strategy
- the 2024 National Early Years Strategy
- place initiatives such as [Logan Together](#) and [Gladstone Region Together](#).

However, it is not yet fully operationalised as an integrative systems, program and practice tool in the Child Safety System.

Figure 3: the Nest Wellbeing Framework



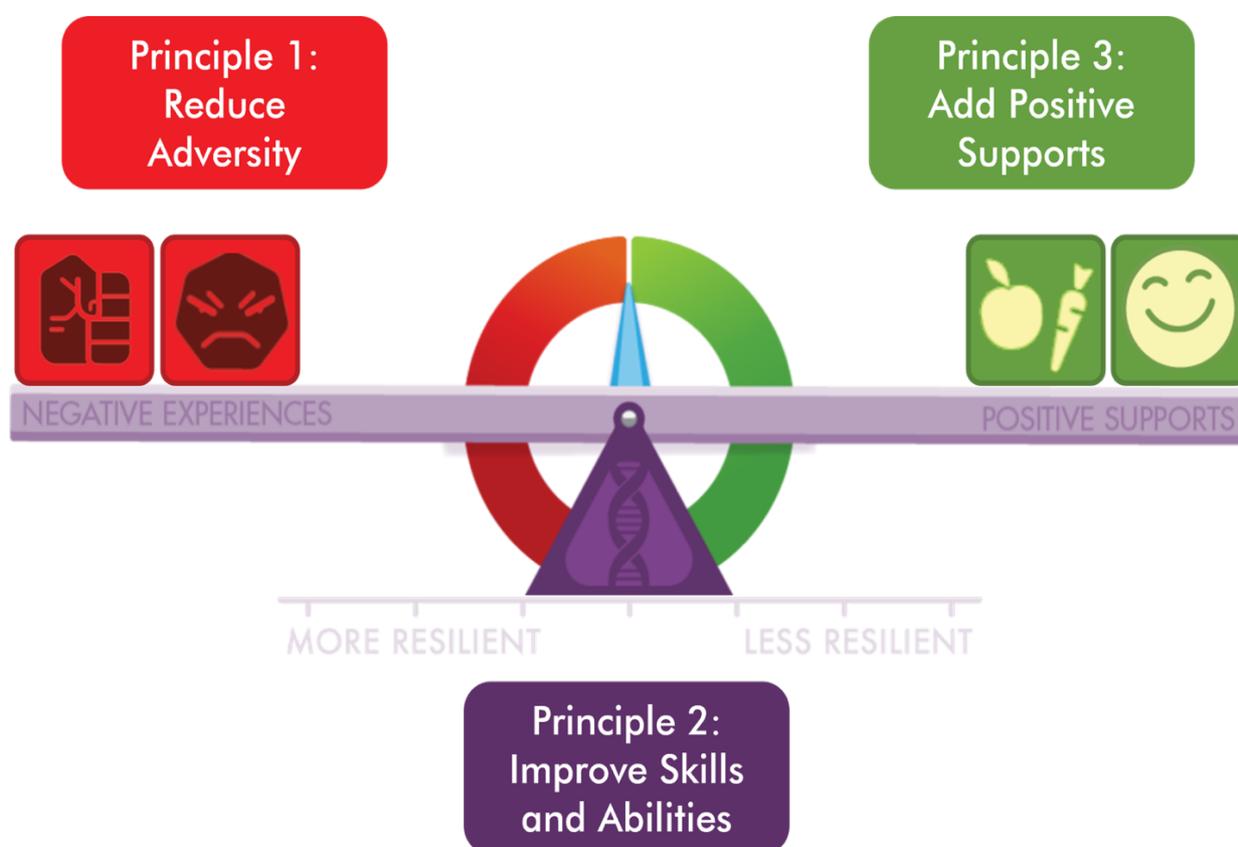
4.2 The Resilience Scale

Based on work by the Harvard Centre on the Developing Child (see [here](#)), and adapted and applied systemically in Alberta, Canada through the Alberta Family Wellness Initiative (see [here](#)), the Resilience Scale is a developmental tool that can be used at individual, family, local, organisational, regional and systems levels.

It maps the dynamic interaction between adversities and protective factors and the skills and capabilities that help children and families navigate life.

QKP is working to facilitate application of The Resilience Scale in Queensland (see <https://tqkp.org.au/what-does-thriving-look-like-2/>).

Figure 4: The Resilience Scale



4.3 Human Connections and Capabilities Framework

Governments invest billions of dollars in 'human service' systems without a coherent, science and evidence-informed framework of what human capabilities they should be enabling.

This is despite what we know of the criticality of 'agency' and capability in navigating life.

This framework articulates the connections and capabilities — including agency, self-regulation, relational skills and problem-solving — that are critical for navigating life well and dealing with its challenges.

The Child Safety System is not yet purposefully designed to build these vital skills. This is all the more important where the State steps in, and then delegates, as 'corporate parent' but struggles to do what almost every parent would try to do for their own children.

Figure 5: Human Connections and Capabilities Framework



4.4 Integration with First Nations knowledges

These frames and tools must be augmented with First Nations knowledges of 'being, belonging and becoming', cultural ways and obligations for child rearing, and ways of understanding wellbeing and resilience. Application must:

- embed cultural identity, connection to Country, and kinship as protective factors and developmental necessities
- enable cultural healing
- be informed by the experience and consequences of colonisation, racism and discrimination
- recognise community governance.

Application of these frames and tools must also address the lived experience of migration and settlement for Queenslanders with diverse cultural and language backgrounds.

5. The new paradigm: A Family and Child Wellbeing and Safety System

Systems deliver the results they are designed, resourced and equipped to deliver.

The Child Safety System needs a bold, transformative reform and investment agenda to deliver different and better results.

To expand a refrain of the Centre for Relational Care, we need a system for child connection and child development.

QKP/ARACY propose that the Col and the Queensland Government embrace and orchestrate a paradigm shift to a **Family and Child Wellbeing and Safety System**.

