SNAICC
National Voice for our Children

Submission

Safe and Supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Second Action Plan 2027–2031

October 2026

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Summary

SNAICC – National Voice for our Children welcomes the opportunity to inform the development of the Safe and Supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Second Action Plan 2027–2031. This submission brings together the priorities identified through jurisdictional consultations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations, peak bodies, leaders, practitioners, and other sector stakeholders.

The message from consultations was consistent and urgent. The priorities agreed in the First Action Plan remain the same, but implementation has been too slow, uneven and lacking accountability. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sector has invested substantial expertise, time, relationships, and goodwill in Safe and Supported. The clear expectation is that governments will do the same.

We have resoundingly heard that the Second Action Plan must implement meaningful systems transformation and self-determination. This means:

- Changing the underlying logic of the system to centre children and families, community strengths, and cultural authority.
- Shifting the centre of gravity from statutory crisis responses to prevention, early support, healing, family restoration, and whole-of-family services.
- Measurably transferring funding, authority, commissioning power, and data governance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in line with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
- Holding every government accountable to communities and for concrete and time-bound reform.

The Second Action Plan must therefore be different to the First Action Plan in the following key ways:

- Activities must be funded, with investment identified at the outset rather than left to future budget processes.
- Actions must deliver tangible change for children and families, building on what governments have already agreed.
- Stronger accountability is required for activities and deliverables, including identifying leads responsible for actions; annual public reporting; communication of progress and data availability at jurisdictional levels; public, independent, First Nations-led review; and clear consequences when commitments are not met.

Recommendations

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisations

Recommendation: Develop and implement co-designed jurisdictional transition plans that:

- provide immediate, direct and dedicated investment in ACCOs, proportionate to community need and their existing or potential role in service delivery
- progressively transfer funding and authority to ACCOs in line with the National Child and Family Investment Strategy
- establish published jurisdictional targets, timelines and annual reporting on direct investment in ACCOs, the proportion of child and family services funding delivered through ACCOs, and the functions and authority transferred.

Recommendation: Provide dedicated Commonwealth and jurisdictional investment in ACCO capability and capacity, including capital and digital infrastructure, governance, accreditation, evaluation mechanisms, leadership and workforce development, and fund the establishment or expansion of ACCOs where regional data and community priorities demonstrate unmet need.

Recommendation: Agree and progressively implement in every jurisdiction a dedicated, reliable, and sustainable funding model for ACCOs delivering child and family services, drawing on the model in the Doing Things Differently report, including a stable funding floor, needs-based loadings, long-term contracts, consolidated funding streams, simplified reporting, and explicit recognition of cultural, remote, workforce, infrastructure, and organisational costs.

Recommendation: Establish or strengthen adequately resourced peak bodies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families in each jurisdiction. Peak bodies should be governed by a majority Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Board, which has strong governance and policy development and influencing capacity. Their establishment and development should be resourced by governments, but independently led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Workforce

Recommendation: Commission a public, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led workforce demand analysis that models current and future ACCO child and family workforce requirements at national, jurisdictional, and local levels, including service coverage, regional gaps, workforce supply, required competencies, and governance capabilities needed for sector growth, and implement strategies responding to its findings.

Recommendation: Fund targeted, culturally safe pathways into and within the ACCO child and family services workforce, including vocational and tertiary education, recognition of prior learning, scholarships, paid and supported placements, modular and work-based training, mentoring, and leadership development.

This should include dedicated funding for ACCOs to design and deliver local workforce development initiatives, alongside investment in ACCO-led training organisations and partnerships with education providers.

Recommendation: Reform government funding, procurement, and contracting arrangements so that ACCOs can offer wages and employment conditions at least equivalent to comparable government roles, including minimum five-year contract terms, regional and remote loadings, recognition and remuneration of cultural expertise and lived experience, and funding for culturally safe supervision, workforce wellbeing, retention, leadership, and succession planning.

Supporting children and families

Recommendation: Set and publish jurisdictional targets and timelines for progressively shifting child and family services investment to ACCO-led prevention, early support, early years, and whole-of-family services, including self-referral pathways, with annual reporting on progress.

Recommendation: Fund ACCOs to provide continuous, culturally safe, and whole-of-family support before, during, and after statutory involvement, including advocacy, practical assistance, assessment, and therapeutic services, family-led decision-making, cross-sector coordination and reunification support commencing at the point of removal and continuing for a sustained period after restoration.

Recommendation: Agree and implement nationally consistent active-efforts standards for all five elements of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle; embed those standards in legislation, policy, programs, processes, and practice; fully resource implementation; and establish public reporting, independent monitoring, and effective remedies where the standards are not met.

Recommendation: Require every state and territory to develop and implement, in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, fully costed plans to delegate authority for child protection, family preservation and reunification functions to ACCOs, in line with community aspirations.

Recommendation: Develop, evaluate, and scale Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-led, place-based commissioning models that give communities authority to define needs, priorities, outcomes, service models, and provider selection, and support locally designed child and family wellbeing responses grounded in culture, kinship, community, and Country.

Recommendation: Establish whole-of-government responsibility for addressing the social, cultural, and structural determinants of child protection involvement, with named responsibilities and funded actions across housing, education and early childhood, health, disability, justice, family violence, food security and income support, and ensure poverty and service exclusion are not treated as parental failure.

Housing: Establish a positive duty on governments to provide practical assistance to secure safe, stable, and suitable housing where housing insecurity places a child at risk of removal or prevents reunification, and fund ACCO-led housing responses, working towards no child being removed solely because of poverty or housing instability.

Education: Require education departments, early childhood services, and schools to identify and implement actions with communities and ACCOs to provide early support, address systemic racism and inappropriate reporting to child protection, improve referral

pathways, and enable ACCOs to deliver culturally safe support in educational settings.

Health and infant removals: Scale culturally safe, community-controlled supports for new and expectant parents, improve nationally consistent data on infant removals and supports provided to families, and implement best-practice approaches to prevent avoidable removals.

Disability: Implement a nationally consistent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-defined minimum dataset and culturally safe assessment tools and protocols for children and parents with disability or developmental delay in contact with child protection systems, and ensure relevant disability reforms address their needs.

Recommendation: Recognise cultural connection as a right and protective factor and invest in ACCO-led cultural connection, identity, mentoring, healing, and family restoration supports before, during, and after statutory involvement, including time on Country, language, and cultural knowledge, survivor-led and intergenerational healing, and sustained support before and after reunification.

Introduce a priority category for government-funded health and therapeutic services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in or leaving out-of-home care, including subsidy to cover gap fees where public services are not available or appropriate.

Recommendation: Respond publicly to the completed reviews of carer and informal kinship-carer support and implement locally designed reforms with ACCOs, including culturally safe assessment, recruitment and retention, equitable financial and discretionary assistance, housing, respite, legal and therapeutic support, and appropriate resourcing for ACCOs to provide supports and payments directly to kinship, grandparent, community, and other carers.

Recommendation: Require governments to act as responsible corporate parents by guaranteeing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in care and care leavers priority access to health, dental, developmental, therapeutic, housing, education, employment, and cultural connection supports; funding ACCOs to deliver cultural and transition support; and reforming and increasing the Transition to Independent Living Allowance, including expanded eligibility and culturally relevant expenditure.

Recommendation: Agree and implement jurisdictional priority actions arising from the Legal Supports Scoping Study to expand early, accessible and culturally safe legal assistance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families at risk of or in contact with child protection systems, including sufficient independent representation for children.

Accountability for implementation

Recommendation: Establish an annual public accountability framework covering every Second Action Plan commitment, including status against milestones, expenditure and funding source, delivery organisations, funding to ACCOs, regional progress, outcomes for children and families, reasons for delay, and time-bound corrective action. Reporting should be supplemented by publicly accessible jurisdictional dashboards and periodic independent, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-governed reviews, with published findings and government responses.

Recommendation: Legislate, strengthen, and adequately resource in every jurisdiction a dedicated, independent commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people that meets nationally agreed minimum requirements and has powers to access information, hear directly from children, monitor systems, investigate systemic issues, report publicly, and require formal government responses.

Recommendation: Co-design and publicly report nationally consistent and locally adaptable measures of success with children, families, communities, ACCOs, and peaks, combining quantitative data with community-led qualitative evidence.

Recommendation: Require every government to formally respond to the Second Action Plan and publish a partnership-based implementation plan identifying the responsible minister and agency for each commitment, investment and funding source, implementation dates, timelines for transferring funding and authority, performance measures, First Nations governance arrangements, and publicly reportable outcomes, with central agency oversight and annual public updates and corrective action.

Self-determination and shifting the logic of the system

Recommendation: Establish and progressively scale jurisdictional and regional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-led commissioning arrangements that give communities and ACCOs authority over needs assessment, investment priorities, outcomes, service design, funding allocation, and provider selection, including access to direct and dedicated community-controlled funding.

Recommendation: Establish and resource local and regional Indigenous data governance arrangements that guarantee communities and ACCOs timely access to relevant funding, service, and outcomes data and authority over its collection, custodianship, interpretation, use, sharing, storage, and publication.

Recommendation: Establish and sustainably fund the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Support, building on the scoping work completed under the First Action Plan, with community-controlled governance and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge frameworks. The Centre should support ACCOs and communities to share practice, evidence, evaluation, and innovation; strengthen and grow effective models without compromising their cultural integrity or local context; undertake research, evidence translation, review and evaluation; and publicly document how governments and mainstream systems have changed their practice in response to First Nations knowledge and evidence.

