

REVIEWING IMPLEMENTATION OF
THE ABORIGINAL AND
TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER
CHILD PLACEMENT
PRINCIPLE
QUEENSLAND
2020



SNAICC
National Voice for our Children

Review of the ATSICPP implementation efforts over the reporting period 1 May 2019 – 30 April 2020

By SNAICC March 2021

About SNAICC

SNAICC – National Voice for our Children (SNAICC) is the national non-government peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

SNAICC works for the fulfilment of the rights of our children, in particular to ensure their safety, development and well-being.

The SNAICC vision is an Australian society in which the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families are protected; our communities are empowered to determine their own futures; and our cultural identity is valued.

SNAICC was formally established in 1981 and today represents a core membership of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations providing child and family welfare and early childhood education and care services.

SNAICC advocates for the rights and needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families and provides resources and training to support the capacity of communities and organisations working with our families.

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Introduction

This report reviews the progress of the Queensland Government, through the Department of Child Safety Youth and Women (the Department), in implementing the full intent of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (ATSICPP). This review is informed by the best practice approach set out in SNAICC [Understanding and Applying the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle – A Resource for Legislation, Policy, and Program Development](#) and SNAICC, 2018, the [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle: A Guide to Support Implementation](#). Based on these resources, SNAICC undertook comprehensive baseline analyses of the progress of states and territories in implementing the full intent of the principle in 2018. Following from the baseline analysis, SNAICC undertakes annual state and territory compliance reviews to map the progress and gaps in the implementation of the ATSICPP across Australia.¹ The current review considers ATSICPP implementation efforts over the past year (from 1 May 2019 to 30 April 2020).

In undertaking the review, SNAICC uses both quantitative and qualitative analysis to measure and review state and territory progress against the five elements of the ATSICPP – Prevention, Partnership, Placement, Participation, and Connection – across five interrelated systems elements – Legislation, Policy, Programs, Processes, and Practice. The reviews primarily focus on the actions of child welfare agencies across Australia and therefore do not fully consider the progress of other departments and agencies. However, the child welfare agencies consulted are encouraged to provide information about whole-of-government efforts and the initiatives of other agencies that contribute to implementation of the ATSICPP. The reviews are developed with input from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations (ACCOs) and state and territory governments.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Working Group for the National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children guides the development of the reviews. The Working Group is tasked with ensuring implementation of the ATSICPP in line with the agreement under the Fourth Action Plan to “uphold the five elements of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle to recognise the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to be raised in their own culture and the importance and value of their family, extended family, kinship networks, culture and community”.²

The review aligns with the priority reform areas of the new *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*. It aims to hold governments accountable to reforming their systems in a way that will achieve better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families, as well as highlight the successes of their reforms.

¹ SNAICC – National Voice for our Children (2018). *Baseline Analysis of Best Practice Implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle: Queensland*, available at <https://www.snaicc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/ATSICPP-Baseline-QLD-Final-April-2018.pdf>

² Commonwealth of Australia (2018). *Fourth Action Plan 2018-2020: Supporting Families, Communities and Organisations to Keep Children Safe*, available at https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/01_2019/dss-fourth-action-plan-v6-web-final.pdf

Snapshot of progress and areas for improvement

Progress summary

Areas for improvement

Implementation across all elements

Appointment of a new commissioner with a focus on providing critical oversight and structure issues disproportionately affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Queensland.

Established *Changing Tracks: an action plan for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Families 2020-2022*, with Aboriginal leadership in partnership with the Queensland First Children and Families Board.

Released Queensland's Framework for Action: Reshaping our approach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander domestic and family violence.

Further investment in thorough, effective and meaningful implementation.

Better quality assurance processes to enhance cultural competency of departmental staff (education, training, monitoring and supervision).

Prevention element

Continued funding and implementation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Wellbeing Services.

Continued funding and implementation of the Family Participation Program (FPP).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Wellbeing Services inadequately funded to meet demand, based on number of eligible families.

Child Safety expectations and case plan requirements for families are not often in alignment with what is available within the social service system.

Partnership element

Engagement of QATSICCP to assist in implementing FPP.

Partnership with QATSICPP to develop Kinship Care Project.

Continued funding and implementation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Wellbeing Services (as above).

Halt Collective and Early Indigenous Response collective increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in decision-making.

Reports that FPP often feels more like a referral services than an equal partnership.

FPP concerns include fears of losing funding and the service for community when holding department to account.

More inclusion of voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and stakeholders to inform design of systems.

Insufficient funding for culturally safe legal representation and no funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander independent entity role.

Placement element

QATSICPP commenced kinship care program Family Caring for Family.

Upgraded Operational Policy 641-2 to reflect requirements around the Placement principle.

Good practice example: an ACCO worker was placed on site with Department Assessor which resulted in moving almost 20 children from non-kin to kin care.

There was a 7.4% drop in placements with kin or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers.

Cultural understanding of the importance of kinship systems, cultural authority and family systems limited within the department.

The *Child Protection Act 1999* continues to include 'anyone else who is a person of significance to the child' in the [definition of kin](#).

Poor practice example: families having to seek permission for children in non-kin placement to have connection with family rather than embedded practice.

Participation element

Continued funding of 15 ACCOs and rollout of FPP.

Upgrading *Child Safety Practice Manual* to reflect ATSI CPP.

Introducing FPP Guidelines in December 2019.

Good practice example: where Child Safety Team leaders regularly consulted with FPP managers to consider which cases to refer.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family-led decision-making still not offered widely or consistently across all points of child protection continuum.

Referrals are still extremely low compared to number of eligible families. FPP does not meet demand and requires more investment.

Inconsistent compliance with FPP guidelines and policy.

Poor practice example: department prioritising timeframes rather than adapting to work in a culturally safe and respectful way.

Connection element

Introduction of Child Safety Operational Policy: *Decisions about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children*.

Upgraded *Child Safety Practice Manual* to include safe care and connection practice kit.

