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State Strategy for the Safety and Support of Children and Young People

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Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft State Strategy for the Safety and Support of Children and Young People.

Overall, the draft strategy represents a constructive step forward from previous child protection strategies. It reflects a more family-centred approach and demonstrates a commitment to:

- Prevention rather than crisis response
- Early intervention
- Family preservation
- Aboriginal self-determination
- Lived experience participation
- Recognition of the impacts of poverty and disadvantage on families

These shifts are welcome and align with what children, young people and families have consistently advocated for.

However, the current draft reads more as a statement of aspiration than an implementation framework. Throughout the consultation process our central question remained:

WHAT WILL CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES EXPERIENCE DIFFERENTLY BECAUSE OF THIS STRATEGY?

Without clear accountability, measurable outcomes, defined responsibilities and investment commitments, it is difficult to understand how the strategy will translate into meaningful change.

1. A Clear Direction Forward

Does the strategy provide a clear direction?

The strategy provides a strong philosophical direction and clearly signals an intended shift from a reactive child protection system toward a prevention-focused safety and support system.

Particular strengths include:

Prevention and Early Intervention

The strategy appropriately prioritises:

- Preventing harm before it occurs



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- Responding early to emerging concerns
- Supporting families before crisis develops
- Reducing unnecessary statutory intervention

Families consistently tell us that support came too late. Many only received assistance once concerns had escalated to the point of child protection involvement. The emphasis on prevention is therefore strongly supported.

Recognition That Family Wellbeing supports Child Wellbeing

The strategy recognises that child safety is closely connected to:

- Housing stability
- Financial security
- Mental health
- Disability support
- Domestic and family violence responses
- Community connection

This represents a more holistic understanding of child wellbeing than approaches which focus solely on parenting capacity.

Recognition of Poverty and Disadvantage

Acknowledging the relationship between child protection involvement and socio-economic disadvantage is particularly important.

However, the strategy should explicitly state that:

Poverty is not parental failure. Families should not be penalised because they are poor.

Where concerns arise primarily from material hardship, responses should prioritise practical assistance rather than statutory intervention.

What is missing?

A Clear Theory of Change

One of the most significant gaps identified during consultation was the absence of a clearly articulated theory of change.

The strategy outlines aspirations and principles but does not clearly explain:

- How proposed actions will lead to improved outcomes
- What mechanisms will reduce child protection involvement
- How investment in prevention will reduce demand for statutory services
- How success will be measured over time

Without a clear theory of change it becomes difficult to assess whether the proposed strategies are likely to achieve their stated aims.

Stronger Parent and Family Voice

The strategy emphasises hearing the voices of children and young people, which is essential and strongly supported.

However, the voices of parents, families and caregivers are comparatively absent.



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There is limited discussion of:

- Parent advocacy
- Parent peer support
- Family leadership
- Parent participation in governance
- Lived experience parent representation

The consultation process reinforced this concern. Discussion repeatedly referenced children and young people, but parent voices were rarely mentioned.

A genuinely family-centred strategy must create mechanisms for both child and parent participation.

Families should be involved not only in consultation but also in:

- Governance
- Evaluation
- Decision making
- Accountability structures

2. A Policy Foundation for the New Legislation

Shared Responsibility and Collaboration

The strategy repeatedly references collective responsibility and cross-sector collaboration. This is encouraging but currently lacks practical detail.

Key questions remain:

- What does collective responsibility look like in practice?
- How will agencies work differently from current arrangements?
- Who is responsible for delivering particular outcomes?
- How will government, NGOs, councils and communities coordinate effort?
- How will collaboration be measured?

The strategy should move beyond describing shared responsibility and clearly identify which organisations are responsible for which outcomes.

Accountability

A major theme emerging from consultation was the need for:

tangible accountability across government, the sector and the broader community.

At present accountability mechanisms remain unclear.

In particular:

Accountability for DCP

The strategy should clearly identify:

- What outcomes DCP will be directly responsible for
- What outcomes will be shared with partner agencies
- Who will hold DCP accountable for delivery
- How public reporting will occur

Without clear accountability structures, there is a risk that responsibility becomes diffused across multiple stakeholders, making it difficult to assess performance.



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Active Efforts

The strategy identifies Active Efforts as a guiding principle but does not sufficiently operationalise the concept.

Key gaps include:

- No clear definition
- No minimum expectations
- No measurement framework
- No accountability mechanism

The final strategy should clarify:

- What constitutes sufficient Active Efforts
- How they are evidenced
- Who assesses whether Active Efforts have occurred
- What happens when Active Efforts have not been demonstrated

Effective Intervention

Similarly, Effective Intervention is repeatedly referenced but not clearly defined.