Recommendation: Embed the rights and voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people across the governance, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and definition of success of the Second Action Plan through culturally safe, accessible, supported, and appropriately remunerated participation, including children in care, care leavers, children with disability, children in regional and remote communities, and children involved with justice systems.

Recommendation: Make systems transformation and self-determination express objectives of the Second Action Plan.

Context for the Second Action Plan

Safe and Supported: The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021–2031 is the national framework for improving the safety and wellbeing of children and young people in Australia. It is implemented through a mainstream Action Plan and a dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan. The dedicated plan recognises that the safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children cannot be secured by adapting mainstream systems at the margins. It requires Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership, culturally grounded approaches, genuine shared decision-making and structural reform.

Safe and Supported is also the principal national child and family policy framework supporting Target 12 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap to reduce the rate of over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care by 45% by 2031. Consultations consistently and urgently raised concern that the trajectory for this target is going backwards. Safe and Supported implementation must be aligned with the four Priority Reforms of Closing the Gap to drive substantial national change towards this target.

The Second Action Plan will operate from 2027 to 2031, the remaining period to the Closing the Gap target date. It must urgently build on the foundations established under the First Action Plan and correct the weaknesses that have limited progress.

Role of SNAICC and the Leadership Group

The Safe and Supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership Group (the Leadership Group) is a formal partner to government, providing leadership in the governance of Safe and Supported, including co-design, oversight, and shared decision-making.

As the national peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, SNAICC provides the Chair to the Leadership Group and jointly serves as co-secretariat, alongside the Department of Social Services.

In July 2026, the Leadership Group and governments agreed common priorities for developing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Second Action Plan, to be tested through consultation.

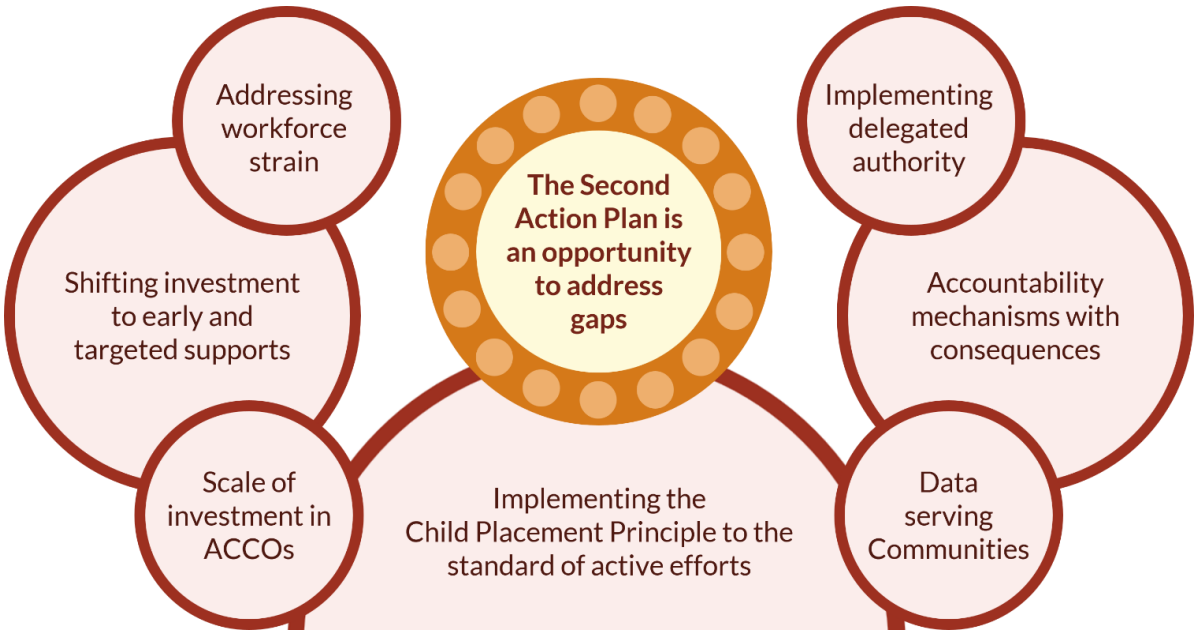
- ACCO investment and transition of funding
- early support and prevention
- delegated authority
- growing the ACCO workforce
- implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle to the standard of active efforts.

Other discussions also focused on stronger oversight and improved data, accountability, and culturally safe, prevention-focused child and family services, including better supports and outcomes for children and young people in out-of-home care.

Achievements so far



Challenges in implementation



Complete
Work progressing
Mixed progress
Delayed

National status of the First Action Plan

The table below provides an overview of SNAICC's initial analysis of progress under the First Action Plan (based on available information).

1	**Delegated Authority** PRIORITY	**A:** Definition		**B:** Jurisdictional plans		**C:** Implementation	
		A: jurisdictional scan					
		A: Framework					
2	**ACCO Investment** PRIORITY	**A:** Investment Strategy	**B:** Co-designed plans	**C:** Market strategies	**D:** Commissioning Frameworks	**E:** Commissioning models	**F:** Implement and monitor	**G:** Locally controlled funding
3	**Data Sovereignty**	**A:** ACCO data capability	**B:** Implement data sovereignty	**C:** ACCO data access	**D:** Centre for Excellence: scoping	**E:** Centre for Excellence: establishment	**F:** Centre for Excellence: ongoing funding	**G:** Review of initiatives
4	**ACCO Workforce** PRIORITY	**A:** Scoping report	**B:** Workforce strategies		**C:** ECEC sector strengthening plan: implement		**D:** Disability Sector Strengthening Plan: support	
5	**Active Efforts** PRIORITY	**A:** National standards		**B:** Jurisdictional plans / implementation		**C:** Review indicators		**D:** Reporting
						C: Establish national reporting		
6	**Legal Supports**	**A:** Scoping study		**B:** Commitment to address barriers		**C:** Joint proposals with AGDs		
7	**Accountability + Oversight**	**A:** Minimum requirements		**B:** Establish and strengthen commissioners			**C:** National Commissioner	
8	**Social Determinants of Safety and Wellbeing**	**A:** Collaboration approach	**B:** CtG: Joint initiatives			**C:** Ensure accessible services		**D:** Support disability reforms
			B: Improving Multidisciplinary Responses					

Consultation outcomes

From August to October 2026, SNAICC and the Leadership Group conducted consultations with ACCOs, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander practitioners, leaders, and sector stakeholders.

Across the country, urgency was a consistent concern, as was the need to remove structural barriers, improve confidence in government through transparent delivery, facilitate genuine self-determination, and transform the underlying logic of child and family systems.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of supporting children are relational, collective, holistic, and grounded in culture. The Second Action Plan should enable ACCOs to utilise those strengths to provide culturally safe and supportive services for communities, rather than requiring ACCOs to reproduce fragmented government models.

Consultations consistently focused on common national priorities for the Second Action Plan, aligned with the core themes of empowering ACCOs, growing the workforce, supporting children and families, increased accountability for implementation, self-determination, and shifting the logic of the system. Participants stressed that these priorities must align with a focus on strengthening families and communities through prevention, early support, healing, and family restoration.

Core themes for the Second Action Plan



Consultations on the Second Action Plan

Northern Territory	31 August
South Australia	1 September
Tasmania	4 September
New South Wales	7 September
Western Australia	10 September
Queensland	15 September
Australian Capital Territory	17 September
Victoria	28 September
National Workshop	29 September
Additional sector consultations	September–October

Key national priorities

Supporting children and families

- First Nations-led models
- Early support & prevention
- Addressing social determinants
- Delegated authority
- ATSICPP active efforts
- Culture & healing
- Family restoration
- Support for carers
- Support throughout the system incl. disability
- Legal supports

Strengthening ACCOs

- ACCO investment & funding transition
- Addressing resource gaps
- Real-cost, needs-based funding models
- Peak bodies

Growing the workforce

- Identifying gaps and demand
- Flexible training pathways
- Pay parity and skills recognition

Accountability for implementation

- Public reporting on funding & implementation & independent review
- First Nations children's commissioners
- Community-defined measures of success
- Whole-of-government responsibility
- Strengthening state and territory buy-in

Self determination & shifting system logic

- Local decision-making, commissioning & data sovereignty
- Sharing best practice & 2-way learning
- Centring First Nations knowledge and evidence

Detailed national priorities

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisations

ACCOs are central to prevention, family preservation, cultural connection, healing, and safe support through statutory systems. They hold community trust and cultural authority that governments and mainstream organisations cannot replicate. Yet they are expected to carry extensive informal and unfunded responsibilities while competing for short-term program grants within systems they did not design.

Investment in ACCOs and funding transition to shift power and strengthen community-control

The Second Action Plan should establish provide for both immediate direct investment in ACCOs and a planned transition of funding, functions, and decision-making authority to ACCOs, aligned with Closing the Gap Priority Reform Two. This should include dedicated and proportionate funding for ACCOs that already have the capability or potential to respond to community needs, rather than relying solely on the transfer of existing programs and contracts from mainstream providers.

Transition must not be framed as ACCOs proving readiness while governments retain control. Departments must change commissioning, risk evaluation, information sharing, procurement, workforce settings, and regulatory practices as required. Progress should be measured by the scale and proportion of transfer of resources and authority.