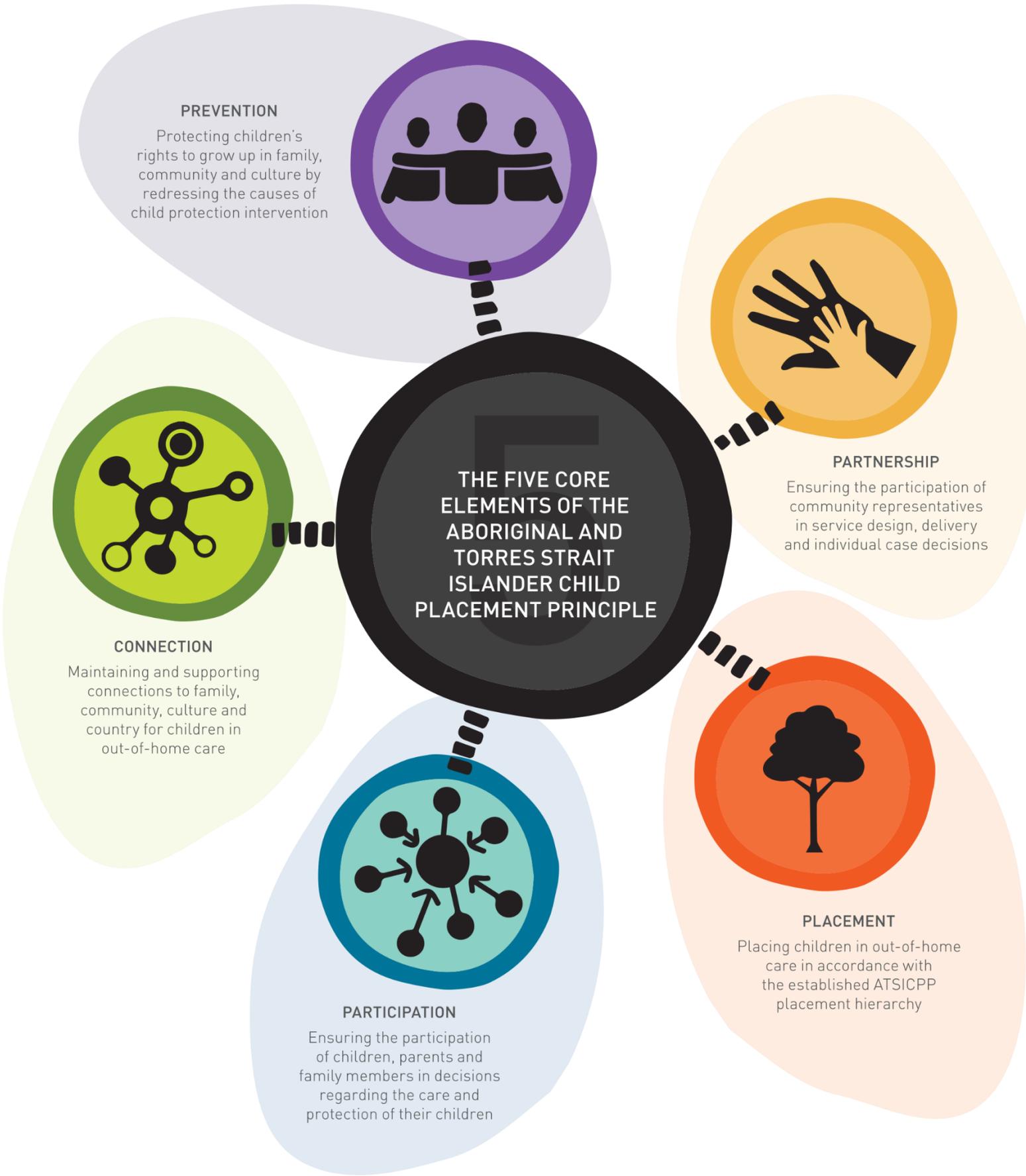
Changes to the *Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect (SCAN) Team Manual* to strengthen provision of cultural advice.

Good practice example: reading out each element at the start of a meeting about a child and then applying to the child's case.

Inconsistent understanding in the department of the purpose and intent of the ATSI CPP elements self-determination and reunification.

Departmental records (case plans, assessments, affidavits) continue to be heavily deficit-based and lacking cultural or family strengths including protective behaviours.

Poor practice example: Child Safety staff admitting to not reading the *Child Safety Practice Manual*.



Overview

Key findings

Queensland's legislative framework is relatively strong and remains the only jurisdiction that expressly includes all five elements of the ATSICPP in its legislation as principles.³ In recent years, Queensland has introduced unprecedented reforms that work towards achieving self-determination and better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. The legislative reforms, providing for functions and powers of the Chief Executive (Child Safety) to be delegated to the chief executive of an appropriate Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Entity for an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child and increased funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled services, demonstrate a clear commitment to implementing the ATSICPP. Nevertheless, implementation gaps and reform fatigue clearly translate to poor performance on certain elements. Key findings for each element include:

- **Prevention:** continued investment in ACCOs to deliver early intervention and prevention services is promising; however, the investment in family support services as a percentage of total expenditure on child protection and family support-related services remains low (16.1%) compared to a national average of 15.94%.⁴
- **Partnership:** Queensland leads the nation in the proportion of expenditure provided to ACCOs for family support (14.7%) and intensive family support (24.7%). Nevertheless, the total percentage of expenditure on ACCOs for all child protection and family support related services remains 4.8%, significantly less than the percentage of children in care who are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (44%).
- **Placement:** although Queensland has commenced a new Kinship Care project which supports the implementation of the placement element, the 7.3% drop in placements of children with kin or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers is particularly concerning. There is also a lack of data tracking reunification of children and young people to birth parents or kin.
- **Participation:** although several initiatives successfully promote participation of children and families in decision-making, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family-led decision-making is still not offered widely or consistently across all points of child protection.
- **Connection:** while the data indicates 95% of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children have cultural support plans, two-thirds reveal that they do not feel connected to their culture, suggesting a lack of quality planning.⁵

Thus, while the strategic frameworks, policies, and procedures generally align with the goals and intentions of the ATSICPP, there are significant gaps in their implementation and further work is required to achieve the desired outcomes.

³ *Child Protection Act 1999* (Qld), 55C.

⁴ Table 16A.7, Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, Productivity Commission, *Report on Government Services – Chapter 16 – Child Protection* (SCRGSP) (2020)

⁵ Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women (2019). *Supporting Families Changing Futures Plan 2019 – 2023*, available at <https://www.csyw.qld.gov.au/resources/campaign/supporting-families/supporting-families-changing-futures-2019-2023.pdf>

Key overarching initiatives

Queensland has continued to progress significant reforms to eliminate the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the child protection system, including:

Our Way: A generational strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families (2017-2037) (Our Way)⁶ – the 2019-20 Budget provided \$14.6 million over four years, plus other investments, to implement new and enhanced Our Way initiatives. This builds on the \$162.8 million already committed. The Our Way Monitoring and Evaluation Plan has been developed to monitor and assess impacts over the life of the Our Way strategy and supporting Action Plans against key performance indicators. An external evaluation of Our Way commenced in 2020.

Changing Tracks: an action plan for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Families 2017-2019⁷ – the first Changing Tracks Action Plan was released in 2017. This is the first of seven action plans intended to achieve the long-term goals set out in Our Way. While the *Changing Tracks Progress Report May 2017-December 2018* demonstrated that all 35 of the actions included in Changing Tracks 2017-2019 were on track to be fully completed by 2019, the second action plan, Changing Tracks 2020 -2022, expressly recognises that there are four 'continuing actions' from Changing Tracks 2017-2019.

Changing Tracks: an action plan for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Families 2020-2022 (Changing Tracks 2) – in May 2020, the Queensland First Children and Families Board (in partnership with Family Matters Queensland, government and non-government partners, and the community) released Changing Tracks: an action plan for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Families 2020-2022.⁸ This plan is the second of seven action plans intended to achieve the long-term goals set out in Our Way. The action plan expressly aims to embed active efforts to implement and give full effect to all five elements of the ATSI CPP across the family support system (legislation, policy, programs, processes and practice) (see Action 3.3). Importantly, Changing Tracks 2020-2022 recognises the need for an independent National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Commissioner to monitor/oversee a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's strategy (see Action 4.5).

Appointment of Children's Commissioner – on 12 May, Natalie Lewis was appointed as Commissioner for the Queensland Family and Child Commission, with a focus on providing critical oversight of the systemic and structural issues disproportionately affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Queensland.⁹ Although this is yet to become a legislative role with legislative powers, it is a positive step towards achieving the action, and SNAICC understands that a legislative review of the *Family and Child Commission Act 2014* is scheduled to take place soon.