This requires shifts not only in policies, practices and resources, but structural, cultural and transformative shifts in relationships and connections, in power dynamics, and in mental models and recognition of how systems are experienced and embodied.

It requires acknowledging that current systems were not designed with or for First Nations peoples and therefore produce inequitable outcomes. A Family and Child Wellbeing and Safety System must be co-designed and governed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. First Nations self-determination is a core systems principle, not a reform stream.

5.1 Core design principles

At the core of a re-designed system are:

- whole child and whole family approaches, fit for both purpose and context
- high quality developmental care relationships — familial, peer, community and professional
- trauma- and neuro-informed, healing- and recovery-oriented policy and practice in accord with the [Queensland Trauma Strategy](#) and [Neuro-Informed](#) frameworks
- high-level and local integration with child and parental health, early learning, disability, mental health, education, housing, libraries and other systems, including in non-stigmatising 'hubs and spokes' models
- community-activated networks and supports: voluntary and peer-based
- community-led, place-based initiatives that weave supports and services together
- well-equipped workforces and organisations with core, common and contemporary knowledge, skills and tools, and strong cultural capability
- First Nations governance, cultural safety and cultural accountability embedded across the system.

5.2 Key systemic challenges for Queensland

Five key 'systems' issues need to be addressed in order to shift to a Family and Child Wellbeing and Safety System fit for both purpose and context in Queensland.

These are the need:

1. for an integrated **'Whole Systems Approach'** to Family and Child Wellbeing and Safety, with a stronger multi-dimensional and long-term focus on child development and trauma- and neuro-informed care and healing, and a stronger cultural lens
2. to address the systemic **imbalance of investment** across the continuum of universal primary prevention, early and secondary intervention, and tertiary intervention, and for **investment reform**
3. to fully enable **First Nations self-determination** and the Child Placement Principles, and to further invest in community-controlled **Indigenous family wellbeing, development and safety services**
4. to fully enable children's agency and participation in systems design and decision-making, and to fully realise the **Queensland Charter of Rights** and the **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child**, in Child Safety policy, programs and practices
5. to reorient the 'superstructure' of Ministerial, Departmental and partner agency accountability, to facilitate **reform implementation** and **'systems learning'**, and for a clearer, coordinated and transparent focus on **life outcomes for, and the voice of, children, young people and families**.

QKP/ARACY outlines in the sections below a high-level and comprehensive agenda for systems-level change on each of these issues over the next decade.

5.3 A Family and Child Wellbeing and Safety System in practice: the Scottish example

Queensland can look to precedents such as Scotland's *Getting it Right for Every Child* and The Promise Scotland for comprehensive reform agendas, arrangements and learnings.

Scotland has made a sustained and systematic effort over the past 20 years to improve children's health and development, learning, safety and justice outcomes. At the core of the Scottish agenda has been a 'whole systems approach' using common and core frames outlined above in section 5.1, together with a strong commitment to children's rights.

This transformation - known as *Getting It Right For Every Child* ([GIRFEC](#)) - has been advanced progressively since 2006 as a whole of government agenda shifting policy, investment, planning and practice.

As the introduction to GIRFEC states:

"GIRFEC is our commitment to provide all children, young people and their families with the right support at the right time. ... It provides Scotland with a consistent framework and shared language for promoting, supporting, and safeguarding the wellbeing of children and young people. ... It is locally embedded and positively embraced by organisations, services and practitioners across Children's Services Planning Partnerships, with a focus on changing culture, systems and practice."

The key components of *Getting It Right for Every Child* (see more [here](#)) are summarised below:

GIRFEC key components

- [GIFEC National Policy Statement, Principles and Values](#)
- [National Practice Model:](#)
 - [Wellbeing Wheel \(SHANARRI\)](#) - outcomes assessment tool
 - [My World Triangle](#) - information gathering tool
 - [Resilience Matrix](#) - information analysis tool
- [Children's Services Planning Partnerships](#) – local area plans, coordination, facilitation and capability development
- [Named person](#) – a clear point of contact for every child
- [Child Plan](#) - a personalised, non-statutory plan with extra support if needed
- [Lead Professional](#) - for each Child Plan
- [Information Sharing Charter](#)
- [Whole Family Wellbeing Fund](#) - investing in holistic family support to ensure that families can get the help they need, where and when they need it
- [The Promise Scotland](#) - implementation support body, with a designated Minister for Keeping the Promise
- [Holistic Family Support Routemap and national principles](#), and
- [Child, Youth and Families Outcomes Framework](#) - with 21 wellbeing indicators and national reporting.

Recent data and evaluations from Scotland have indicated:

- [26% reduction in children on child protection register from 2014 to 2024](#)
- [45% reduction in offending by young people under 18 years; with an average of 168 under 21 years in custody in 2023-24 compared to 1012 in 2008-09](#)
- [Reductions in rates of absolute and relative child poverty by 7-10 percentage points.](#)

QKP/ARACY commends the Scottish example to the Commission of Inquiry and the Queensland Government.

5.4 Other examples and sources

In doing so, we draw not only on the Scottish example, but also on other examples such as the legislative models in Victoria's *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2025* and its *Children, Youth and Families (Supporting Stable and Strong Families) Bill 2025*. The UK Government's *Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026* provides guidance on multi-agency coordination.

QKP/ARACY commend to the Commission the transformative work facilitated by:

- the Victorian-based [Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare](#),
- the NSW-based [Centre for Relational Care](#),
- the [ACU Institute for Child Protection Studies](#)
- the [Australian Centre for Child Protection](#) at Adelaide University
- the UK-based [Foundations: What Works Centre for Children and Families](#)
- the US-based [National Scientific Council on the Developing Child](#) and [Harvard Centre on the Developing Child](#)

- the US [National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine](#).