Recommendation: *Develop and implement co-designed jurisdictional transition plans that:*

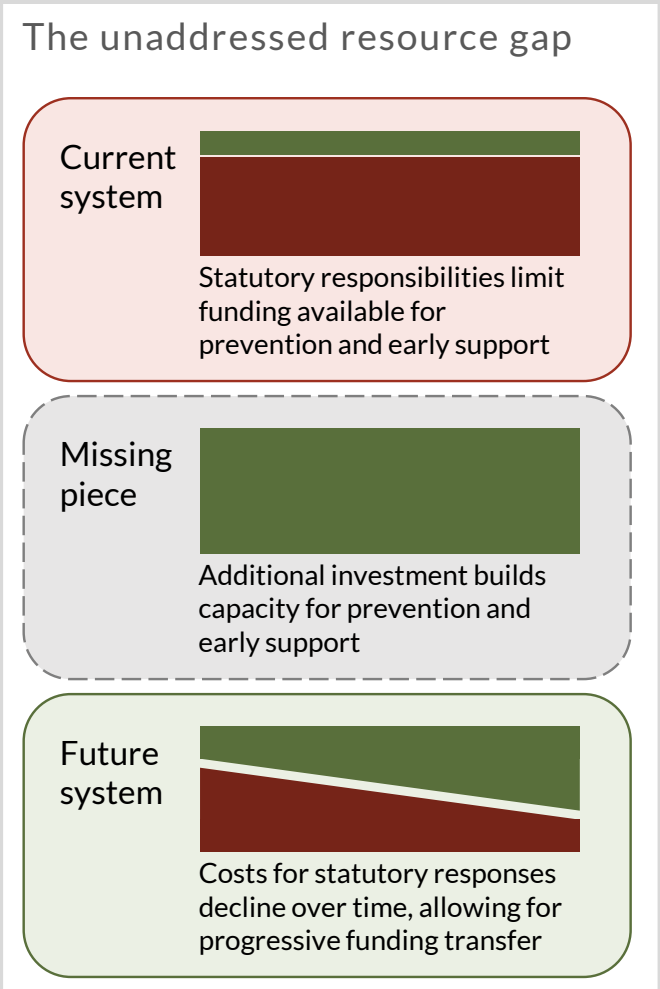
- *provide immediate, direct and dedicated investment in ACCOs, proportionate to community need and their existing or potential role in service delivery*
- *progressively transfer funding and authority to ACCOs in line with the National Child and Family Investment Strategy*
- *establish published jurisdictional targets, timelines and annual reporting on direct investment in ACCOs, the proportion of child and family services funding delivered through ACCOs, and the functions and authority transferred.*

Addressing gaps in resourcing

Additional investment is required to build capacity for prevention and early supports, to allow expenditure to shift away from statutory responses. The National Child and Family Investment Strategy recognises that tertiary demand will remain high during transition and that moving services to ACCOs is not cost neutral. However, it does not provide agreed funding standards, amounts and division of contributions, or jurisdictional implementation pathways.

Investment should include core organisational capability and capacity, not only direct service outputs. This includes fit-for-purpose infrastructure, digital systems, governance, accreditation, evaluation mechanisms, strong leadership, and workforce development. New ACCOs and service expansion should be supported where regional data demonstrates unmet need, with local communities determining appropriate models.

Recommendation: *Provide dedicated Commonwealth and jurisdictional investment in ACCO capability and capacity, including capital and digital infrastructure, governance, accreditation, evaluation mechanisms, leadership and workforce development, and fund the establishment or expansion of ACCOs where regional data and community priorities demonstrate unmet need.*



Funding models for the real cost of service delivery

Funding models should recognise the real cost and value of culture. Culturally grounded services require time and resourcing for relationships, cultural supervision, community engagement, kinship mapping, connection to Country, cultural plans, family-led decision-making, and responsibilities that extend beyond narrow program outputs. Remote delivery also requires travel, accommodation, outreach, infrastructure, and workforce costs. These are part of effective service delivery and should be explicitly costed.

Recommendation: *Agree and progressively implement in every jurisdiction a dedicated, reliable, and sustainable funding model for ACCOs delivering child and family services, drawing on the model in the Doing Things Differently report, including a stable funding floor, needs-based loadings, long-term contracts, consolidated funding streams, simplified reporting, and explicit recognition of cultural, remote, workforce, infrastructure, and organisational costs.*

Peak bodies

Strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak bodies are essential to collective advocacy, policy development, sector coordination, workforce planning, shared learning, and accountability.

Recommendation: *Establish or strengthen adequately resourced peak bodies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families in each jurisdiction. Peak bodies should be governed by a majority Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Board, which has strong governance and policy development and influencing capacity. Their establishment and development should be resourced by governments, but independently led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.*

Workforce

Workforce capacity is an enabling condition for achieving progress under Safe and Supported. Delegated authority, prevention services, cultural support, legal assistance, family healing, and local commissioning cannot be expanded without a stable and skilled workforce.

Identifying gaps and demand

Workforce planning should be led by communities to map current supply, future demand, regional gaps, and the competencies needed for different roles. It should recognise both professional qualifications and cultural authority, lived knowledge, community relationships, and practice expertise. Planning must also identify the corporate, legal, data, IT, finance and governance roles needed to sustain organisational growth, including access to workforce data at a regional level.

A synthesis of existing workforce evidence does not answer this need. Detailed scoping and modelling of ACCO workforce needs is required to ensure that investment can be planned to deliver on the commitments that governments have agreed.

Recommendation: *Commission a public, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led workforce demand analysis that models current and future ACCO child and family workforce requirements at national, jurisdictional, and local levels, including service coverage, regional gaps, workforce supply, required competencies, and governance capabilities needed for sector growth, and implement strategies responding to its findings.*

Training pathways to meet needs

Training and workforce development should be accessible in regional and remote communities and designed around community need. Pathways should include traineeships, recognition of prior learning, modular and work-based study, scholarships, mentoring, and leadership development.

ACCO-led registered training organisations and partnerships with education providers should be expanded. ACCO service providers should also be funded for local workforce development initiatives, such as on-the-job learning and leadership programs. Entry requirements should not unnecessarily privilege a single professional pathway where skills can be safely developed through supervised practice.

Recommendation: *Fund targeted, culturally safe pathways into and within the ACCO child and family services workforce, including vocational and tertiary education, recognition of prior learning, scholarships, paid and supported placements, modular and work-based training, mentoring, and leadership development.*

This should include dedicated funding for ACCOs to design and deliver local workforce development initiatives, alongside investment in ACCO-led training organisations and partnerships with education providers.

Pay parity and skills recognition

ACCOs routinely invest in developing staff who are then recruited into better-paid government or mainstream roles. Funding must enable pay parity, secure employment, and competitive conditions. It should also resource culturally safe supervision, manageable workloads, workforce wellbeing, and succession planning. Skills and cultural knowledge should be recognised and remunerated, including the additional cultural load carried by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff.

Recommendation: *Reform government funding, procurement, and contracting arrangements so that ACCOs can offer wages and employment conditions at least equivalent to comparable government roles, including minimum five-year contract terms, regional and remote loadings, recognition and remuneration of cultural expertise and lived*

experience, and funding for culturally safe supervision, workforce wellbeing, retention, leadership, and succession planning.