⁶ Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services, Queensland Government (2017). *Our Way – A Generational Strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Families 2017-2037*, available at <https://www.communities.qld.gov.au/resources/campaign/supportingfamilies/our-way.pdf>

⁷ Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services, Queensland Government (2017). *Changing Tracks – An Action Plan for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Families 2017-2019*, available at <https://www.communities.qld.gov.au/resources/campaign/supporting-families/changing-tracks.pdf>

⁸ Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women, Queensland Government (2020). *Changing Tracks – An Action Plan for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Families 2020 – 2023*, available at <https://www.csyw.qld.gov.au/resources/campaign/supporting-families/changing-tracks-action-plan.pdf>

⁹ SNAICC media release (2020), available at <https://www.snaicc.org.au/snaicc-congratulates-natalie-lewis-on-her-appointment-as-commissioner-for-the-queensland-family-and-child-commission/>

Supporting Families, Changing Futures Plan – in late 2019, the Queensland Government released the Supporting Families, Changing Futures plan for helping Queensland children, young people, parents and families experiencing vulnerability. While the plan focuses on all Queensland’s children, it expressly notes that the “disproportionate representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and children in the child protection system remains the most significant issue we face”.¹⁰

Queensland’s Framework for Action: Reshaping our approach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander domestic and family violence¹¹ – in May 2019, the Queensland Government released *Queensland’s Framework for Action: Reshaping our approach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander domestic and family violence*. The framework commits to a new way of working in genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities. The framework recognises the strong interconnections between child protection and domestic and family violence, as well as the impact of intergenerational trauma. The framework aligns with the ATSICPP relating to partnership, participation, and connection.

Other key initiatives underway that support the implementation of the ATSICPP include:

- the continued funding of \$39.9 million per annum to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Wellbeing Services
- the continued rollout and funding of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Participation Program
- a partnership with QATSICPP to develop Family Caring for Family, a Kinship Care Model
- the continued support of the Queensland First Children and Families Board which provides independent advice and oversight to hold the Queensland Government and partners accountable
- implementation of legislative amendments delegating functions of the Chief Executive, Child Safety, Youth and Women to the CEO of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander entities
- early and collaborative community-led case responses as part of initiatives such as the HALT Collective in Brisbane and the Early Indigenous Response Collective (EIRC) on the Sunshine Coast.

Community voices

While the direction of the overarching plans and frameworks reflects positive intentions and commitments to achieve better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families, sector leaders have raised ongoing concerns and issues with the current system that need to be addressed. These include:

- issues with implementation of the Family Participation Program
- continued deficit-based practice and lack of cultural competency from departmental staff

¹⁰ Queensland Government (2019). *Supporting Families Changing Futures Plan 2019–2023*, available at <https://www.csyw.qld.gov.au/resources/campaign/supporting-families/supporting-families-changing-futures-2019-2023.pdf>

¹¹ Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women, Queensland Government (2019). *Queensland’s Framework for Action: Reshaping our approach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander domestic and family violence*, available at <https://www.csyw.qld.gov.au/resources/campaign/end-violence/qld-framework-for-action-reshaping-approach-atsidfv.pdf>

- inadequate funding of prevention and early intervention services to meet demand, based on eligible number of families
- lack of centralised, quality assurance processes (education, training, cultural competency, monitoring and supervision) which have led to inconsistent practice across the state.

Despite these concerns, sector representatives reported several positive achievements that support the implementation of the ATSICPP. These include early and collaborative initiatives introduced such as the HALT Collective in Brisbane and the Early Indigenous Response Collective (EIRC) on the Sunshine Coast, and partnership with QATSICPP to develop a Kinship Care Project (Family Caring for Family). Initiatives such as the HALT Collective and EIRC were described as positively fostering early and collaborative responses that include Child Safety, community-controlled organisations and Elders where appropriate.

What the data says

Data indicates that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children continue to be over-represented in the child protection system. Key relevant data for the reporting period include that:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are 8.8 times more likely to be placed in out-of-home care (OOHC) or other supported placement than non-indigenous children. This is an increase to last year's rate (8.2); however, it continues to be below the Australian average (9.7) and the second lowest in Australia¹²
- the percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children placed with kin or other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers dropped from 55.4% in 2018 to 48.1% in 2019. This is significantly lower than the national average (63.6%)¹³
- at June 30 2019, 50.8% Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were not placed with relatives/kin or other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers or in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residential care, a percentage markedly higher than the national average of 35.7%¹⁴
- the percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children placed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers dropped from 36.9% in 2018 to 34.2% in 2019, also lower than the national average (43.8%)
- 95% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in care have a cultural support plan¹⁵
- in terms of expenditure on ACCOs, Queensland leads the nation in ACCO expenditure on family support (14.7%) and intensive family support (24.7%)
- the total percentage of expenditure on ACCOs remains 4.8%, significantly less than the percentage of children in care who are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (44%).

¹² Family Matters (2020). *The Family Matters Report 2020*. Melbourne: SNAICC – National Voice for our Children, available at <https://www.familymatters.org.au/the-family-matters-report-2020/>

¹³ Table 16A.20, Table 16A.21 (SCRGSP, 2019, 2020)

¹⁴ Table 16A.21 (SCRGSP, 2020)

¹⁵ Queensland Government (2019). *Supporting Families Changing Futures Plan 2019–2023*, available at <https://www.csyw.qld.gov.au/resources/campaign/supporting-families/supporting-families-changing-futures-2019-2023.pdf>

Prevention

The prevention element of the ATSI CPP aims to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families grow up healthy, safe and within their own family and community. Features of prevention are broad – they can include addressing social determinants of health, organisational reforms to address institutional racism, or more targeted earlier interventions aimed at supporting families and preventing children from entering the child protection system. Thus, most government departments have a role to play in prevention. This review, however, is limited to the actions and progress of the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women to implement the prevention element of the principle, while noting that true prevention can only be achieved with a whole-of-government approach.

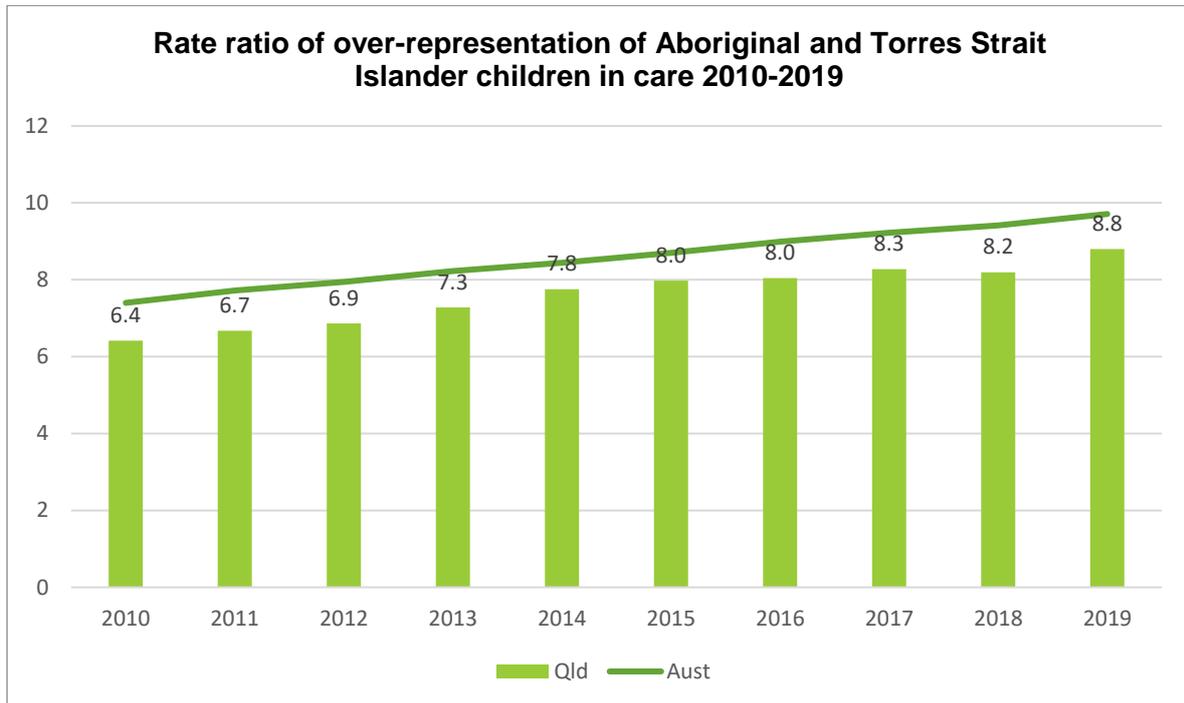
The Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women has endeavoured to implement the Prevention element by:

- prioritising increasing investment in prevention and early intervention in the latest Action Plan
- continually funding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Wellbeing Services
- continually funding the Family Participation Program (discussed under the Participation element).