We also commend to the Commission of Inquiry, the collective work facilitated by QKP and partners and collaborators through the:

- Thriving Kids Brain Builders Initiative (<https://tqkp.org.au/our-initiatives/thriving-queensland-kids-brain-builders-initiative/> and <https://qbi.uq.edu.au/brain-builders>)
- Enabling Workforces and Organisations initiative (<https://tqkp.org.au/enabling-workforces/> and <https://tqkp.org.au/enabling-workforces-toolkit/>), supported by the Queensland Mental Health Commission
- Queensland Hubs Exchange (<https://tqkp.org.au/our-initiatives/thriving-kids-integrated-service-systems-collaborative/>)
- Childhood Builders Capability Champions initiative (<https://tqkp.org.au/our-initiatives/childhood-builders-suite-of-developmental-frames-and-tools/>), and
- Childhood Stewards Initiative.

6. Whole Systems Approach

A. Queensland needs an integrated 'Whole Systems Approach' to Family and Child Wellbeing and Safety, with a stronger focus on relational, trauma- and neuro-informed care, healing, connection and capability development, and a stronger cultural lens.

Issues and insights

As the adage goes - and science, evidence and lived experience demonstrates - 'it takes a village to raise a child'. 'Fixing a broken system' cannot be achieved with a focus just on the Department with the principal role under the *Child Protection Act*. [Col ToR: B., C.]

The 'Child Safety System' is a complex interaction of:

- multiple systems and environments that shape the wellbeing, development and safety of children, young people and families, in particular, health, early learning, education, housing, disability, mental health, community services, income support, and systems address food insecurity and other material basics
- a broad suite of Queensland child safety and other related legislation
- multiple departments and statutory authorities, including a suite of oversight bodies
- three levels of government
- the cultural and community contexts in which children and families live, and the connections that give identity, support and meaning
- other sectors including community organisations, philanthropies, universities and corporates.

The effectiveness of the child safety system is heavily influenced by the social and economic circumstances of children and families, the environments in which they live, relationships within and beyond the family, and families' interactions with multiple systems.

Generally, our systems – Commonwealth and States/Territories - have struggled to create the conditions in the systems and environments in which families live that are conducive to children and families thriving (see: Moore, T.G. (2024). [*Core Care Conditions for Children and Families: Implications for policy and practice*](#)).

Children, young people and families and other caregivers in the child safety system also continue to interact with multiple systems. They can experience a churn of multiple referrals, often to the wrong door. They can have multiple case workers. They can have multiple, disconnected plans: disability, child protection, education support, housing support, mental health support, health care, victim support etc.

Public debate about child safety has often focused on 'saving the child' or 'fixing the family', or 'blaming the Department', rather than on fixing the systems that have often each and together let them down, and that sometimes cause harm.

The Child Safety Department is often referred to as being at the 'bottom of the cliff', dealing with the missed opportunities or failures of other systems to effectively engage and service the needs of families experiencing adversities, before, during and after significant harm is experienced by a child or children.

The Child Safety System - as it is currently designed, and despite the best efforts of practitioners across multiple systems - operates too disconnected from the other systems and other vital aspects of what it takes for children and young people to thrive and be safe.

The Child Safety System needs to be re-conceptualised as a '**Family and Child Wellbeing and Safety System**' that takes a holistic, developmental, life-course and inter-generational, and communal perspective to what is in the 'best interests of the child'.

The critical focus on 'safety' needs to be re-set with a multi-dimensional and long-term focus on:

- child health and development, learning, participation, material basics, culture and identity, and being valued, loved and safe - the interconnected domains of *The Nest*
- addressing the over-representation of First Nations families and children, and families and children with disabilities, developmental delays and challenging behaviours, and
- family functioning, and parental wellbeing and connectedness, for all parents and other caregivers, including grandparents and sibling carers.

A Family and Child Wellbeing and Safety System needs to seamlessly integrate with child and parental health, early learning and education, health, mental health, violence, housing, disability and other human service and human development systems.

A Family and Child Wellbeing and Safety System needs to be co-led by First Nations peoples, including peak bodies such as QATSCIPP and OATSICC, and First Nations community-controlled organisations and First Nations enterprises. It must enable First Nations governance and delivery, including cultural governance, cultural safety, and cultural accountability.

However, in Queensland, there is currently:

- no whole of government, cross-sectoral Families Strategy to bring a concerted, coherent and evidence- and experience-informed and inclusive approach to what it takes for children and families to thrive, be resilient and able to navigate adversities, such as Alberta's *Wellbeing and Resiliency Framework* and Tasmania's *Together for Families*
- no cross-sectoral vehicle for implementing and guiding transformative reform of the Child Safety System, such as *The Promise Scotland* (see more at: <https://thepromise.scot>)
- no shared child and youth wellbeing outcomes framework, like *The Nest* Child and Youth Wellbeing Framework (see more at: <https://www.aracy.org.au/the-nest-wellbeing-framework/>; as utilised in the QFCC's *Growing Up in Queensland* platform; or Scotland's *Getting It Right For Every Child* SHANARRI Framework (see <https://www.gov.scot/policies/girfec/>)
- no 'whole systems' statement of operating principles of what families should expect in their interactions with all services and systems, like Scotland's *The Promise Ten Principles of Intensive Family Support* (see more at: <https://thepromise.scot/resources/2020/keepthepromise-family-support.pdf>)