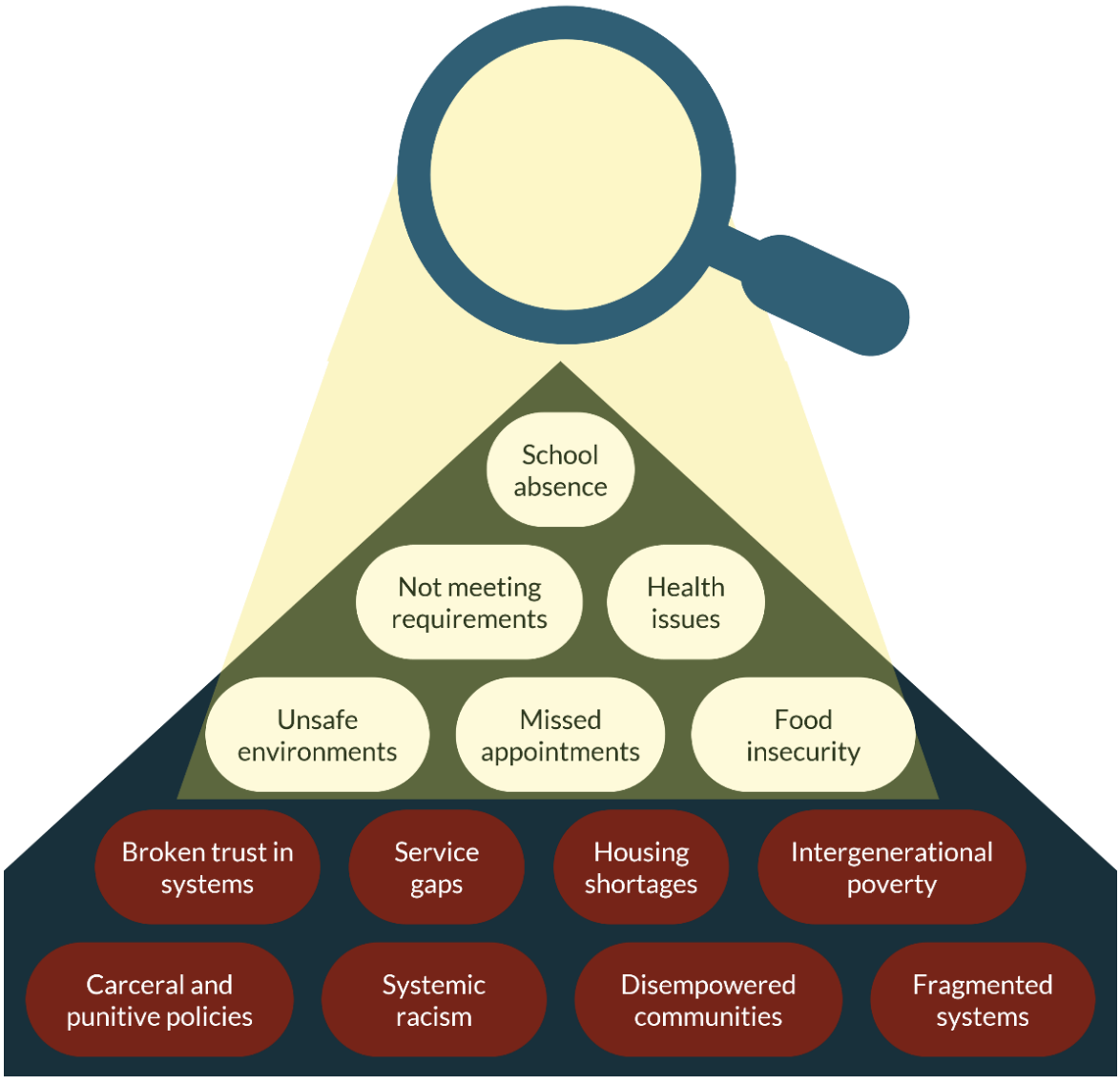
Supporting children and families

Current systems only see and engage with part of the picture – and often respond punitively. What appears to the statutory system as family dysfunction may reflect poverty, racism, inadequate services, inappropriate assessments, or systemic failure.

Early support and prevention

Families should be able to seek help before formal child protection contact and without fear that doing so will trigger punitive intervention. Funding should shift to prevention and early support, with self-referral pathways through trusted ACCOs. 'Early support' must mean early in a family's experience, not merely early in the tertiary system. Holistic support should follow the family, rather than requiring separate navigation of fragmented programs.

The statutory lens



Recommendation: *Set and publish jurisdictional targets and timelines for progressively shifting child and family services investment to ACCO-led prevention, early support, early years, and whole-of-family services, including self-referral pathways, with annual reporting on progress.*

Support throughout the system

Where statutory involvement occurs, families require consistent advocacy, practical assistance, therapeutic and diagnostic support, family-led decision-making, and clear pathways to restoration. Reunification planning and support should begin at the time of removal. Children and families should not lose access to support when a legal or administrative stage ends. ACCOs should be resourced to provide continuity and coordinate services across portfolios including child protection, health, education, disability, housing, and justice.

Recommendation: *Fund ACCOs to provide continuous, culturally safe, and whole-of-family support before, during, and after statutory involvement, including advocacy, practical assistance, assessment, and therapeutic services, family-led decision-making, cross-sector coordination and reunification support commencing at the point of removal and continuing for a sustained period after restoration.*

ATSICPP active efforts

The Child Placement Principle is a system reform framework, not only a placement hierarchy. All five elements (prevention, partnership, placement, participation and connection) must be implemented together. Active efforts require agencies to demonstrate prompt, purposeful, thorough, and culturally safe steps to prevent separation, support participation, identify kin, place children within family and community, maintain connection, and achieve restoration as soon as it is in the best interests of the child.

Recommendation: *Agree and implement nationally consistent active-efforts standards for all five elements of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle; embed those standards in legislation, policy, programs, processes, and practice; fully resource implementation; and establish public reporting, independent monitoring, and effective remedies where the standards are not met.*

Delegated authority

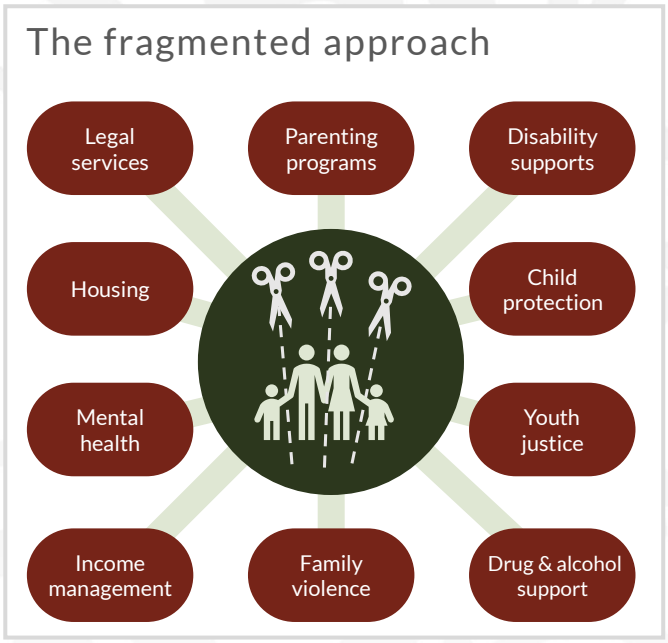
Delegated authority is a pathway towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander authority and decision-making in child protection and should be progressed in line with community ambitions in each jurisdiction. Legislative authority alone is insufficient. Implementation requires community design, workforce and infrastructure investment, access to information, sustainable funding, clear authority, and accountability to local communities. Models must reflect place and should not be limited to partial delegations that leave decisive control with departments.

Recommendation: *Require every state and territory to develop and implement, in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, fully costed plans to delegate authority for child protection, family preservation and reunification functions to ACCOs, in line with community aspirations.*

First Nations-led models tailored to place

The current system divides need into separate administrative categories, and each service responds to the part of the family that fits its mandate. No part of government is necessarily focused on family restoration.

This can result in the system treating family members separately, referring them between agencies, and requiring them to meet multiple thresholds. Family members are segmented into services for different needs, but insufficient attention to healing and reunification can entrench the separation so that children never return home.



The Second Action Plan should support locally designed models grounded in culture, kinship, community, and Country. Commissioning should begin with community priorities and strengths rather than predetermined government service specifications. Evidence should centre Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and community-defined outcomes. Two-way learning should enable effective local practice to influence national and jurisdictional systems without stripping it from its context.

Recommendation: *Develop, evaluate, and scale Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-led, place-based commissioning models that give communities authority to define needs, priorities, outcomes, service models, and provider selection, and support locally designed child and family wellbeing responses grounded in culture, kinship, community, and Country.*

Addressing social determinants

Preventing child removal and strengthening family wellbeing requires coordinated action across the systems that shape the conditions in which children and families live. Children's safety and wellbeing depend on stable housing, food, health care, disability support, education, income, safety from violence, culture, and connection. Support should address these needs without defining poverty or service exclusion as parental failure.

Housing systems must be recognised as core partners in preventing child removal, with coordinated action to address homelessness, overcrowding, housing insecurity, and the lack of safe and affordable housing that can prevent children remaining safely with their families or returning home following removal.

Education systems also have a critical responsibility to support safety and wellbeing through culturally safe learning environments, meaningful partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations, early identification of support needs, and proactive efforts to strengthen children's connection to school, culture, family and community.

Recommendation: *Establish whole-of-government responsibility for addressing the social, cultural, and structural determinants of child protection involvement, with named responsibilities and funded actions across housing, education and early childhood, health, disability, justice, family violence, food security and income support, and ensure poverty and service exclusion are not treated as parental failure.*

Housing: *Establish a positive duty on governments to provide practical assistance to secure safe, stable, and suitable housing where housing insecurity places a child at risk of removal or prevents reunification, and fund ACCO-led housing responses, working towards no child being removed solely because of poverty or housing instability.*

Education: *Require education departments, early childhood services, and schools to identify and implement actions with communities and ACCOs to provide early support, address systemic racism and inappropriate reporting to child protection, improve referral pathways, and enable ACCOs to deliver culturally safe support in educational settings.*

Health and infant removals: *Scale culturally safe, community-controlled supports for new and expectant parents, improve nationally consistent data on infant removals and supports provided to families, and implement best-practice approaches to prevent avoidable removals.*

Disability: *Implement a nationally consistent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-defined minimum dataset and culturally safe assessment tools and protocols for children and parents with disability or developmental delay in contact with child protection systems, and ensure relevant disability reforms address their needs.*

Connection to culture, healing and family restoration

Connection to culture is both a right and a protective factor. Children should have meaningful relationships with family, community, and Country; opportunities to learn language and cultural knowledge; and support to develop a strong and positive sense of identity.

Family healing and restoration must be available before, during and after statutory involvement, including access to health and therapeutic services for children impacted by abuse and removal, as well as survivor-led and multigenerational healing that recognises the continuing effects of past and present removal policies.

Recommendation: *Recognise cultural connection as a right and protective factor and invest in ACCO-led cultural connection, identity, mentoring, healing, and family restoration supports before, during, and after statutory involvement, including time on Country, language, and cultural knowledge, survivor-led and intergenerational healing, and sustained support before and after reunification.*

Introduce a priority category for government-funded health and therapeutic services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in or leaving out-of-home care, including subsidy to cover gap fees where public services are not available or appropriate.