Despite positive actions to implement the Prevention element, data indicates that the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in care remains high. In Queensland, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are 8.8 times more likely to be placed in OOHC than a non-Indigenous child. This is an increase to last year's rate (8.2); however, it continues to be below the Australian average (9.7) and is the second lowest in Australia. 121.1 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children per 1,000 in Queensland are in contact with child protection: this is a slight increase from 117.5 per 1,000 in 2017-2018.¹⁶ **Figure 1** shows that the rate ratio of over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in OOHC has continued to increase over the last 10 years, from 6.4 in 2010 to 8.8 in 2019.

¹⁶ Family Matters (2020). *The Family Matters Report 2020*. Melbourne: SNAICC – National Voice for our Children, available at <https://www.familymatters.org.au/the-family-matters-report-2020/>

Figure 1: Rate ratio of over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in care 2010-2019 ¹⁷



Investment in family support and intensive family support services is essential for strengthening families and preventing them from entering the child protection system. **Figure 2** indicates that the Queensland Government’s expenditure on family support and intensive family support remained at 16% of the overall real expenditure on child protection in 2018-2019. This is a significant under-investment in supports that promote the wellbeing of children and families. Nevertheless, **Figure 3** indicates that the expenditure on family support and intensive family support has been increasing relative to expenditure on protective intervention and OOHC over the last eight years, from 11.4% in 2011-2012 to 16.1% of total expenditure in 2018-2019. Of that, 20% is spent on ACCOs. While this trend is promising, further investment is required to significantly reduce the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who enter care.

¹⁷ Table 16A.19 (SCRGSP, 2020)

Figure 2: Real recurrent expenditure for child protection Australia 2018-2019, Queensland ¹⁸

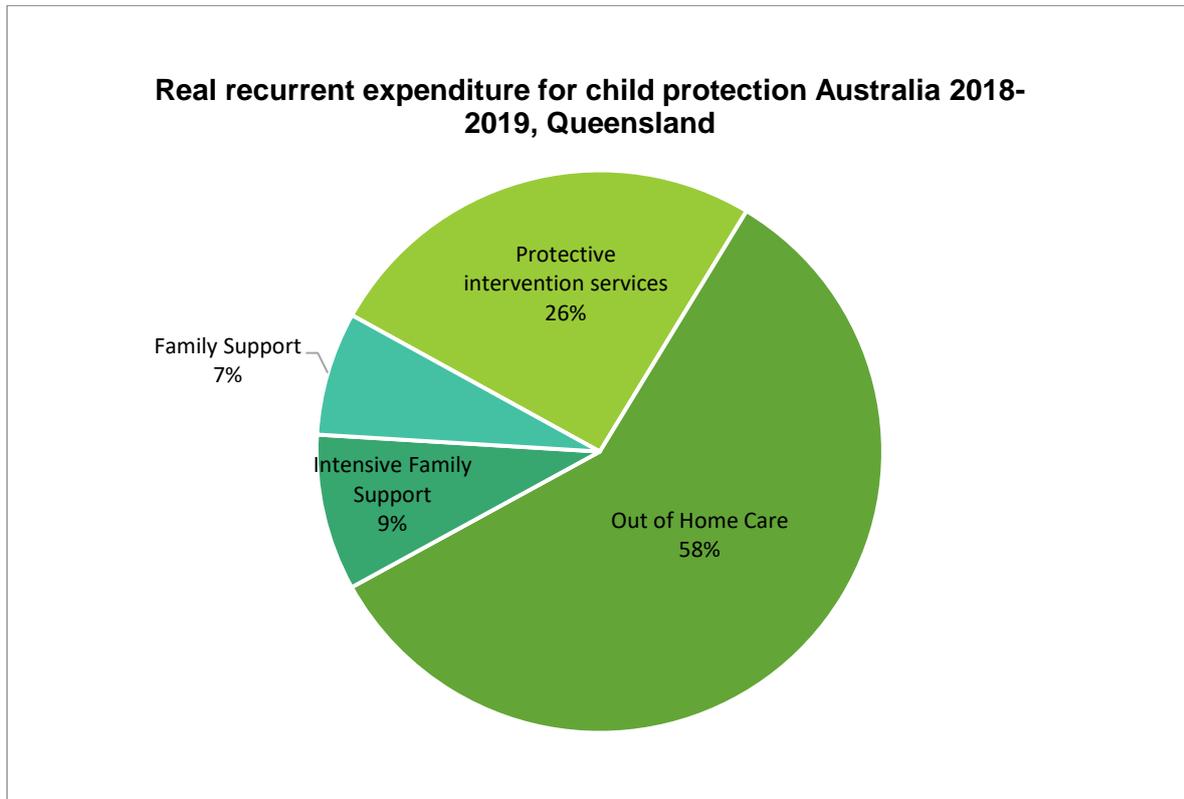
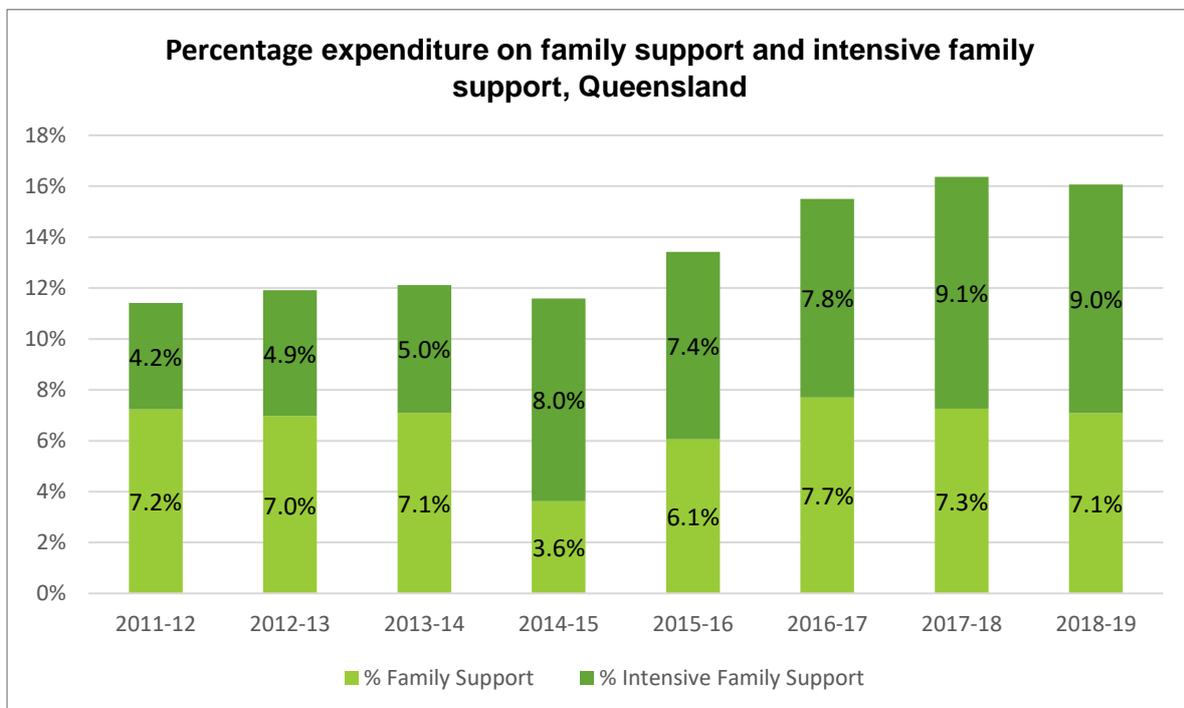