- no articulation of the capabilities of families and children that the child safety and other human service systems should foster in children and families i.e. the abilities to build resilience, navigate life and rear children well
- late identification of disability, unmet support needs and low utilisation of NDIS supports and limited specialised services and supports for caregivers, especially those with disabilities, as articulated in the QDN Submission
- limited arrangements for integrated Thriving Kids, Thriving Families Plans at local or regional levels to ensure all services and systems are working well together and are fit for both purpose and context, such as GIRFEC-aligned Local Authority Children’s Services Plans (see for example: <https://girfec-ayrshire.co.uk/what-is-girfec/our-aims/>; and <http://www.moray.gov.uk/downloads/file150784.pdf>)
- no systematic whole of government deployment of dedicated key workers who can help families access community supports and navigate complex services and systems, unlike in Scotland’s *Getting It Right for Every Child*
- no tool or platform for an integrated ‘Whole Child / Whole Family Plan’ to coordinate multiple specific plans, facilitate information sharing, align case work across multiple services, and help a family carry its story through a fragmented service system. This tool could be based on:
 - *The Nest* Child and Youth Wellbeing Outcomes Framework
 - First Nations social and emotional wellbeing and cultural frameworks, including cultural plans, cultural healing supports, and kinship mapping
 - *The Resilience Scale* as activated in Alberta Canada (see more at <https://www.albertafamilywellness.org>)
 - the Child’s Plan tool in Scotland’s *Getting It Right for Every Child* (see <https://www.gov.scot/policies/girfec/childs-plan/>)
- no centre of excellence in child wellbeing and safety to translate the latest science, evidence and lived experience into policy, program and practice design and into workforce and organisational capability development, such as Victoria’s [Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare](#), and the UK UK-based [Foundations: What Works Centre for Children and Families](#) and [The Promise Scotland](#)
- no cross-sectoral workforce and organisational development initiative to build and deploy core, common and contemporary knowledge, language, skills and tools, such as QKP’s *Childhood Builders, Brain Builders, Childhood Stewards* and *Enabling Workforces and Organisations* Initiatives (see <https://tqkp.org.au/our-initiatives/>)
- no state-wide network of child and family hubs / neighbourhood centres equipped to provide a comprehensive and integrated suite of child development, parenting and family wellbeing supports and services
- no legislation like Victoria’s *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2025* that requires the heads of key relevant Queensland Departments to collectively steward the Child Safety system and address rubs, gaps or harms (see [here](#))
- limited whole of government guidance on how agencies work together to safeguard children, such as UK Government’s [‘Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026’](#)

- no legislation like Victoria's *Children, Youth and Families (Supporting Stable and Strong Families) Bill 2025* to enable 'community parenting'
- limited use of evidence-based predictive analytical tools to aid decision-making for screening, assessment, placement and review processes, such as those being deployed in Child Safety Systems in North America, Europe and New Zealand (see, for example the work of Professor Rhema Vaithanathan at <https://ai.uq.edu.au/profile/527/rhema-vaithianathan>; and: https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=jpD_uAwAAAAJ&hl=en).

Solutions and recommendations

QKP/ARACY's recommendations are aimed at creating a more holistic, developmental and integrated system. They are not just for the Department, though they are especially significant when the State becomes the 'corporate parent' of Queensland children and young people [Col ToR: D].

QKP/ARACY propose that the Commission of Inquiry recommend that the Queensland Government:

1. **commit to reframe and build a Family and Child Wellbeing and Safety System over the next decade** [Col ToR: C.; recommendations F].
2. **commit to a 'Whole Systems Approach', through a suite of integrated, developmental and relational reforms that weave services, systems and communities together to work better for Queensland children, young people and families**, including co-development of:
 - 2.1 a whole-of-government **Families Strategy** and a **Children's Plan** [Col ToR: recommendations F]
 - 2.2 updated **whole of Government guidance on how agencies work together** based on the UK *Working Together Guide* [Col ToR: recommendations F]
 - 2.3 a shared **child and youth wellbeing outcomes framework**, based on *The Nest*, adopted and operationalised in service models, standards, commissioning and contracting, and accountability arrangements [Col ToR: recommendations F]
 - 2.4 a **statement of operating principles** of what families should expect in their interactions with all services and systems, based on Scotland's *The Promise Ten Principles of Intensive Family Support* [Col ToR: recommendations F]
 - 2.5 a **statement on the capabilities of families and children** that the child safety and other human service systems should be designed to foster [Col ToR: recommendations F]
 - 2.6 a **shared framework for addressing the causes, manifestations and consequences of the increasing acuity and complexity** of the social, emotional, psychological, behavioural, physical and mental health needs, and the increasing levels of neurodiversity, of children and young people engaged in the Family Wellbeing and Child Safety System.
3. **introduce legislation based on Victoria's *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2025* and their *Children, Youth and Families (Supporting Stable and Strong Families) Bill 2025***

- to bring strengthen a whole of government and community approach to family and child wellbeing and safety** [Col ToR Recommendations G].
4. **convene Regional Thriving Family Partnerships and co-develop Regional Plans to coordinate supports and services and make systems fit for context** [Col ToR Recommendations F].
 5. **co-develop a tool for an integrated 'Thriving Family Plan' that brings together supports and services, facilitates information sharing, aligns case work across agencies, and helps a child / family carry its story** [Col ToR: B. iii., v., viii].
 6. **commit to uplift workforce, caregiver and organisational capabilities across the Family and Child Wellbeing and Safety System for high quality relational interactions and trauma and neuro-informed policy and practice**, including:
 - 6.1 deployment of **key workers** who can help families access community supports and navigate complex services and systems requirements, based on roles in the Scotland's *Getting It Right for Every Child* [Col ToR: recommendations F]
 - 6.2 engagement in QKP's **Childhood Builders, Brain Builders, Childhood Stewards, Queensland Hubs Exchange** and **Enabling Workforces and Organisations** Initiatives to build and deploy core, common and contemporary knowledge, language, skills and tools [Col ToR: recommendations B, C, D & F]
 - 6.3 advocating for the establishment of a **National Centre of Excellence in Family and Child Wellbeing and Safety** to translate the latest science, evidence and lived experience into policy, program and practice design and into workforce and organisational capability development [Col ToR: recommendations F]
 - 6.4 Investigating the use of evidence-based **predictive analytics tools** to aid decision-making and reduce risk of bias, prejudice and human error [Col ToR: B. i; recommendations F].
 7. **implement of the national Thriving Kids initiative, in accord with the design recommended by the National Thriving Kids Advisory Group, with a particular focus on families with children with developmental delays and disabilities at risk or already engaged in the Family and Child Wellbeing and Safety System.** [Col ToR: D; recommendations F]

7. Investment rebalancing and reform

B. Queensland needs to rebalance investment across the continuum of primary prevention, early intervention, secondary and tertiary intervention, and to advance comprehensive investment, commissioning and contracting reform.