Support for carers

Kinship carers, grandparents and community members provide extensive formal and informal care, often without adequate financial, practical or cultural support. Carer assessment and support should be culturally safe and should not create unnecessary barriers. Support should include respite, housing, legal assistance, training, therapeutic services, and coordination across health, aged care, and other services where relevant.

Recommendation: *Respond publicly to the completed reviews of carer and informal kinship-carer support and implement locally designed reforms with ACCOs, including culturally safe assessment, recruitment and retention, equitable financial and discretionary assistance, housing, respite, legal and therapeutic support, and*

appropriate resourcing for ACCOs to provide supports and payments directly to kinship, grandparent, community, and other carers.

Support for children in and leaving out-of-home care

Children in out-of-home care require comprehensive health, developmental, and social and emotional wellbeing support; independent avenues to report harm; meaningful participation in decisions; and sustained cultural connection. Care leavers should be supported toward ambitious goals, including secure housing, education, employment, health, relationships, and connection. Where governments take on parental roles, they should act as responsible parents and prevent exits from care into homelessness or justice involvement.

Recommendation: *Require governments to act as responsible corporate parents by guaranteeing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in care and care leavers priority access to health, dental, developmental, therapeutic, housing, education, employment, and cultural connection supports; funding ACCOs to deliver cultural and transition support; and reforming and increasing the Transition to Independent Living Allowance, including expanded eligibility and culturally relevant expenditure.*

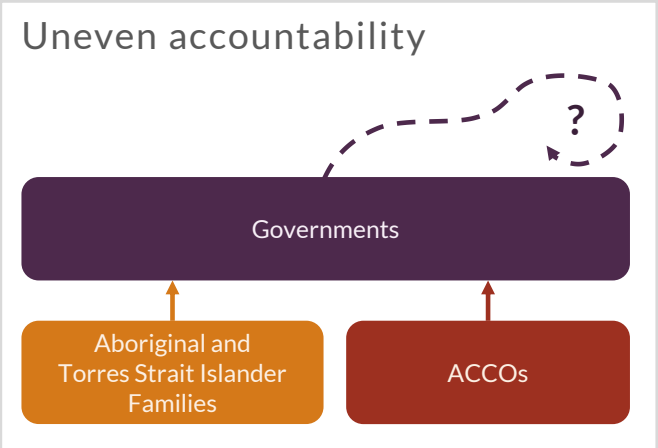
Legal supports

Children and families need early, accessible, and culturally safe legal assistance to understand and exercise their rights when at risk of, or in contact with, child protection systems. Children's representation must be distinct from representation for parents or carers, with sufficient providers to avoid conflicts. Assistance should extend to housing, family violence, discrimination, education, and other legal issues that affect family stability.

Recommendation: *Agree and implement jurisdictional priority actions arising from the Legal Supports Scoping Study to expand early, accessible and culturally safe legal assistance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families at risk of or in contact with child protection systems, including sufficient independent representation for children.*

Accountability for implementation

The existing system obscures the role of governments and mainstream systems in producing or failing to address structural harm. Families and ACCOs must demonstrate safety, compliance, and capacity to keep children safe, while governments are largely not held responsible for structural violence, under-funding, or broken commitments.



Transparent public reporting, communication, and independent review

The Second Action Plan should establish a public line of sight from commitments to implementation and outcomes. Reporting should identify what changed, not only what meetings occurred or projects commenced. It should disclose

expenditure, funding source, and progress against milestones. Where information is unavailable, the responsible agency should state when and how the gap will be addressed.

An independent review should be led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders and include community-led qualitative evidence. Findings and government responses should be public. Corrective action should occur during the Plan, with clear escalation through partnership governance and responsible ministers.

Recommendation: *Establish an annual public accountability framework covering every Second Action Plan commitment, including status against milestones, expenditure and funding source, delivery organisations, funding to ACCOs, regional progress, outcomes for children and families, reasons for delay, and time-bound corrective action. Reporting should be supplemented by publicly accessible jurisdictional dashboards and periodic independent, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-governed reviews, with published findings and government responses.*

Strong First Nations children's commissioners

Every jurisdiction should legislate and adequately resource an independent commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, consistent with the agreed minimum requirements. Commissioners should have powers to monitor systems, access information, hear directly from children, investigate systemic issues, report publicly, and require responses.

Recommendation: *Legislate, strengthen, and adequately resource in every jurisdiction a dedicated, independent commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people that meets nationally agreed minimum requirements and has powers to access information, hear directly from children, monitor systems, investigate systemic issues, report publicly, and require formal government responses.*

Community-defined measures of success

Measures of success should be developed with children, families, communities, and ACCOs. National consistency is important, but it must not erase local priorities. Measures should include outcomes for children, families, and communities, as well as systemic transformation.

Recommendation: *Co-design and publicly report nationally consistent and locally adaptable measures of success with children, families, communities, ACCOs, and peaks, combining quantitative data with community-led qualitative evidence.*

Whole-of-government responsibility and jurisdictional buy-in

Each state and territory and the Commonwealth should publish an implementation plan, co-designed with the local sector. Implementation plans do not require duplication of existing jurisdictional plans and action, but should describe how existing efforts are strengthened and built on with new investment and action to fully deliver Safe and Supported commitments. Commonwealth leadership should include using national agreements and investment to drive reform, enable prevention, and make jurisdictional performance visible.

Recommendation: *Require every government to formally respond to the Second Action Plan and publish a partnership-based implementation plan identifying the responsible minister and agency for each commitment, investment and funding source,*

implementation dates, timelines for transferring funding and authority, performance measures, First Nations governance arrangements, and publicly reportable outcomes, with central agency oversight and annual public updates and corrective action.

Self-determination and shifting the logic of the system

Self-determination must be understood as a collective right, consistent with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. In practice, it requires Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to exercise authority over the systems, institutions, resources and data affecting their children, families, and communities.

Many current systems remain grounded in Western and colonial assumptions about family, risk, expertise, and decision-making. They fragment families into programs, privilege statutory and professional authority over kinship and cultural authority, and require communities to fit government processes. The Second Action Plan should expressly seek to change this logic. ACCOs should lead systems transformation, and government organisations should be accountable for changing their own practice, structures, and culture.

Jurisdiction and regional-level decision-making and commissioning

Equal partnership requires ACCOs to influence and control investment and

Recommended partnership framework



commissioning, not simply bid to deliver government-designed programs. Jurisdictional and regional commissioning arrangements should give communities authority to define needs, outcomes, service models, and providers. Direct and dedicated funding should be available where it best supports community control, including Commonwealth investment.

Recommendation: *Establish and progressively scale jurisdictional and regional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-led commissioning arrangements that give communities and ACCOs authority over needs assessment, investment priorities, outcomes, service design, funding allocation, and provider selection, including access to direct and dedicated community-controlled funding.*

Local data sovereignty and access to data

Communities require access to timely, regional, and service-level data to direct work and investment. Data access agreements should be developed through local governance and reflect community decisions about collection, use, interpretation, storage, and publication. Data should support local planning and accountability, not surveillance.

Recommendation: *Establish and resource local and regional Indigenous data governance arrangements that guarantee communities and ACCOs timely access to relevant funding, service, and outcomes data and authority over its collection, custodianship, interpretation, use, sharing, storage, and publication.*

Sharing best practice and two-way learning

Safe and Supported should establish mechanisms for ACCOs and communities to share practice, learn from each other and influence government systems. Effective models should be supported to grow without being standardised in ways that remove cultural and local integrity. Governments and mainstream systems must also demonstrate what they have learned and changed through engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander practice.

Recommendation: *Establish and sustainably fund the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Support, building on the scoping work completed under the First Action Plan, with community-controlled governance and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge frameworks. The Centre should support ACCOs and communities to share practice, evidence, evaluation, and innovation; strengthen and grow effective models without compromising their cultural integrity or local context; undertake research, evidence translation, review and evaluation; and publicly document how governments and mainstream systems have changed their practice in response to First Nations knowledge and evidence.*

Voices of children and young people

The rights and voices of children and young people should sit across every action. Children should participate safely and meaningfully in governance, implementation, oversight, and the definition of success. Participation must be culturally safe, accessible, supported and paid where appropriate. It must include children in care, care leavers, children with disability, children in regional and remote communities, and those in contact with the justice system.

Recommendation: *Embed the rights and voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people across the governance, implementation, monitoring,*

evaluation, and definition of success of the Second Action Plan through culturally safe, accessible, supported, and appropriately remunerated participation, including children in care, care leavers, children with disability, children in regional and remote communities, and children involved with justice systems.