Figure 3: Percentage expenditure on family support and intensive family support, Queensland ¹⁹



¹⁸ Table 16A.7 (SCRGSP, 2020)

¹⁹ Table 16A.7 (SCRGSP, 2020)

Changing Tracks: an Action Plan for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Families 2020–2022 (Action Plan)

Queensland's new 'Changing Tracks 2' Action Plan prioritises increasing investment in prevention and early intervention, including universal child and family services and intensive and targeted family support services (Action 3.1 and Action 3.2). The Actions recognise that community-controlled approaches are more likely to be effective and promote the role of ACCOs to provide early intervention services. The Action Plan also includes development and implementation of the Queensland Healing Strategy to address the impact of intergenerational trauma, grief and loss, violence and abuse (Action 3.5).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Wellbeing Services

In late 2018 the Queensland Government committed \$150 million over five years to community-run Family Wellbeing Services, which were introduced with an aim to better support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities. The program combines the functions of the following existing family support programs into one community-run service: the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Support Service, Tertiary Family Support services, Targeted Family Support services, and Secondary Family Support Services.

Funding of \$39.9 million per annum continues to be allocated to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family and Wellbeing Services, and, for the reporting period, additional investment has been committed or provided to these services to enhance their capacity to offer a holistic response to the diverse needs of families. This includes the creation of 31 Youth and Family Worker roles across the state, and the establishment of domestic and family violence (DFV) specialists in five of the services. This aims to strengthen multidisciplinary service integration and accessibility to DFV support when required by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. The funding of 33 ACCOs to deliver Family and Wellbeing Services has been widely endorsed as a positive step towards community control and better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. Nevertheless, stakeholders did report that there are shortcomings in the funding of these services, and they fail to meet demand, based on eligible number of families.

Referrals to culturally safe legal services

Sector leaders reported insufficient funding of culturally safe legal services and a lack of engagement with legal services early in the child protection process. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander legal services should be engaged earlier than they currently are because legal professions can provide advice to parents of their rights, responsibilities and consequences of their actions when dealing with child safety. Using lawyers earlier on in the early intervention and prevention space is consistent with early and collaborative, community case-led responses, which are evident in the modelling provided by the Halt Collective (Brisbane) and the EIRC (Sunshine Coast). Further, the National Family Violence Prevention Legal Service Forum has recommended that a child protection notification and referral system be implemented to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in contact with the child protection system are linked to independent, culturally safe, preventative legal services at the earliest possible stage.²⁰

²⁰ National Family Violence Prevention Legal Services (2018). *National Family Violence Prevention Legal Services Forum submission to the Australian Labor Party*, May 2018, available at

Conclusion

While the rollout of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Wellbeing Services and commitment to prevention is a promising step, additional investment is required to ensure that all families receive the services they need in a culturally safe way and achieve better whole-of-life outcomes. In particular, investment needs to address impacts of intergenerational trauma on children at a community level and in line with the elements in the Queensland Healing Strategy. The total expenditure on family support or intensive family support remains low (16.1%) and has decreased slightly in the past year. This is concerning, given that the rise in percentage of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children in care suggests that service demand for families that need culturally safe support is increasing.

Partnership

Implementing the partnership element requires a shift in practice across all areas of the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women. During the reporting period, the Department has endeavoured to implement the partnership principle by:

- engaging QATSICPP to assist in implementation of Family Participation Program guidelines and develop local level processes to operationalise the guidelines
- implementing legislative reforms relating to the delegation of functions of the Chief Executive to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Entities
- introducing collaborative community-based initiatives such as the HALT Collective and the Early Indigenous Response Collective
- increasing funding for scholarships from the previous year for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled practitioners to enrol in graduate certificates at Griffith University
- partnering with QATSICPP to develop a Kinship Care Project (discussed under Placement Element)
- continuing funding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Wellbeing Services (discussed under Prevention element) and Family Participation Programs (discussed under Participation element).

In terms of expenditure on ACCOs, Queensland leads the nation in ACCO expenditure on family support (14.7%) and intensive family support (24.7%). Nevertheless, the total percentage of expenditure on ACCOs remains 4.8%, significantly less than the percentage of children in care who are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (44%). This is significantly less than the amount reported and reviewed in the 2019 reviews as that percentage was calculated as a proportion of expenditure on non-government organisations. SNAICC requests and measures the percentage of ACCO expenditure in total (inclusive of government services).

Family Participation Program

The department has engaged QATSICPP to assist in implementing the Family Participation Program (FPP). Funding ACCOs through the FPP is a positive step towards implementing the partnership principle. However, sector leaders have reported that the status of the FPP is as a referral service and support agency – not an equal partnership (discussed in more detail under the Participation element). The FPP, which commenced with 15 providers and a

http://www.nationalfvpls.org/images/files/2018_ALP_National_Policy_Platform_Consultation-National_Family_Violence_Prevention_Legal_Services_Forum_submission.pdf

\$34 million investment over three years since 2018, is being enhanced as part of the \$14.6 million investment over four years to implement and enhance initiatives under the Our Way generational strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families to eliminate the disproportionate representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the child protection system by 2037.

Delegation of functions of Chief Executive

In December 2019, the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women and QATSICPP commenced co-designed and implementation of legislative provisions enabling the delegation of the Chief Executive's (Child Safety) functions and powers to an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Chief Executive of an appropriate Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander entity. The legislation allows delegations in relation to an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child who *is* in need of protection or who *may be* in need of protection. The capacity to delegate decision-making in relation to children who may be in need of protection will enhance the ability of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to prevent the escalation of children into the statutory child protection system. The implementation of the legislation is being undertaken in partnership between QATSICPP, ACCOs in two early adopter locations, and the Department. An action research framework is embedded with evaluation occurring concurrently with the implementation of the initiative. The process is being overseen by the Queensland First Children and Families Board. The first delegations are being implemented to support the Safe Care and Connection initiative, the EIRC (described below) and contact between children and their family and community. These initiatives are a partnership with the local community service providers and operate at different points across the child protection continuum.

The HALT Collective and Early Indigenous Response Collective

Sector leaders provided positive feedback on collaborative initiatives such as the HALT Collective²¹ in Brisbane and the Early Indigenous Response Collective (EIRC) on the Sunshine Coast, and recommended initiatives such as these be embedded across the state as standard practice.

The HALT Collective, like the EIRC, is a collaborative Brisbane district community-led intake process. When the Brisbane Regional Intake Service is notified about an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander family, a referral to HALT may be considered. HALT members, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Wellbeing Services Kurbingui, Kummara and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Health Service Ltd (ATSICHS), as well as Indigenous Family and Child Connect (FaCC) and the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women's Cultural Practice Advisors inform and assess the case. HALT has led to more collaborative work and stronger partnerships around family engagement, planning and intervention, as well as stronger partnerships between the department and the secondary sector.