Issues and insights

Historically, Queensland has significantly under-invested in universal / primary prevention and early / secondary prevention (i.e. less per capita than best in class or national averages, than comparable Australian jurisdictions) as evidenced in:

- annual Productivity Commission's Reports on *Government Services and Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage* and the *Closing the Gap* report
- the QFCC's [Annual report on the performance of the Queensland child protection system 2024-25](#).

This 'public health frame' has applied to the Child Safety System in Australia, in particular over the past 15 years through work of the [Institute for Child Protection Studies](#) at the Australian Catholic University.

As defined by the Preventive Peaks Alliance:

- *"Prevention supports families and communities to build the developmental capabilities, social connections and conditions that protect and support all members of the community to thrive. It is the collective set of strategies, policies and actions that strengthen the everyday environments in which children, young people, families, individuals and communities live learn, work and connect."*
- *"Early intervention empowers families and communities to strengthen their resources and relationships early, when additional support can make the greatest difference. It refers to timely, proportionate support provided to children, young people, families, individuals and communities face extra pressures, building on existing strengths rather than waiting for difficulties to deepen and enabling improved health, wellbeing, social and economic outcomes"*.

In practical terms, the Preventative Peaks Alliance identifies:

- **'Primary prevention'** through social programs and infrastructure such as child and parental health; parenting support and family wellbeing; playgroups and libraries; social and affordable housing; violence prevention; community-led place-based initiatives; universal early learning

- **'Secondary** prevention' through family support services; home visiting for at risk families; integrated child and family hubs in communities experiencing adversities; supported housing; mental health and trauma recovery services; youth services and so on.

The failure to adequately invest 'upstream' in preventative and developmental social infrastructure and services, especially in primary prevention, has contributed to an incessant demand to keep spending more at the crisis, tertiary end.

An estimated 16% of the Child Safety System spend goes on supporting families at risk, and 84% on intervening and removing children. This imbalance (along with other universal and secondary investments) must be addressed.

Investing more funds at the crisis/tertiary end of the continuum, relative to universal/primary and secondary interventions, will:

- not address or disrupt the conditions, factors and pathways that are creating and exacerbating adversity, trauma and harm
- not slow down the rate of growth in the flow of families into crisis and children into care.

Reform of existing program investment, commissioning and contracting processes, beyond those already advanced, can drive greater public value, higher impact, and reduce undue red tape and transactions costs.

There is also scope to better align and leverage federal, state and local public, philanthropic and corporate investment.

Significant changes are required to the investment, commissioning and contracting processes and to flow and balance of investment to:

- drive better value and impact from existing and new expenditure
- flatten the curve on the growth of tertiary-level investments
- rebalance the overall investment across the continuum
- reduce red tape and transaction costs
- boost productivity
- make systems 'work' for children and families
- build trust and confidence in citizens and communities.

QKP/ARACY is encouraging the Government to consider reforms of existing investment, commissioning and contracting processes in the human services / human development portfolios through the Cabinet Budget Review Committee. Specifically, the investment review should:

- identify unnecessary transaction costs for non-government organisations and councils in doing business with the Queensland Government
- investigate alignment with evidence of **'what works'** and what is **'fit-for-purpose and context'** in Queensland, and identify opportunities for **reallocation to prevention** for efficiency and impact improvements.

QKP/ARACY is also encouraging the Government to consider the FY26 pre-budget submissions made by the peak bodies, such QATSCIPP, Peak Care, QCOSS (along with its recent [Raising Queensland](#) policy agenda), Q Shelter, Neighbourhood Centres Queensland, and QKP, as the foundations for a Queensland Family Wellbeing and Safety Investment package.

Solutions and recommendations

Building and sustaining an equitable, effective and efficient 'child safety system' requires an overhaul of investment, commissioning and contracting. [Col ToR Recommendations F.]

Investment reform is not just a matter for the Department, but for whole of Government, as the Department is constrained by existing budget and procurement processes. This requires leadership and engagement from Queensland Treasury.

QKP/ARACY propose that the Commission of Inquiry recommend that the Queensland Government:

8. **commit to advance Investment, Commissioning and Contracting Reform for child, youth and family development, wellbeing and safety services provided through government agencies and non-government organisations.** This should include a suite of key elements:
 - 8.1 trialling **pooled funding** and **collaborative, value-based commissioning at regional and place levels** of related state (and possibly federal and philanthropic) investment [Col ToR: recommendations F]
 - 8.2 developing a **Queensland Prevention and Early Intervention Investment Framework** facilitated by Queensland Treasury (as with Victoria's [Early Intervention Investment Framework](#), and the recent recommendations of the Australian Productivity Commission in the [Delivering Quality Care](#) report) [Col ToR: recommendations F]
 - 8.3 establishing a **PEI Unit** and **Avoided Costs** team in Treasury to analyse current and proposed spending. [Col ToR: recommendations F]
 - 8.4 undertaking a Qld Treasury-led review of the **economic impact of the life cost** of entering and exiting out of home care [Col ToR: recommendations F]
 - 8.5 commissioning an **investment review**, to report by early 2027, on existing and proposed State Government funded child and youth early intervention programs, and parenting, and family supports [Col ToR: recommendations F]
 - 8.6 developing **long-term outcomes-focused, multi-agency investment plans** to achieve a better balance of investment toward prevention and early intervention, and to reduce duplication and gaps, starting with a 'Thriving Families' Investment Plan [Col ToR: recommendations F]
 - 8.7 **rationalising 'like' programs** within and across Departments to reduce administration and transaction costs [Col ToR: recommendations F]
 - 8.8 **extending contracts** – up to 7-10 years for certified quality providers, and designating a **'lead' contracting Department** for community organisations with contracts with multiple agencies [Col ToR: recommendations F]
 - 8.9 engaging local communities in investment decisions, including through **long-term regional investment plans**, to ensure programs are fit for both purpose and context [Col ToR: recommendations F].
9. **commit to growing the proportion of investment in primary and secondary prevention and development social infrastructure and services to achieve better**

child, youth and family development, safety and wellbeing outcomes [Col ToR: [recommendations F](#)].