Shifting the logic of the system

Recommendation: *Make systems transformation and self-determination express objectives of the Second Action Plan.*

Area	Current system logic	Required system logic
Starting point	Statutory risk and government responsibility for managing it	Children's rights, family strength, culture, and community authority
Understanding of problems	Family deficits and parental capacity	Interaction between family needs, structural conditions, and systemic responses
Timing	Support after risk escalates	Support before crisis, throughout involvement, and through to restoration and healing
Unit of response	Individual child, parent, client, or program category	Child within family, kin, community, culture, and Country
Authority	Departments and statutory officers	Shared and progressively transferred to communities and ACCOs
Role of ACCOs	Contracted providers and cultural advisers	System leaders, commissioners, decisionmakers, and institutions of community governance
Culture	Additional component of a mainstream model	Foundation of safety, assessment, service design, and decision-making
Funding	Short-term purchase of specified outputs	Long-term investment in need, capability, and generational change
Data	Government-owned and interpreted evidence for monitoring and administration	Community-governed resource for self-determined planning, decisions, evaluation, and accountability
Evidence	Western systems presented as 'neutral'	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, being, and doing
Accountability	Families and providers accountable to government	Governments, systems, and providers accountable to communities
Success	Compliance, activity, and reduction of immediate risk	Children safe and thriving in family, community, and culture
Reform strategy	Improve or culturally adapt existing programs	Transform the system and transfer power

Consultation summaries

Sector consultations on priorities for the Safe and Supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Second Action Plan 2027–2031

Northern Territory

31 August 2026

Facilitators

- Catherine Liddle, SNAICC
- Rob McPhee, Safe and Supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership Group

Summary of key points

- There are big issues facing the NT, including:
    - Racism and pain from past and present policies
    - Governments not actioning the many recommendations from existing reports and inquiries
    - Incarceration of children
    - Government working in silos – and children falling off the radar when agencies don't coordinate.
- The NT has some very strong and effective ACCOs, which is a real strength. They are doing great work to support families and maintain culture, including working together to provide wrap-around services. But they need more support. There needs to be a much stronger focus on early intervention and family support, and investment in ACCOs to deliver these services.
- There are many effective programs, but there needs to be a stronger focus on integrating services for families.
- Funding to ACCOs is a critical issue. ACCOs need a sustainable, long-term funding model, and governments should set an ACCO funding target.
    - Governments need to prioritise investment in sector strengthening. Governments need to put in the resources to build ACCO capacity, to take on things like delegated authority.
    - This includes investment in infrastructure for ACCOs (governments use lack of infrastructure as an excuse not to fund services).
- The Commonwealth needs to play a leadership role in setting a national standard for the implementation of ATSICPP (all 5 elements) across the country, with independent monitoring. This includes holding the NT government accountable.

- There was strong agreement that workforce is a core issue that needs to be addressed in the Second Action Plan, including addressing the unique workforce needs of ACCOs. This includes:
    - a need for ACCO-led training, or support to access other training
    - a focus on community needs rather than over-emphasis on social work qualifications
    - longer-term funding contracts for ACCOs (because they often invest in developing their staff, who are then lost to government roles because they can only be employed on short-term contracts).
- There is a strong need to address the social determinants of child protection involvement, including food security, housing and access to services – especially in remote communities.
- Other priorities include:
    - Need for ACCO-led child and family services, rather than delivering programs within systems designed by government
    - A strong voice / peak body for NT children and families
    - Empowering communities to pass on knowledge and culture, and two-way learning
    - Supports for men who face barriers and/or want support with their parenting
    - Strengthening family-led decision-making in the NT
    - Need for Delegated Authority in the NT
    - Community access to useful data and data sovereignty.

South Australia

1 September 2026

Facilitators

- John Burton, SNAICC
- Amy Cleland, Safe and Supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership Group

Summary of key points

- There has not been enough progress in SA under the First Action Plan and existing actions in the plan still need to be addressed in the Second Action Plan.
- There was strong agreement that much stronger accountability is needed under the Second Action Plan. There needs to be consequences for governments when they don't follow through on their commitments or provide ACCOs with the resources they need. This includes the Commonwealth holding states accountable.
- Early intervention and prevention: there needs to be a much stronger focus on early supports for families to prevent child protection involvement, and ACCOs need to be funded to deliver these services.
- Funding is needed to grow the ACCO sector. This should be proportionate to need (based on child protection involvement, rather than the Aboriginal population in SA). Funding should be flexible, outcomes-based and relational. Current funding requirements are too stringent and don't allow ACCOs to develop their workforce or adequately meet community needs.
- Funding should be independent of departments (line agencies) to allow ACCOs and governments to work in genuine partnership without the power imbalance of current roles (i.e. government working as both service provider, funding administrator, and regulator). ACCOs must be involved in defining outcomes and designing programs and measurements – as well as what this overall shift could look like in each jurisdiction.
- Other departments– including education – need to also take responsibility for preventing removals and addressing racism. This includes child protection pushing back on racism in schools – e.g. children in SA are being reported to child protection for accessing free school breakfast programs.
- There needs to be more coordination and consistency for families across child protection offices, including in application of the ATSICPP. Government needs to learn from community ways of doing things (collective, holistic, supportive).
- Government needs to take more responsibility for children exiting care, including reunification supports for families that commence immediately after removal.
- Lack of housing is a huge barrier that needs to be addressed to prevent child protection involvement, support reunifications and prevent kids exiting care into homelessness.
- ACCOs' specific workforce needs must continue to be a focus.

- Other priorities include: useful, usable data for ACCOs; influencing public narratives; support for kinship carers; and ACCOs being supported to deliver Family Group Conferencing.

Tasmania

4 September 2026

Facilitators

- John Burton, SNAICC
- Wendy Moore, Safe and Supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership Group

Summary of key points

Greater Aboriginal-led decision-making

- Relational work is required to translate national commitments into genuine shared decision-making, funding control, and delegated authority at the local level. That is not just about changing the law but changing the processes and relational approach.
- Reforms and priorities at the national level are not always incorporated into state and territory reforms in practice, and knowledge sharing and best practice does not influence processes.

System communication, accountability and consultation

- Policy and process changes are not consistently informed by – or communicated to – communities, ACCOs, or frontline staff.
- At the state level, there are often still big disconnects between what is happening at a policy level versus what is happening practically on the ground.

Early intervention and prevention

- Investment is inadequate and families often only come to attention of supports once they have entered the child protection system.
- ACCOs need to be able to support families flexibly at every step of the journey – ideally through a consistent person who can build trust and bring in other expertise as required. Families should not have to be formally involved with the system before needs can be identified and supports can be provided.

Aboriginal ways of being, doing and measuring success

- Not well reflected in child protection practice, contributing to misunderstandings, escalation and poorer outcomes for families.
- Need for greater education for child protection workers to change their practice and develop culturally safe approaches.

Investment in ACCOs, legal supports and carer development

- Building the workforce and carers is an urgent priority. Support is needed for informal care arrangements, carer recruitment, and culturally safe services. The Child Placement Principle cannot be applied if people are not supported to become carers.

- Children who don't have strong connections to culture and community need someone to be there for them and support that connection. That can turn their whole attitude and life around. But work to facilitate those connections requires resourcing, time, and staff for ACCOs.
- Children require their own legal representation, which means there has to be more than one provider to avoid conflicts of interest.

Social determinants

- Stronger relationships with ACCOs are needed across services to address policy and service silos and allow ACCOs to help families access what they need.
- Prevention and responses to family violence should draw on multi-sector expertise to support families and children caught between violence, child protection, and factors such as lack of housing.
- Schools receive funding based on the number of Aboriginal children enrolled but there's no mechanism to report on how they used that funding. Aboriginal Liaison officers need to be resourced to work with both teachers and students to improve cultural safety.
- Schools need to be more receptive to work ACCOs are doing with disengaged students and engage in two-way learning about how alternative modes of education can succeed.
- Ashley Youth Detention Centre is still open and is a site of serious historical abuse for many families. Children in contact with the justice system can be held on remand simply because they do not have somewhere else to go.

New South Wales

7 September 2026

Facilitators

- John Burton, SNAICC
- John Leha, Safe and Supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership Group

Summary of key points

- Children are still not being heard in systems or policy contexts. This work needs to meaningfully centre their voices.

Investment and data

- Investment should focus on identified needs informed by better data and objective evidence, including the need for and benefit of prevention and early intervention, and realistic expectations of resourcing required for lived-experience leadership.
- Decision-making should be equitable and transparent, not just based on the loudest voices or people in the room. This includes greater flexibility, visibility, and control over commissioning, ideally through established foundations that can be built on and adapted to individual communities.
- All data collected and collated, whether by communities or others, should be done so for the benefit of communities and with communities deciding how it is used.
- Better monitoring and evaluation of progress is needed throughout the duration of the plan to show what actions are progressing and how, as well as what is working and what is not working.

Workforce

- Workforce development requires more than just investment, including:
    - support and compliance from non-Indigenous organisations
    - consideration of how training requirements and pathways could support greater recruitment of Aboriginal staff
    - identification of required skillsets for different roles and which skills are required to commence a role versus those that can be developed via modules or staggered training on the job
    - the ability to work differently, creatively, and flexibly.
- The increasing administrative burden on ACCOs needs to be balanced with client-facing work and the importance of building trust and relationships with families.

System and social determinants

- Targeted, early intervention and self-referral pathways are needed for families to receive support before formal system contact.

- The Plan should recognise that the impacts of child removal don't end with the child but continue across families, communities, and descendants. This requires a commitment to survivor-led and multi-generational healing that addresses unresolved trauma and structural conditions created by removal policies.
- An important part of the work is rebuilding families and supporting children to have a positive view of their culture and community and to know that they are loved. This includes strong mentoring and support, being able to spend time on Country and connect with community, and developing an understanding of the history and impacts of colonisation.
- Social determinants should be understood as underpinning the rest of the actions in the Plan.