Between November 2018 and March HALT discussed 60 Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander families who were notified to the Brisbane Regional Intake Service. Of these:

- twenty-eight (47%) were recorded as a Child Concern Report with a follow-up Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community support response in place

²¹ Department of Child, Safety, Youth and Women (2020). The HALT Collective, available at <https://www.csyw.qld.gov.au/campaign/supporting-families/news/news-articles?id=k7b73cow&start=1>

- twenty-six (43%) were recorded as a Child Protection notification but received a joint response from Child Safety Service Centre and a community-controlled organisation
- six (10%) were recorded as a Child Protection Notification and assessed by a Child Safety Service Centre
- ninety-eight per cent of the children are currently with family members.²²

Good practice examples

Good practice examples that were highlighted by stakeholders included:

- regular case consultations by Child Safety team leaders and FPP managers to consider which cases to refer and informing FPPs of all notifications regarding an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child
- Family Wellbeing Services making internal recommendations for existing clients with an unborn baby to self-refer to FPP to prevent removals
- FPP determining who to service after Child Safety Service Centres referred all Investigation and Assessment cases to FPP. This enabled the provider to prioritise appropriately and work with families in a timely way so that they have the time to meaningfully participate in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family-led decision-making process
- the department increasing funded scholarships from the previous year for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled practitioners to enrol in graduate certificates at Griffith University
- resourced roles for QATSICPP which were introduced in late 2019 to assist in building capacity of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sector to empower families to have a voice in decision-making.

Conclusion

Several initiatives that have either been continued or introduced in the reporting period indicate progress towards implementing the participation element of the ATSI CPP. Pockets of good and innovative practice have been identified by sector leaders and should be embedded across the state as standard practice. Nevertheless, there are still significant gaps in implementation and concerns around the nature of the partnerships between government and ACCOs. It is clear that despite some progress, further active efforts are needed on the part of the government to build and maintain trust to enable meaningful and respectful partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders.

²² Ibid.

Placement

During the reporting period, the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women has endeavoured to implement the Placement principle by:

- engaging QATSICPP to develop a kinship care program, Family Caring for Family
- upgrading Operational Policy 641-2 to reflect the requirements of the Placement principle and require the involvement of children and family in placement decision-making.

Data on the percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children placed with kin or other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers indicates a decrease from 55.5% in 2018 to 48.1% in 2019. Further, **Figure 4** indicates that the percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children placed with kin or other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers has steadily decreased since 2006, when the percentage was 61.6%.

In Queensland, 'kin' is defined by the Child Protection Act 1999, schedule 3, as "any of the child's relatives who are persons of significance to the child, and anyone else who is a person of significance to the child".²³ The use of a broad interpretation of 'kin' or 'family' means that some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are being raised by non-Indigenous, non-family members deemed by the state to be, for example, part of their social network or a person of significance to the child. The result from such a placement can be a varying degree of separation from family and culture, which cannot rightly be deemed as compliant with the intent of the ATSICPP. Wide statutory definitions of 'kin' that do not truly reflect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kinship may distort data available on how many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in OOHC are having their cultural rights respected and cultural needs met.

Figure 5 indicates the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children placed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers. This figure may be a better representation of children who are placed in accordance with the ATSICPP, as while they are not deemed 'kin', Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers may help children maintain connection to culture more effectively than non-Indigenous, non-family member people of significance in the child's life. In Queensland, the number of children placed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers decreased from 36.9% in 2018 to 34.2% in 2019. This is a significant decrease since 2006 (52.1%), and much lower than the 2019 national average of 43.8%. Queensland has the lowest rate of children placed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers in Australia excepting Tasmania (13%).

²³ State of Queensland (2018). *Child Protection Act 1999*, p 339, available at <https://www.legislation.qld.gov.au/view/pdf/inforce/2018-07-23/act-1999-010>

Figure 4: Percentage of Indigenous children placed with kin or other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers between 2006 and 2019 ²⁴

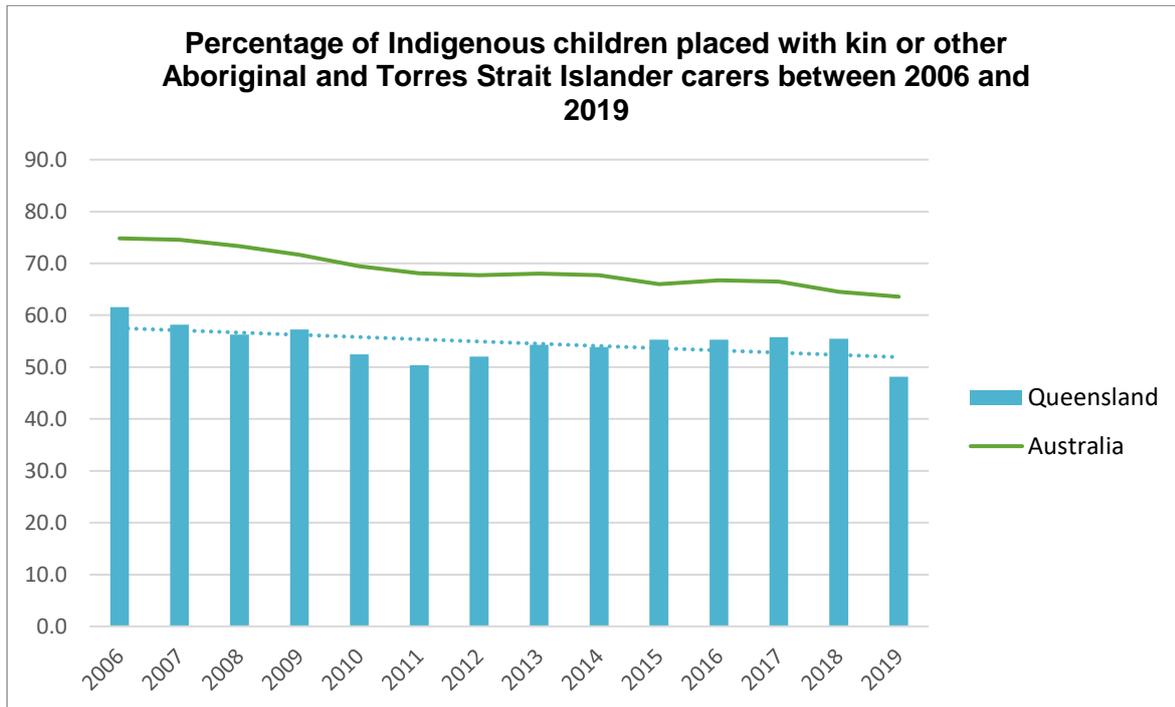
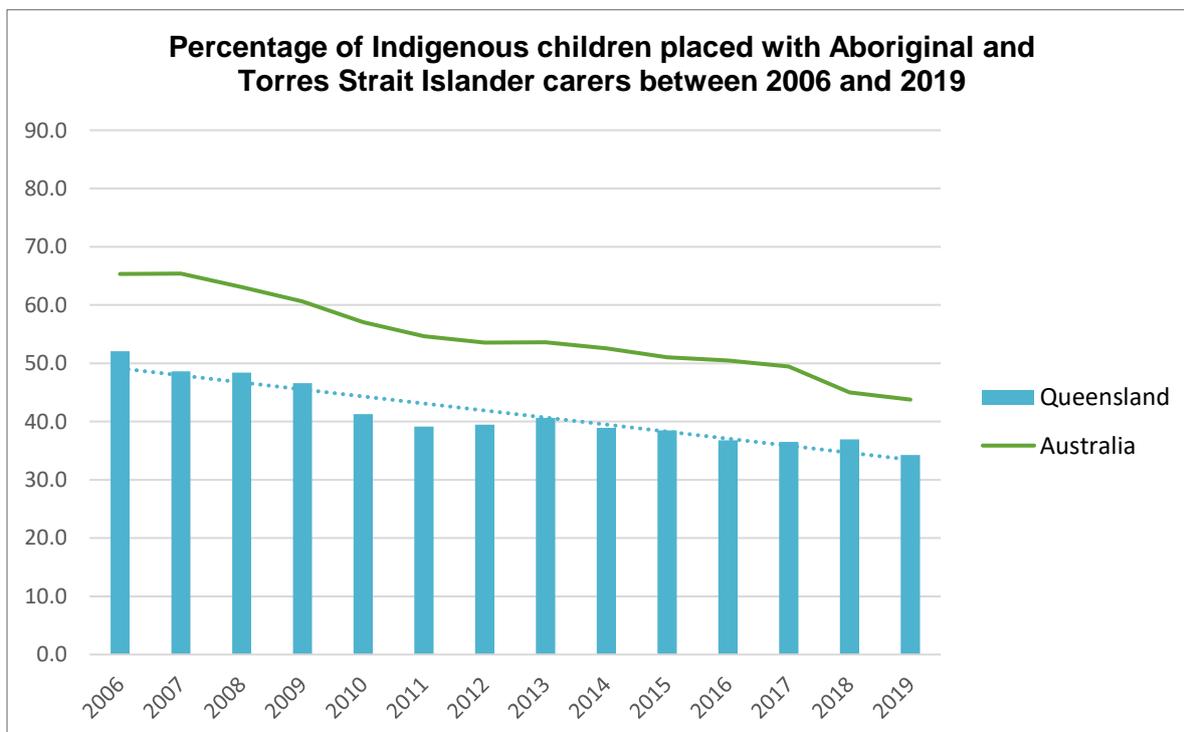