The strategy should identify:

- Evidence-based interventions that will underpin implementation
- Interventions that will receive investment priority
- Outcome measures used to determine effectiveness
- Reporting mechanisms for monitoring progress

3. Improving Outcomes for Aboriginal Children and Families

The commitments to Aboriginal self-determination are among the strongest elements of the draft strategy.

Positive commitments include:

- Aboriginal-led services
- Investment in ACCOs
- Aboriginal-led decision making
- Application of the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle
- Strengthening cultural identity and connection

These commitments align with longstanding advocacy by Aboriginal families and communities.

To strengthen implementation, the strategy should ensure:

- Aboriginal leadership in governance structures
- Co-design of accountability frameworks
- Long-term investment in ACCOs
- Transparent reporting against Aboriginal-specific outcomes

Most importantly, these commitments should be accompanied by measurable outcomes rather than remaining statements of intent.



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4. Delivering Tangible Action

Agency Plans

Agency Plans have the potential to become a critical accountability mechanism. However, the strategy should provide greater clarity regarding:

- How plans will be monitored
- Whether plans will be independently reviewed
- How progress will be publicly reported
- Consequences when commitments are not met

A key recommendation arising from consultation is that:

Agency Plans should not be developed solely within government.

Agency Plans should:

- Be publicly available
- Be open to community feedback
- Include consultation before publication
- Include transparent reporting after implementation
- Involve NGO participation
- Demonstrate how community input has influenced final plans

This would strengthen transparency, accountability and shared ownership.

Family Preservation and Reunification

Family preservation is strongly promoted throughout the strategy but lacks operational detail. The strategy should include:

Explicit Outcomes

Children should be supported to:

Remain safely with, or return safely to, their families wherever possible and in their best interests.

Reunification Measures

The strategy should include:

- Reunification as a core outcome
- Ongoing reunification viability assessments
- Regular review of reunification opportunities
- Family preservation measures
- Reunification indicators and targets
- Support for parents addressing reunification barriers

Reunification should remain an active permanency objective throughout a child's time in care.

Practical Supports Families Need

Families repeatedly tell us they do not need another referral. They need practical help.



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Priority investments should include:

Housing Stability

- Priority housing access
- Rental assistance
- Bond support
- Family-focused crisis accommodation
- Flexible funds to prevent eviction

Immediate Practical Assistance

- Food vouchers
- Utility support
- School uniforms and supplies
- Childcare assistance
- Transport assistance
- Essential household items

Small practical interventions frequently prevent much larger crises.

Peer and Advocacy Support

- Parent peer workers
- Family mentors
- Independent parent advocates
- Lived experience family support roles

Lived experience should be embedded in service delivery as well as system design.

Mental Health and Family Therapy

Families require:

- Free counselling
- Trauma-informed services
- Family therapy
- Accessible services with minimal wait times

Domestic and Family Violence Responses

- Safe housing pathways
- Trauma recovery support
- Perpetrator accountability
- Approaches that keep non-offending parents and children safely together where possible

Disability and Neurodiversity Supports

The strategy should address:

- Support during NDIS waiting periods
- Crisis support for families before breakdown occurs
- Assistance for families supporting children with complex behaviours



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Family-Led Decision Making

Expansion of:

- Family Group Conferencing
- Parent advocacy
- Family participation before removal decisions
- Aboriginal-led decision making processes

Care Leavers

Additional attention is required for young people transitioning from care.

The strategy should include clear commitments regarding:

- Housing supports
- Education pathways
- Employment supports
- Parenting supports
- Transition planning

Importantly, being a care leaver should not automatically increase the likelihood of future child protection intervention.

Measuring Success

The strategy should include measurable public targets such as:

- Reduced entries into care
- Reduced removals
- Reduced emergency removals
- Increased family preservation
- Increased reunification
- Reduced repeat notifications
- Improved housing stability for families
- Increased access to early intervention services

Without measurable targets it will be difficult to determine whether reform is succeeding.

Closing Comments

The draft strategy contains many positive commitments and reflects a welcome shift toward prevention, early intervention, family preservation and Aboriginal self-determination.

However, meaningful reform requires more than shared aspirations.

The final strategy should include:

- A clear theory of change
- Defined accountability arrangements
- Transparent public reporting
- Stronger parent and family voice
- Community visibility of Agency Plans
- Measurable outcomes and targets
- Clear investment commitments
- Practical supports that address family needs before crisis occurs

Families consistently tell us they do not need another referral. They need practical assistance when problems first emerge.



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If this strategy is serious about prevention, investment should prioritise stable housing, financial assistance, disability supports, mental health services, peer support and family-led decision making. These are the supports that help families stay safely together and reduce the need for child protection intervention.

Ultimately, the success of this strategy should be judged by one question:

What will children, young people and families experience differently as a result of it?

Yours Sincerely

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