Western Australia

10 September 2026

Facilitators

- John Burton, SNAICC
- Karl Williamson, Safe and Supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership Group
- Barbara Henry, Safe and Supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership Group

Summary of key points

Funding and commissioning

- Funding needs to shift to whole-of-family responses and investment in prevention, early intervention, and early years, with mechanisms to look at whole-of-government funding inputs.
- Funding decisions should recognise the benefit of holistic, Aboriginal-led support and quantify what resourcing is actually required to deliver that.
- Services should be Aboriginal designed. Communities need to be involved earlier in commissioning to design and shape services, not just deliver them.

Workforce, community capacity-building, and evaluation

- A strategic workforce plan is required to identify required skills and how to build those skills, as well as support for ACCOs to be established and expanded in identified gaps.
- Community capacity building is needed, including infrastructure and availability of qualifications relevant to community need.
- Communities are already doing unrecognised work like providing safe spaces and informal care that isn't resourced.
- Better access to data at a regional level is needed to allow ACCOs to assess need in their area and understand how families are interacting with services. Monitoring and evaluation tools also need to be built into grants and designed to accurately measure success, as defined by communities.
- ACCOs can have high administrative burdens around securing and reporting on a number of discreet contracts, as well as governance and accreditation.
    - Long-term funding that is consolidated across programs would allow ACCOs to deepen expertise and specialise in delivery areas.

Holistic and cultural approach and social determinants

- All of the work should be based on a foundation of culture and aligned with Aboriginal ways of doing and community expectations. Future planning is also needed for how all

children will be supported to remain connected to culture, inherit traditional knowledge, and understand their identity.

- Families are segmented and siloed into different services (e.g. for perpetrators, victims, and children), but a lack of family reunification and healing often means that that separation is entrenched and children never come home.
    - A culturally-informed model would resource services to support the whole family.
    - More work also needs to be done to identify and address support gaps for care leavers.
- Collaboration is needed across departments and services, as well as across the social determinants of safety and wellbeing and basic essentials like living conditions and food security.
    - The Education Department and schools should play a larger role in sharing data, connecting children to services, and facilitating screening and diagnosis.
    - Every child has a right to health. There are currently gaps in both identifying needs and responding to them.
- Governments also need to take a holistic approach to Safe and Supported. The success of the Second Action Plan will depend on transforming the entire system, rather than taking actions in isolation or retrofitting existing initiatives to fit commitments.

Key missing pieces in Western Australia

- A state peak body for children and families
- An Aboriginal children's commissioner.

Queensland

15 September 2026

Facilitators

- John Burton, SNAICC
- Murray Benton, QATSICPP

Summary of key points

Prevention, capability, and authority

- Queensland has a strong opportunity to focus on prevention and early intervention. This should be a clear action or build on existing actions. For example, it could be drawn out as part of active efforts to implement the child placement principle. Substantial investment is required.
- Delegated authority is not necessarily implemented to the full extent of the legislation, particularly in regional and remote areas. It must be fully implemented in line with shared decision-making to be fully evaluated.
- A holistic approach to social determinants is required to encompass the things that help families thrive. The blueprint of practice emerging in the child and family sector (e.g. delegated authority and active efforts) should also be transferred to other areas like youth justice.
- A national approach is required to build a sustainable workforce with the training and cultural authority to deliver the responses families need. System reform will not succeed without workforce capacity.
- More is required in therapeutic, diagnostic, healing, and legal supports, as well as safe and trusted avenues for children to report harm.

Funding, data, monitoring, and accountability

- Data must be built to identify future investment needs and service gaps while maintaining self-determination. It should allow ACCOs and communities to determine needs, understand pathways through the system, and inform decisions at a local level.
- The impact and effectiveness of Safe and Supported isn't always clear at a jurisdictional level. ACCOs need better visibility, such as public report cards to assess progress at regional and state levels.
- We need a laser focus on the things we're trying to achieve and clear information on government action, including tangible numbers for funding. But outcomes for children and families must be central.
- We need to bring communities along on the journey of data sovereignty. They should be empowered and resourced to determine the data story and narrative that they want to tell, rather than collecting and organising data according only to established

reporting mechanisms. Reporting systems don't currently capture the great work happening on the ground or the stories of change.

Australian Capital Territory

17 September 2026

Facilitator

- John Burton, SNAICC

Summary of key points

- There is the need for a stronger focus on self-determination, including the genuine transfer of decision-making authority to Aboriginal communities.
    - There is concern that government consultation processes do not always provide meaningful opportunities for Aboriginal communities to influence policy and decision-making, particularly where key decisions have already been made.
    - Delegated authority and community-led commissioning have not progressed.
    - There is concern that not all Aboriginal communities are represented or consulted – and that decisions do not always reflect the needs and priorities identified by communities.
- There is a need for further progress to towards Indigenous Data Sovereignty, including greater Aboriginal ownership and control of data.
    - Current approaches focus on developing 'indicators' to monitor progress, rather than addressing the underlying issues of who owns and controls the data.
    - There is limited transparency on the type of data that is collected, how it is used and who has access to it. There is concern that the data that is collected is not being used consistently to inform policy development and service delivery.
    - There are concerns about where Aboriginal expenditure goes and what outcomes are achieved.
- There was a strong call out for needs-based, flexible, long-term funding for ACCOs.
    - Current funding models can undermine the workforce stability, organisational capability and long-term planning.
    - Funding models often prioritise service delivery without accounting for the infrastructure, governance, workforce, and organisational capability required to sustain services.
    - The discontinuation of the IMR funding was highlighted as an example of poor funding models.
- There is a need to shift from tertiary crisis-driven responses, to prevention, early intervention and family supports.
    - Piecemeal funding of individual services and programs make it difficult for ACCOs to provide holistic, wrap around support to children and families.

    - ACCOs have existing models of holistic, wrap around support and require adequate, sustained resourcing to deliver and expand this work.
- Needs to be greater evidence that active efforts are being made to implement the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle
    - Whilst Governments have committed to implementing the Child Placement Principle, there are concerns about whether these commitments are translated into practice.
    - ACCOs and communities need to have stronger involvement in the decision making about Aboriginal children and young people involved in the child protection system.
- There is a need for greater investment in the ACCO workforce
    - Recruitment and retention can be challenging for ACCOs, particularly where they are competing with government and mainstream organisations for Aboriginal staff.
    - Consideration could be given to workforce benchmarks that reflect the Aboriginal population and the workforce required to meet community need.
- There needs to be stronger collaboration across health, education, child protection and family services.
    - Siloed government systems can create barriers to providing support services to children and families.
    - There are insufficient communication and feedback loops between services, organisations, government departments and jurisdictions
    - Stronger mechanisms are needed to support information sharing, collaboration and coordinated responses across sectors.

Victoria

28 September 2026

Facilitators

- Catherine Liddle, SNAICC
- Muriel Bamblett, Safe and Supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership Group

Summary of key points

- There is a need for long-term investment in ACCOs to deliver services to children and their families
    - There is a need to strengthen the connection between early childhood care, education, health and family support services – the siloed approaches of the systems create further barriers.
    - Early intervention and prevention services provided in the early years are critical to reducing the number of children entering out-of-home care.
- Health and wellbeing are fundamental to improving the outcomes for Aboriginal children in care
    - All children in care deserve access to healthcare and wellbeing services that focus on physical health, social and emotional wellbeing, identity and culture.
    - Pathways to good health was highlighted as important and successful program for improving access to care in Victoria.
    - The current systems do not adequately capture qualitative information about children's identity, culture and emotional wellbeing.
- There is an ongoing need to support the transition of funding from mainstream services to ACCOs
    - This means avoiding the 'stop/start' approach to funding and procurement – and ensuring that organisations have the time and capacity to build sustainable services.
    - Funding and resourcing must recognise the broader organisational and service requirements of ACCOs.
- Workforce shortages are an issue across all ACCO services
    - Investment into workforces requires more than recruitment, need to look at organisational development, leadership, capability, workforce retention and training.
    - Training pathways can be difficult to access. VACCHO highlighted the success of its RTO, and the potential to expand training opportunities across the sector.
- There is the need for better data systems and stronger accountability.
    - Whilst quantitative data is important, there are significant gaps in qualitative data that is collected – particularly around identity, culture and wellbeing.

    - There is a need to map out what data is currently being collected to help identify the gaps and strengthen data sovereignty and sharing.
- There is a need for nationally consistent efforts to implement the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle
    - There is concern about the lack of compliance and implementation across the country.
    - Need for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commissioner for children and young people to be legislated in all jurisdictions
- Housing and homelessness were identified as a major cross-cutting issue that impacts Aboriginal children and families
    - Rates of homelessness amongst Aboriginal children and young people are rising in Victoria
    - There is a concern for the children who fall between the systems and struggle to access the appropriate support.
    - There is an opportunity for homelessness services and pathways to intervene before children, and young people reach crisis point.
- There was a call for increased cross-system collaboration
    - Current systems affecting Aboriginal children and families cannot be addressed independently.

National Workshop

29 September 2026

Facilitator

- Rob McPhee, Safe and Supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership Group

The national workshop facilitated strong, productive discussion on key priorities for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Second Action Plan.

Top themes

Sense of urgency: Participants repeatedly emphasised that communities have been providing advice and strong efforts towards reforms for years, yet tangible improvements for children and families remain limited and some outcomes are worsening.

Structural barriers: Siloed systems, inadequate and inequitable funding, poor access to data, and limited decision-making authority for community-controlled organisations were identified as ongoing barriers to reform.

Lack of confidence in governments: Participants expressed concern that jurisdictions are not genuinely committed to implementing agreed reforms and that existing plans have not gained sufficient traction in practice.