Figure 5: Percentage of Indigenous children placed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers between 2006 and 2019 ²⁵



²⁴ Table 16A.20, Table 16A.21 (SCRGSP, 2019, 2020)

²⁵ Ibid.

Operational Policy 641-2

*Operational Policy 641-2: Decisions about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children*²⁶ was redrafted to include the Queensland Human Rights Act 2019 and recognition of the distinct cultural rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The policy outlines the requirements for placing an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child in care. It specifies that in making decisions about placing an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child, Child Safety must, if practicable, place the child with a member of the child's family group.

The policy also states that Child Safety must give proper consideration to the views of the child and the child's family about where and with whom the child will live, and ensure the decision provides for the optimal retention of the child's relationships with family members and other people of significance to the child under Aboriginal tradition or Island custom.

Kinship care program

The Department engaged QATSICPP to independently design and develop an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kinship care program with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled child protection sector. QATSICPP commenced its kinship care program, Family Caring for Family, including consulting the sector on three options for a kinship care model and presenting at all stages of the project to the Queensland First Children and Families Board.

Feedback from sector leaders

Sector leaders reported a general lack of cultural understanding on the importance of connection, kinship systems, the role of a person of cultural authority for a child, honouring the family system (for example, matriarchal) and taking time to conduct a process in accordance with custom. There is a concern that Child Safety staff are not best placed and do not have adequate engagement skills required to seek out placements within the child's family or community, and consequently the last resort option is implemented. There is a strong need for families to be provided early support for preservation of the family and alternatively planning for reunification or kin placement at all stages of intervention.

Examples of poor practice included:

- where staff are uninformed of the QATSICPP and families are in the position of having to seek permission for children in non-kin placements to have connection with family rather than an embedded within the case plan
- when family and FPP propose placement changes with a view to reunify, and Department staff have reportedly defended their original decision rather than being supportive of identifying the strengths of the family and working to uphold the rights of the child to live with their family
- where the Department, working in a rushed time frame, impacts on placement outcomes and children's connection to family. Departmental staff are not clear on when procedural time frames can be relaxed with good cause, with this occurring on an ad hoc basis. Where timeframes are extended, there are improved outcomes for children.

²⁶ Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women (2019), *Policy: Decisions about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children*, available at <https://www.csyw.qld.gov.au/resources/dcsyw/child-family/protecting-children/decision-making-atsi-children-641.pdf>

- where the *Child Protection Act 1999* continues to include “anyone else who is a person of significance to the child” in the definition of kin, and the practice of not confirming with family or people with cultural authority for the child as being kin.

An example of positive practice included where an FPP achieved a sustained increase in kin placements by working with family to identify kin and then referring the family’s identified kin carer to a Foster and Kinship Care (FKC) service in their community. The FKC service then works with the family member and the Department to achieve provisional kin carer approval. In this reporting period, approximately 20 children moved from non-kin (and often non-Indigenous) placement to kin placement following this process.

Conclusion

While positive steps have been taken to update policies and engage QATSICPP to develop a kinship care model, further work is required to embed the placement element of the ATSI CPP as part of standard practice and continue to shift the organisational culture across the state. The continual decrease in the percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children placed with kin or other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers is particularly concerning and indicates that there are significant gaps in efforts to place children at higher levels of the placement hierarchy. While the two initiatives described above have potential to improve Queensland’s progress in implementing this element, alone they are unlikely to be sufficient to address the concerning decline in the numbers of children living within kinship placement.

Participation

During the reporting period, the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women has endeavoured to implement the Participation principle by:

- continuing to fund 15 ACCOs to deliver the Family Participation Program (FPP)
- upgrading the Child Safety Practice Manual to reflect all elements of the ATSI CPP
- introducing revised FPP Guidelines in December 2019 to support referral to FPP
- establishing Regional Implementation Groups with support from QATSICPP.

Family Participation Program and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family-led decision-making

Following Queensland’s successful trial of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family-led decision-making in 2016-17, the government rolled out FPP across the state, providing funding to 15 ACCOs to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to participate in child protection decision-making.²⁷ Queensland’s investment in FPP has been lauded as a positive step towards better practice and implementing the participation element of the ATSI CPP. Nevertheless, there are gaps in FPP’s implementation, with stakeholders reporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family-led decision-making is not offered widely or consistently across all points of the child protection continuum and not at all decision-making points for a family. Sector leaders reported that the outcome of not

²⁷ Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women (2019). Family Participation Program, available at <https://www.csyw.qld.gov.au/child-family/child-family-reform/meeting-needs-requirements-aboriginal-torres-straitislander-children-families-communities/family-participation-program>

implementing the process fully can be disempowering for families, with one family member commenting:

“they wonder why it’s not working, it’s because we don’t feel a part of it, someone is making decisions for us”

and

“let us have a say in our own lives”.²⁸

There was also a consensus that the FPP does not meet demand and requires more investment.

Similar to the 2019 Implementation Review, sector leaders continue to report that referrals are extremely low compared to the number of eligible families. It was reported that many departmental staff are largely uninformed on the purpose and role of the FPP. Despite pockets of good practice, stakeholders viewed the existing status of the FPP as feeling like more of a referral service and support agency – not an equal partnership. Referral to the FPP was seen as being at the discretion of the Department rather than a right of families. Requests by the FPP to receive localised data regarding the number of eligible families by referral type (for example, Investigation and Assessment six months prior to expiry of short-term orders) to enable the FPP to undertake predictive planning are not being met by Child Safety. There were also reports of FPP providers fearing loss of funding and the service for community when holding the Department to account and being set up to fail where they are not able to deliver the service to its full intent as a result of departmental decisions and control. This has impacted on reunification and opportunities to grow a child’s connection through community-controlled knowledge and expertise.

