



Safe and well

Supporting families, protecting children

The Government of South Australia's
strategy for keeping families
and children safe and well



Government
of South Australia



Readers are asked to note that references in this report to Aboriginal children, families and communities refer to people who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

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Foreword

Our government is committed to delivering high quality services to keep vulnerable children and families safe and well.

This strategy outlines the actions this government is taking to support families at risk of entering the child protection system, protect children from harm when they come into care, and invest in young people to leave care with opportunities for a bright future.

We have prepared this strategy to share our vision for the service system - a connected system that ensures the right support is available to children and families at the right time. It reflects the collective efforts already underway across government to reform the child protection system and highlights our priorities going forward.

Our focus so far has been on establishing strong foundations for the system with a standalone Department for Child Protection, a new legislative framework and a rigorous evidence base to inform our work going forward.

We have implemented widespread changes following a number of Royal Commissions, inquiries and reviews. From this we are learning what needs to be done to create a system that best supports safe and positive futures for children and young people.

We acknowledge the significant achievements across government, and of our non-government partners and local communities, who have assisted in getting to where we are today. Continuing to work together will be essential in delivering the actions outlined in this strategy, and ensuring government agencies and service providers are collaborating to prevent families escalating through the child protection system.

Importantly, we must shift the way we work with Aboriginal families and children to reduce overrepresentation in all parts of the system. This includes engaging Aboriginal people, who have the knowledge and experience to make the best decisions about care for their children.

Our work supports families who need help, keeps vulnerable children safe from harm and provides stable and loving care for children who can no longer live safely with their parents. At the centre of this, we need to value the voices of the children and young people.

This strategy is our commitment to supporting vulnerable families, protecting children and young people, and investing in their future to keep them safe and well.

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A strategy to keep families and children safe and well

Our vision: South Australia is a state where vulnerable families with children are supported, and where children are safe, valued and look forward to a bright future.

Child protection is a key priority of the South Australian Government. This strategy sets out how the Government of South Australia will continue to progress reform with a coordinated and considered approach to keep vulnerable families with children safe and well.

Our challenges are not unique. Like other jurisdictions across Australia, we are facing the same complexity of issues and growing demand for services. Multiple Royal Commissions and inquiries have shaped our reform efforts to date. In 2016, the Child Protection Systems Royal Commission released its report, 'The Life They Deserve'. This report detailed findings from a comprehensive investigation into South Australia's child protection system, including the policies, practices and structures in place for children and young people at risk of harm.

In 2017, the Final Report of the Commonwealth Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse was released. It highlighted serious failings in the way institutions across Australia protect children and young people, and the ways they deal with reports of abuse when they occur.

Findings of both the Commonwealth and State Royal Commissions stressed the need for a system that is better equipped to protect children and young people from harm and to support vulnerable families. Collectively these two Royal Commissions delivered 512¹ recommendations for the State Government to implement. We will continue to acknowledge the intention of each of these recommendations and are moving towards a more holistic approach to reform. An approach that takes a contemporary view of child protection as a whole-of-government system with collective responsibility for the safety and wellbeing of children and young people.

This strategy provides the framework for all government agencies, non-government partners and the community to understand how we will

organise and prioritise what we will do over the next three years to keep vulnerable children and families safe and well. It outlines our extensive whole-of-government effort as part of a coordinated program of system level reform across three areas of focus:

Supporting

We will provide earlier, intensive, targeted support to families with multiple and complex needs, to reduce incidents of child abuse and neglect and prevent children entering the child protection system in the first place.

Protecting

We will protect children from harm, including when they come into care. We will deliver trauma-responsive, development-focused services designed to meet the individual needs of children and young people in care, with an emphasis on family based care, reunification and permanency.

Investing

We will invest in children and young people in care and their transition from care to support them to lead productive lives as adults, and help to break intergenerational contact with the child protection system.

These focus areas are supported by a **strong system** where all agencies working with vulnerable children and families are trauma-informed.

We can learn much from the experiences of our children and families, the State and Commonwealth Royal Commissions, and from one another. Together we will create a system that reflects the aspirations we have for South Australian children and families to be safe and well.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle is a central part of the strategy and the child protection system. The principle recognises Aboriginal children's rights to maintain connections to family, community, culture and country. We acknowledge that Aboriginal families are currently overrepresented in the child protection system and that past government policies and practices in this space have had devastating impacts and caused lasting trauma. Aboriginal people have the knowledge and experience to make the best decisions regarding Aboriginal children. All actions in this strategy are to be taken in a way that upholds all elements of the Principle.