10. commit to a cross-portfolio Queensland Family Wellbeing and Safety Investment package to grow the amount invested in:

- 10.1 improving access to evidence-informed **parenting supports, family wellbeing services and peer-based networks, especially for young parents** [Col ToR: [recommendations F](#)]
- 10.2 a state-wide network of **child and family hubs / neighbourhood / parent wellbeing centres** equipped to provide a comprehensive and integrated suite of evidence-informed child development, parenting and family wellbeing and safety supports and services [Col ToR: [recommendations F](#)]
- 10.3 community-engaged **place-based initiatives**, in collaboration with the Australian Government, the Investment Dialogue for Australia's Children / Queensland Kids Funders Alliance, and the Queensland Place Network [Col ToR: [recommendations F](#)]
- 10.4 community-controlled / led **Indigenous family and child wellbeing, development, health and safety services** [Col ToR: [recommendations F](#)].

8. First Nations self-determination

C. Queensland needs to fully enable First Nations self-determination and the Child Placement Principles, and to further invest in Indigenous community-controlled family wellbeing, development and safety services and enterprises.

Issues and insights

Over the past decade, Queensland has been a leading Australian jurisdiction in 'systems reform' efforts to reduce the number, rate and proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families engaged in the Child Safety System.

This reform agenda was not fully articulated by the Carmody Commission of Inquiry but came about primarily from the external and internal leadership, advocacy and innovation of First Nations Queenslanders, and engagement by successive Ministers and Directors-General.

The Child Safety System has made significant steps but has not yet fully reckoned with consequences of historic and contemporary structural racism, colonisation and discrimination driving and sustaining of over-representation.

This has included key steps such as:

- adopting the *Our Way Strategy* and *Changing Tracks* plans
- legislating the Child Placement Principles
- legislating for 'Delegated Authority'
- investing in First Nations Family Wellbeing Services
- investing in First Nations community-controlled health services
- providing stronger support for First Nations Family-led decision-making
- providing stronger support for Kin Care
- investing in service innovation by First Nations organisations
- developing a Healing Strategy
- establishing the Queensland First Children and Families Board
- backing the leadership of the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak
- building the cultural capability of and governance in the Child Safety Department
- changing decision-making processes to reduce the effects of structural and personal racism and discrimination
- encouraging mainstream child safety and community service organisations to partner with, and divest to, First Nations community-controlled organisations
- supporting and engaging with *Family Matters* national reporting for greater transparency
- starting to address First Nations data sovereignty

- creating the Office of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children’s Commissioner (OATSICC) within the QFCC
- advancing a child-rights approach, with a strong cultural lens, to oversight of the Child Safety System.

These reforms have made a positive difference to thousands of First Nations children and families and have slowed the rate of growth of First Nations children in the Child Safety System. Queensland continues to have lower rates of over-representation than comparable jurisdictions.

However, there is a long way yet to go in shifting the power and resources, and addressing the causes and consequences of systems harms experienced across generations, commensurate with the over-representation of First Nations children in the Child Safety System (see *Family Matters* reports at: <https://www.snaicc.org.au/our-work/child-and-family-wellbeing/family-matters/>; <https://www.snaicc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/Reviewing-Implementation-of-the-Child-Placement-Principle-QLD-2025.pdf>).

There is also progress required to extend and embed initiatives that strengthen relationships to culture, kinship systems, community, and Country as foundational determinants of wellbeing, development, safety and purpose.

As foreseen in the *Our Way* Strategy, the desired outcome of no over-representation of First Nations children and families Child Safety System cannot be achieved in a decade, and not without:

- the continuous and genuine engagement of First Nations children, young people, families and communities
- the transformative leadership and innovation of First Nations leaders and organisations, communities and peak bodies
- the fulsome backing of non-Indigenous systems and organisational leaders
- a robust whole of government engagement with the QATSCIPP-facilitated *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children’s Strategy*, which has been supported by QKP/ARACY
- legislated commitment to self-determination a commitment to enable First Nations data sovereignty in all reporting and accountability mechanisms
- the continuous effort by the Government to address systemic and structural racism and discrimination within the broader community and within institutions.

It has taken generations to get to the current state, and it will take a generation if not more, and a host of reforms beyond the Child Safety System, to achieve equity.

Solutions and recommendations

Continuing to shift power and resources to First Nations community-controlled organisations and First Nations-led enterprises, and to address the causes and consequences of adversities and systems harms experienced across generations, should be an essential on-going and core reform agenda for the Child Safety System.

QKP/ARACY propose that the Commission of Inquiry recommend that the Queensland Government:

11. **embed First Nations governance, cultural safety and cultural accountability across all reform streams, not only First Nations-specific ones, continuing to engage constructively with and invest in the Queensland First Children and Families Board, the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak, the Office of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Commissioner, and First Nations community organisations** [[Col ToR: recommendations F](#)].
12. **build on and go further with the Our Way, Closing the Gap and related reforms,** including: [[Col ToR: recommendations F](#)]
 - 12.1 maintaining the legislated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander **Child Placement Principles**
 - 12.2 accelerating **transfer of statutory functions and pathways** to First Nations community-controlled organisations.
 - 12.3 investing further in **First Nations community-controlled organisations and First Nations enterprises** to provide:
 - i. early child development services and infrastructure
 - ii. parenting, especially young parents services
 - iii. education
 - iv. family wellbeing and safety supports and services
 - v. affordable and social housing and homelessness
 - vi. health and mental health
 - vii. disability
 - viii. youth activities.
 - 12.4 continuing to engage on a whole of government basis with the **QATSCIPP-facilitated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Strategy**, and the **Yiliyapinya-led Growing Deadly Brains initiative**.
13. **QKP/ARACY propose that the Commission of Inquiry recommend that the Queensland Government legislates to give statutory recognition to the Office of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Commissioner, in accord with other jurisdictions, as an independent safeguard for Queensland's progress on Closing the Gap and Our Way** [[Col ToR: recommendations G](#)].