The Queensland Government has undertaken several actions to address issues with implementation. The *Child Safety Practice Manual* has been upgraded to require staff to engage the FPP from the earliest point of investigation and assessment planning for an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child. This aims to ensure families are given the opportunity to participate in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family-led decision-making right from the earliest decision about whether their child is in need of protection. The Department has also introduced FPP guidelines which were endorsed in December 2019 to support three priority referral points of the FPP. Internal Department communiques about FPP (commenced in February 2020) were developed with QATSICPP and their members.

In January 2020 regions were asked to establish regional implementation groups to bring together FPPs, QATSICPP representatives, and Child Safety staff to coordinate the implementation of the FPP guidelines and develop local processes. Both successes and challenges are raised at regional implementation groups.

Good practice examples that were identified included:

- the Child Safety team leaders regularly consulted FPP managers to consider which cases to refer
- Child Safety informed FPPs of all notifications regarding an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child.

Despite positive efforts to improve implementation, there were reports of the Department vetting which cases to refer, contrary to the intent of the program guidelines. Stakeholders

²⁸ Input from family member from a remote community in Queensland.

have also raised concerns as to the implementation of the guidelines, noting that the information provided through roadshows was not contextualised to reflect local arrangements. Other barriers to implementing the full participation of family in decision-making, as intended in the legislation and FPP program guidelines, include the Department prioritising its time frames and ways of working rather than adapting to work with family in a culturally safe and respectful way. Where this occurs, family decision-making meetings may be held in the final month of an order which is not adequate time to influence decision-making. The meeting purpose becomes instead to inform of ongoing intervention rather than to reunify children with family, even where there are no remaining child safety concerns.

Conclusion

The Department has progressed in the implementation of the Participation element through numerous initiatives, in particular the FPP. However, it still has a long way to go to fully implement this element. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family-led decision-making is still not offered widely or consistently across all points of the child protection continuum and sector leaders continue to report inconsistent compliance with FPP guidelines and policy. More work needs to be done to ensure that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families have meaningful opportunities to participate in all decisions that impact their lives.

Connection

Unlike some other states where ACCOs have significant roles in the delivery of kinship and foster care services, including case management for children in OOHC, in Queensland there are very few resourced roles for ACCOs in tertiary child protection services. As noted above, ACCO-led kinship care models are only in early stages of design. This, coupled with the state having the nation's second-lowest rate of placing children with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers (discussed above), highlights that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Queensland's child protection system are at high risk of losing vital cultural connections.

During the reporting period, the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women has endeavoured to implement the Connection element of the ATSICPP by:

- introducing the Child Safety operational policy: *Decisions about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children*²⁹
- upgrading the *Child Safety Practice Manual* to include a safe care and connection practice kit
- introducing changes to the *Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect (SCAN) Team System Manual* to strengthen provision of cultural advice.

Culturally safe practice

During the reporting period, the Department of Child, Safety, Youth and Women introduced initiatives to improve the cultural capability of their workforce and promote connection to culture for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

²⁹ Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women. Operational Policy: Decisions about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Available at <https://www.csyw.qld.gov.au/resources/dcsyw/child-family/protecting-children/decision-making-atsi-children-641.pdf>

The Child Safety operational policy: *Decisions about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children* was updated to support the implementation of the legislative amendments including embedding the Child Placement Principle, establishing the independent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander entity (independent person) and family-led decision-making processes.

This policy aims to ensure that:

- decisions made under the Child Protection Act 1999 in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children promote their safe care and connection with family, community, culture and Country
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families are enabled to exercise agency over their lives
- Child Safety services are provided in a way that enables Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, their parents and family members to effectively participate in making significant decisions about the child
- the primary source of cultural advice about an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child and family, for decision-making by Child Safety, is provided by the child and the child's family
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families are supported to participate in significant decision-making processes under the Child Protection Act 1999 by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

In 2019-20, changes were made to the *Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect (SCAN) Team System Manual* to strengthen the provision of cultural advice to SCAN teams where it relates to decision-making for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. The purpose of the SCAN team system is to enable a coordinated, multi-agency response to children where statutory intervention is required.

The Queensland Government upgraded the online *Child Safety Practice Manual* to include a safe care and connection practice kit, which is to be used to inform culturally capable practice with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

Good practice examples driven by sector leaders in their work with Department and families include:

- reading out each element at the start of a meeting about a child and then applying them to the child's case
- documenting how the principle was applied and, where something did not work, what else was then tried
- having robust discussions between Child Safety and FPP where Child Safety is open to being challenged and seeks the input of FPP.

Despite these promising steps, sector leaders reported that in their experience there remains limited understanding in the department of the purpose and intent of the ATSI CPP elements self-determination and reunification. As an example, they referred to some Child Safety staff admitting to not reading the *Child Safety Practice Manual* and, generally, practice is inconsistent. For example, one region consistently applies the Child Placement Principle across all levels of Child Safety including senior executives, whereas in other locations staff have not known of the Child Placement Principle.

Cultural support planning

Data from the *Supporting Families Changing Futures* report indicates that 95% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in care have a cultural support plan.

Despite this, the report also reveals that two-thirds of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in care do not feel connected to culture, suggesting a lack of quality cultural support planning. This is also supported by the views of some stakeholders who have reported that cultural care plans rarely have family input and their quality indicates a lack of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander lens or world view.

It is promising that the Queensland Government is measuring connection to culture for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. As the data demonstrates, the completion of a cultural support plan, while a positive indicator, does not accurately reflect the substance and quality of cultural planning. There is no data indicating the frequency that cultural support plans are created in conjunction with parents or people with cultural authority for a child to ensure meaningful connection is maintained.

Reunification

The *Child Safety Practice Manual* safe care and connection practice kit emphasises the importance of maintaining and developing connections to family, community, culture and Country, and commits to implementation of cultural care plans and prioritises safe and timely reunification.³⁰

The prospect of reunification is often higher when an FPP provider is engaged and included in the family plan with associated actions. Despite legislation and policy promoting and prioritising reunification, there were a number of concerns with poor practice across the state. Sector leaders reported that Child Safety does not always articulate the requirements for reunification at early stages of engagement and that it is common practice not to reunify a child to a family on the basis that it will disrupt the child's attachment to the foster carer. This is contrary to the intention of the Connection element of the principle. Stakeholders also raised concerns of ongoing systemic racism within practice that reduces likelihood of reunification, particularly for families with a history of involvement in the child protection system.

There is limited data available about the reunification of children with their birth parents. This prevents the department from being able to monitor and measure their progress in implementing the Connection principle. The Queensland Government has reported, however, that it is working to include this data in its Integrated Client Management System (ICMS).

Conclusion

Although the Department has introduced a number of policies that support the implementation of the Connection element, sector leaders continue to report culturally inappropriate practice. The lack of data provided on reunification rates limits the ability for the department to monitor its progress and be accountable to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. The Department of Child, Safety Youth and Women must continue to resource and prioritise implementation to ensure that the Connection element is meaningfully implemented, and that staff are practising in a culturally safe way.

³⁰ Queensland Government (2021). *Child Safety Practice Manual, Safe care and connection practice kit*, available at, <https://cspm.csyw.qld.gov.au/practice-kits/safe-care-and-connection>