Calls for stronger accountability: There was a strong call for clearer accountability for governments, particularly where commitments are not delivered and or are going backwards.

Genuine self-determination: Participants identified that child and family systems still operate from Western foundations and that, unless these underlying system logics change, reforms will struggle to achieve meaningful outcomes. This included highlighting that First Nations peoples have effective, holistic ways of supporting children and families, but communities are not empowered to centre and resource those strengths.

Agreed key priorities

ACCOs

- Investment in ACCOs and funding transition to strengthen community-control and shift power (aligned with Closing the Gap Priority Reforms)
- Addressing gaps in resourcing
- Funding models for the real cost of service delivery, including cost of culture and remote services
- Strong peak bodies for children and families in each jurisdiction

Growing the workforce

- Identifying gaps and demand
- Training pathways to meet needs
- Pay parity and skills recognition

Supporting children and families

- First Nations models tailored to place
- Early support & prevention
- Addressing social determinants including housing and education
- Delegated authority
- ATSICPP active efforts
- Connection to culture, healing and family restoration
- Support for carers
- Support for children in and leaving out of home care
- Legal supports

Accountability for implementation

- Transparent public reporting, evaluation, and communication – including on progress, funding, and implementation
- Independent review, shared publicly
- Strong First Nations children's commissioners
- Community-defined measures of success, including data and outcomes that are shared publicly
- Whole-of-government responsibility
- Strengthening state and territory buy-in

Self-determination and shifting the logic of the system

- Jurisdiction-level decision-making & commissioning
- Local data sovereignty and access to data
- Best practice and two-way learning
- Rights of children and young people

Discussion of priorities

ACCOs

- When we talk about capacity building, we need to be careful that we don't frame the transition as ACCOs needing to demonstrate that they're ready for reform. There also needs to be system readiness on the government side to enable community control. Success requires a measurable transfer of resources, authority, and decision-making to the community-controlled sector.
- Investment and ongoing funding must provide for new ways of working and transforming the system, rather than just shifting existing program funding to ACCOs.
- The community-controlled sector needs greater autonomy over funding and commissioning to direct funds to identified needs, supported by local data sovereignty.
- States and territories are still stuck at the crisis end of the system and many people feel hopeless. The Commonwealth has the opportunity to unlock broader systems change by providing new investment in areas such as infrastructure, prevention, and

early supports. Increased investment through funding agreements could facilitate state and territory reforms away from statutory responses.

- Investment is needed in community capacity building and ACCO strategic organisational development, including infrastructure, workforce planning, and long-term funding to deepen expertise.
- Community access to regional data is required to assess need and establish and expand ACCOs in identified gaps.
- Greater recognition of the role ACCOs play in supporting children and families both inside and outside of formal performance measures and outcomes is required.
- Investment must be focused on identified needs – particularly around prevention and early intervention and the funding models that recognise the benefit, need, and real cost of prevention.
- Funding must be long-term, sustainable, equitable, and needs based to support generational change.
- Funding decisions must recognise the benefit of holistic, First Nations-led support and the real cost of delivery, including the cost of culture.
- First Nations-designed services must be supported by community-led commissioning with streamlined funding and reporting.
- Investment, funding, and reforms must be connected and long-term instead of piecemeal, as well as aligned with clear targets, capacity, infrastructure, and workforce growth. Investigate pooled funding between the Commonwealth and jurisdictions to reduce fragmentation and cost-shifting.
- All states and territories require a strong peak body for children and families that is empowered to work with communities, ACCOs, the sector, and governments.

Growing the workforce

- Investment in leadership infrastructure is required to support greater responsibility and authority, including retention, culturally safe supervision, workforce wellbeing, and leadership pathways.
- The workforce must be grown in a way that honours First Nations ways of working with children and families.
- A strategic workforce plan is necessary to identify required skills and provide training and qualifications relevant to needs.
- Transferring delegated authority and funding cannot succeed without parallel workforce growth based on identified needs and appropriate training pathways.
- Pathways should also be available for non-Indigenous staff to transfer from mainstream services alongside funding to provide culturally safe support to ACCOs in areas like legal, IT, and other technical roles.
- Pay parity is needed to ensure that ACCOs do not lose essential skills and leadership to government and NGO recruitment.

Supporting children and families

- Shift funding to prevention, early support, early years, and whole-of-family responses. Not just early in the tertiary system.
- Family healing and restoration must be available before system contact and consistently available throughout, including a focus on reunification that commences at the same time as removal.
- Need to emphasise that only ACCOs have the standing in communities to effectively support families and prevent children from entering the system.
- We need culturally safe assessment frameworks and protocols that recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families within the context of family, kinship, culture, community and Country.
- Formal assessments and diagnosis should be available and accessible before children commence school.
- ACCOs should be supported with long-term investment to provide holistic, whole-of-family early support and responses across child protection, health, education, and family support. The Improving Multidisciplinary Responses program should be continued.
- Safe and Supported should align to Closing the Gap and incorporate serious ambition to achieve those outcomes, such as Year 12 completion.
- Collaboration across portfolios is required to address social determinants and connect families to services.
- These determinants should also be understood as interconnected with social determinants of justice system involvement and cultural determinants of health.
- Delegated authority remains a major focus. Infrastructure, workforce, and funding are all critical to success.
- National standards are required for all five elements of the Child Placement Principle, as well as stronger accountability for implementation.
- The Second Action Plan must provide for a greater focus on family reunification, healing, and support after leaving care, including planning and support for children to remain connected to culture and identity and to inherit traditional knowledge.
- Aboriginal children should not be adopted out of their communities.
- Kinship carers and informal care provided by community require greater support.
- Grandparents are often carers and there may be opportunities to provide greater support across aged care and family services.
- We need to have higher aspirations for young people leaving out of home care and provide them with the resources and opportunities to succeed.
- Legal supports for children must be understood as distinct from legal supports for caregivers.

Accountability for implementation

- Governments need to be structurally held accountable for their commitments through avenues such as jurisdictional governance arrangements, implementation plans, public reporting, KPIs, tied funding, and independent reviews.
- Clear reporting on lessons from the First Action Plan is required.
- Performance indicators for Safe and Supported must be developed in collaboration with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and consistent across the country.
- Report cards to leaders under the Partnership Agreement should be public and specify what funding is provided by the Commonwealth and what is provided by jurisdictions, as well as how it is implemented and what proportion of services are delivered by ACCOs.
- Mechanisms must also be created to assess whole-of-government funding inputs against community-defined measures of success.
- The Second Action Plan needs to commence with clear commitments set out alongside how they will be monitored. Each jurisdiction should provide a formal response to Safe and Supported, including:
    - Identifying the responsible government and agency for each action; timelines for transferring authority and funding, investment, and other actions; implementation dates; KPIs; and publicly reportable outcomes.
    - First Nations governance mechanisms and partnership agreements replicated at the jurisdictional level and adapted in collaboration with local ACCOs.
- Evaluation must be clear, meaningful, and outline exactly what is needed.
- We need to change the narrative to recognise that ACCOs keep children in families and communities. The Second Action Plan should be promoted with a First Nations-led comms and educational strategy, and to showcase the strengths of ACCOs and communities.
- All states and territories require strong First Nations commissioners in line with the Minimum Requirements.
- We need to strengthen intersectoral and intergovernmental collaboration to support whole-of-system reform.
- 'In principle' support from governments is not enough. The community-led sector is investing substantial time, effort, good will, and determination to see Safe and Supported succeed. Governments must commit the same.
- It needs to be clear what is different about the Second Action Plan and how that will drive the change that the First Action Plan could not.

Self-determination and shifting the logic of the system

- Self-determination must be understood as outlined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, rather than simply as autonomy.

- Western systems logic needs to be fundamentally transformed to accommodate First Nations-led models and culturally grounded approaches.
- Transfer of jurisdiction is a key part of shifting the colonial load. It addresses the imposition of non-Indigenous models, frameworks, and decision-making that don't fit, don't work, and contribute unique pressures to First Nations practitioners and organisations.
- Equal partnership requires ACCOs to be on the same footing as departments, including dedicated, directly appropriated community-controlled funding, including direct funding from the Commonwealth where relevant.
- Shared decision-making must mean that communities have a say in who is at the table, rather than governments choosing who to work with.
- The community-controlled sector needs to be able to access and use data to direct work under all actions and appropriately target investment based on an evidence-informed understanding of what is happening in communities.
- Actions under the Second Action Plan must develop meaningful community feedback loops at local, jurisdictional and national levels.
- All work under the Second Action Plan must be based on a foundation of culture and aligned with First Nations ways of doing and community expectations, including taking a holistic approach to Safe and Supported to comprehensively transform the system.
- Social and emotional wellbeing (SEWB) should be integrated throughout the Plan, including funding and evaluation.
- Services cannot be said to be community-led if communities are still expected to accommodate government's needs and expectations in service design.
- ACCOs must lead systems transformation to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander strengths and cultural authority inform practice, e.g. kinship systems and decision-making processes.
- Governments must transform the way they work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Closing the Gap Priority Reform 3) and Commonwealth leadership is required where jurisdictions do not engage.
- The role of children and young people must sit across the Plan and be embedded in consultation, implementation, monitoring, and defining success.
- Children and families need to be at the centre of decision making.
- Communities must be supported to pass on cultural knowledge.