9. Children's voices and rights

D. Queensland needs to fully enable children's participation in design and decision-making, and fully realise the Queensland Charter of Rights in the Child Protection Act, and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, in Child Safety-related policies, programs and practices.

Issues and insights

For many years, the Queensland *Child Protection Act* has incorporated in Schedule 1 a Charter of Rights for Children in Care. Children's, and parents' and carers' rights, to participate in decision-making are also expressed in multiple provisions of the Act and the Child Safety Practice Manual.

The 'rights architecture' for the Child Safety System was strengthened by the introduction of the *Human Rights Act 2019 (Qld)*, which protects 23 fundamental civil, political, economic, and cultural rights for everyone in Queensland.

More recently, this was augmented by the non-statutory 'The Charter of Rights for Parents involved in the Child Protection System'. This was developed in a partnership between the Family Inclusion Network of Queensland (FIN), the Queensland Parents' Advisory Committee (QPAC) and the then Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs.

The realisation of these statutory and non-statutory frameworks has been supported by:

- the role of Community Visitors
- peer support and advocacy, such as through the CREATE Foundation, the Family Inclusion Network, Queensland Foster and Kin Care, the Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (Queensland), and the Queenslanders with Disability Network
- the legal and rights work of the [Youth Advocacy Centre](#), [Children's Rights Queensland](#), [54 Reasons](#) and other youth and community legal services
- a survey of parents on their experience of their rights in the child protection system by the QFCC, and the Department in 2025 (see [Parent Voice Survey Report](#))
- the rights-focus on the Queensland Family and Child Commission and the [Office of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Commissioner](#), including the annual reports on the state of children's rights in Queensland (see <https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/childrights/report>).

These are significant elements of the Child Safety System.

However, the development of 'rights-based' culture and capability in the Child Safety System and related systems is a work in progress. There is further work required to develop genuine and impactful ways to give greater 'agency' to, and to enable the voice of, children and young people, families, other caregivers and kin.

Furthermore, while progress has been made over recent decades in engaging the voices and the truths of children and young people of their lived experience of systems, further work is also

required to deeply and authentically engage children and young people in systems design at all levels – strategies, policies, investments, programs, services and practices.

At present, there is no co-developed and consolidated Statement of Expectations that articulates what children and young people say are their expectations of the Child Safety System, such as that articulated in the UK Government's recent guidance [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026](#).

Solutions and recommendations

Fixing the Child Safety System requires concerted efforts to affirm and enable a rights-based culture and capabilities in the Child Safety System and related systems.

QKP/ARACY propose that the Commission of Inquiry recommend that the Queensland Government:

- 14. strengthen capabilities, processes and supports to enable the agency and voice of children and young people, and their natural and caregiver families, in systems design and implementation, in decision-making, and in evaluation and accountability processes, and through support for independent, peer and legal advocacy for children in care, and for their parents and carers** [[Col ToR: recommendations F](#)].
- 15. co-develop with children and young people with care experience, and regularly review, a Statement of Expectations that articulates what children and young people say are their expectations of the Child Safety System.**
- 16. strengthen the recognition and enablement of children's and caregivers rights, including:** [[Col ToR: recommendations F](#)]
 - 16.1 the cultural rights of First Nations, as protected under the *Human Rights Act 2019 (Qld)*
 - 16.2 the cultural rights of non-Indigenous Queenslanders from diverse cultural and other language backgrounds
 - 16.3 embedding cultural rights impact assessments in Child Safety decisions
 - 16.4 extending support for parents in accord with the Charter of Parents Rights
 - 16.5 engaging with the [Office of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Commissioner](#) to act its reports on the state of children's rights
 - 16.6 collaborating with CREATE, Children's Rights Queensland and the Queensland Human Rights Commission to further develop and provide accessible and useful rights education and information materials, specifically adapted for children in care, and their families, caregivers and kin.

10. Accountability and learning

E. Queensland needs to reorient the 'superstructure' of Ministerial and Departmental accountability, facilitate reform implementation and systems learning, and bring a clearer, coordinated and transparent focus on life outcomes for children, young people and families.

Issues and insights

The Department and the responsible Minister, and the Government broadly, are under constant, intense and robust public, stakeholder and official scrutiny and accountability for what happens in the child safety portfolio. [CoI ToR: B. ix., x., xi.; recommendations F.]

Those accountabilities include to:

- **Parliament**: requiring Premiers and Ministerial Briefing Notes; responses to Questions with or without Notice; preparation, participation and follow up to Estimates and Legislative Committee hearings and Committee Inquiries; responses to Private Members Bills; responses to Petitions; and responses to MPs and a Minister's own electorate constituents
- **Executive Government**: requiring preparation of submissions and briefing notes for: the Minister, the Premier and the Treasurer; for Cabinet and Cabinet Budget Review Committee submissions; and for Cabinet Committees and Community Cabinets
- **Statutory oversight bodies**: requiring preparation of statements, submissions and responses to the: Queensland Family and Child Commission; Queensland Audit Office; Ombudsman's Office; Crime and Corruption Commission; Public Guardian, including Community Visitors; Child Death Review Board and the Domestic and Family Violence Review and Advisory Board; Information Commissioner; Privacy Commissioner; the Queensland Human Rights Commission; and, from time to time, national and/or state Royal Commissions and Commissions of Inquiry
- **judicial bodies**: including Children's Court; Coroners Court; Family Court; Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal; Queensland Industrial Relations Commission; and Local, District and Supreme Courts for civil and criminal matters
- **Ministerial forums and advisory bodies**: including portfolio or ministerial forums
- **peak bodies**: including preparing for meetings, representations, public and members forums
- **media and social media**: including responding to requests for Ministerial media statements and responses to media and social media requests and comments
- **citizens, consumers and communities**: including Departmental or independent complaints processes, MPs and Ministerial and media channels.

Accordingly, there is a complex 'super-structure' of internal and external accountability mechanisms. This has evolved over decades but has not itself been subject to scrutiny holistically or systemically for its performance or public value. Usually, these internal and external bodies and processes are operating simultaneously and in parallel.

Substantial resources are required to respond to numerous requests for information and responses to drafts and final reports, findings and recommendations emanating from these multiple points of accountability, and to undertake these processes.

The result is often an 'overload' of requests, processes, findings, recommendations and updates. This can be happening by one or more bodies without sufficient regard to others, or to pre-existing recommendations or reforms.

In this context, it is challenging for the Minister and Department to assess prioritise, resource, operationalise, learn, and adapt. This 'busyness' can also divert attention and resources from statutory responsibilities and from the hard task of implementation of the most valuable and impactful reforms.

However, there are several key issues with this 'super-structure' of accountability:

- there is a **limited focus on accountability in relation to the rights of, and results for, children and young people**, both individually and collectively, and to their natural and care families, including grandparents and extended families and kin, such as being advanced by the NSW-based [Accountable Futures Collective](#).
- there is **limited deployment of a 'whole of systems' lens** to work through the interfaces, rubs and gaps between the multiple systems that natural or carer families, and practitioners, experience.
- at Departmental, Child Safety System or whole of government levels, there is **not a shared, common and evidence-based child and youth wellbeing outcomes framework** such as *The Nest* (see above at Issue 1.)
- there are **limited coordination and alignment across the Statutory Oversight Bodies** of the scheduling of inquiries and investigations, where there is flexibility to do so, into priority issues requiring systemic and independent scrutiny.
- there is **limited deployment of 'human learning systems'** approaches, capabilities and resources, such as those demonstrated in The Front Project and Centre for Policy Development report on *How to Embed Learning Systems in Social Services: A Case Study of South Australia's Child and Family Support System* (see: https://www.thefrontproject.org.au/images/TFP_LearningSystems_WIP0422.pdf).
- there is **no independent, cross-sectoral vehicle for guiding and supporting transformative reform** of the Child Safety System, such as [The Promise Scotland](#) or the UK *Foundations: What Works Centre for Children and Families*.
- there has more progress to be made in engaging with **the voice and lived experience of children, young people, families, caregivers and kin** in accountability processes.

Solutions and recommendations

Given the high stakes and life-long consequences of the decisions taken to intervene in families, and to remove, 'place' and reunify, or adopt children, it is appropriate that the whole child safety

system is under constant, intense and robust public, stakeholder and official scrutiny and accountability.

However, it is time to reorient the current 'super-structure' of accountability, to facilitate systems learning, and to create a stronger collective focus on life outcomes – wellbeing, safety, development and resilience – of children and young people, and their families. The intent should be to support families to flourish and children to thrive.

QKP/ARACY proposes that the Commission of Inquiry recommend that the Queensland Government:

17. establish an independent cross-sectoral vehicle for guiding and supporting transformative reform of the Child Safety System, hosted by the QFCC, to support transformative reform implementation and learning [CoI ToR: recommendations F].

This should be accompanied by:

- 17.1 statutory oversight bodies **coordinating inquiries and investigations** into the Child Safety System, where there is flexibility to do so, into a rolling schedule on priority issues, while retaining capacity to engage on emergent issues
- 17.2 statutory oversight bodies adopt culturally informed accountability frameworks, and collaborating with **OATSIIC** to jointly monitor cultural safety and Closing the Gap and Our Way progress
- 17.3 support for a **Queensland youth-led accountability development initiative**, in collaboration with the NSW-based Accountable Futures Collective, CREATE and others
- 17.4 consideration of **best practice implementation approaches** to inform the framing and scheduling of recommendations.

18. adopt and operationalise The Nest Wellbeing Framework as a 'whole systems' outcomes framework, which provides a practice and accountability tool at child and family levels, a guide for statutory oversight bodies, and with **mandatory public reporting** on the performance against this framework on a regular basis [CoI ToR: B. ix., x., xi.; recommendations F].

11. Conclusion

To reiterate what is stated earlier, systems deliver the results they are designed, resourced and equipped to deliver.

Queensland's Child Safety System, like other jurisdictions, is a legacy system built across generations. From science, evidence and lived experience, we know enough to make a compelling case for generational change - that it is time for transforming not tweaking.

The challenge is not fundamentally one of intent. It is a complex, multi-faceted, whole systems challenge about design, resources and equipping.

That is not so much a knowing problem, but a doing one.

Queensland families and children need us to reimagine and manifest a new paradigm, to orchestrate a 'whole systems approach', to implement well the massive task of reengineering, and forming, a Family and Child Wellbeing and Safety System, and to keep learning and adapting as we go.

QKP/ARACY have outlined a comprehensive agenda for systems reform. We have recommended 18 actions to be implemented as a matter of priority over the next 3 years, to provide a strong foundations and framework for transformational change.

We do not underestimate the enormity of that task.

It is one that will take the whole of government, as well as productive engagement of the Federal and local governments.

It will take more ambitious efforts to activate the whole of the Queensland community, and to partner the community, philanthropic, university and corporate sectors.

We can't keep saying 'child safety is everyone's responsibility', without the systems stewardship, investment, public engagement and cross-sectoral partnerships that requires.

QKP/ARACY are committed to playing our part to contribute to this effort.

Copies of this Submission, and a Summary, are available at:

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