This strategy also recognises the importance of identification as a precursor to implementation of the Principle.

The five elements include:

Prevention – protecting each Aboriginal child's right to grow up in family, community and culture

Participation – supporting Aboriginal children, young people, families and communities to participate in decision-making

Partnership – ensuring the participation of Aboriginal community representatives in service design, delivery and decision-making

Placement – prioritising the placement of Aboriginal children in care in accordance with the established placement hierarchy

Connection – supporting Aboriginal children to maintain connections to family, community and culture.





Supporting

Supporting

We want all South Australian families to be able to provide their children with a safe and healthy environment in which they can thrive and reach their potential.

In recent years, the number of notifications to the Child Abuse Report Line has continued to climb at a concerning rate, with over 78,000 notifications made in 2018-19.

Many of the families involved with the child protection system have multiple and complex needs. Domestic and family violence is the most common issue for these families, with substance misuse and mental health issues also showing up as being significant factors in notifications and instances of children entering care. Intergenerational trauma, disability, housing, unemployment, criminal and legal matters also contribute to the complexity of the environment in which families are caring for their children.

Community awareness about the impacts of domestic and family violence continues to grow and our expectations and understanding about raising children safely have shifted.

Research has also revealed that by the age of 10, one in three children in South Australia will have been the subject of a notification to the Department for Child Protection. For Aboriginal children, this rate is even higher.

To respond to the current challenges facing the child protection system and prevent children coming into care, we will support vulnerable families when they need it most.

We recognise that by investing early, we can build on the strengths of families and communities to support their continuing care of children in a way that offers the best long-term prospects. While also delivering targeted and timely support to vulnerable families, we will provide the best possible opportunities for children and young people to live safely with their families.

A family-centred approach to universal services

Responding to vulnerable families starts with a universal approach to promoting a positive, healthy and safe upbringing for all children.

Understanding South Australian families and creating child-centred, family-focused and community-orientated services and programs is key to this.

Key directions:

- > Use data and evidence to better understand the development of children and young people in South Australia and identify and plan for earlier points of intervention.
- > Take a family-centred approach that addresses the safety of children and young people in the context of their families and communities.
- > Create early help and referral pathways for families to access support when they need it.

Earlier, targeted, intensive support for families with multiple and complex needs

Our goal is to support vulnerable families to safely care for their children. The Government of South Australia envisages a strong network of coordinated, accessible services that work with vulnerable families to prevent and reduce child abuse and neglect.

Key directions:

- > Better understand the multiple and complex challenges that some families experience and better identify families, particularly young parents, who would benefit from early support.
- > Intervene earlier and provide trauma-informed targeted intensive support services in the places where children and families are living, based on predictive risk factors.
- > Support families to safely care for their children at home and reduce the need for children and young people to come into care.
- > Ensure services are culturally safe and responsive with a focus on addressing the impact of intergenerational trauma.

Information-sharing for informed decision-making

Best practice protection and support for children, young people and families is enabled by a robust and easily navigated approach to information management.

The Government of South Australia recognises there are opportunities to increase the ability of our workforce to access key information, prevent duplication of data and to support information-sharing between agencies for more efficient and connected decision-making to keep children and young people safe from harm.

Key directions:

- > Enhance the systems that enable information-sharing to protect children and young people from harm.
- > Consider options to strengthen and simplify the legislative framework for frontline staff sharing information.
- > Work with federal, state and territory governments to improve the interaction between the federal family law system and the state-based family violence and child protection systems.

Actions over the next 12 months

Actions	Lead
> Complete the co-design of Child and Family Support System components including early help and support (access, assessment, service pathways and referrals, commissioning framework, trauma-informed practice, workforce development and the Aboriginal service system)	> Department of Human Services
> Co-design new service models and evaluation methods	> Department of Human Services
> In collaboration with the Australian Government, pilot the co-location of police and child protection officers in the Adelaide registry of the Family Court of Australia to support timely information-sharing to enhance the safety of women and children	> Department for Child Protection > South Australia Police
> Undertake an intensive family support program trial to ensure children remain safe from abuse and neglect, including one in Northern Adelaide and an Aboriginal-specific service in Western Adelaide	> Department of Human Services
> Develop a First 1000 Days of Life Strategy	> Department for Health and Wellbeing



Protecting

Protecting

We want all children and young people to be protected from abuse and neglect. When children and young people come into care, we are responsible for providing care that helps them to recover from past trauma and keeps them safe from any further harm.

Like other Australian jurisdictions, South Australia has experienced a growing number of children and young people who are in care.

We know that children are entering care younger and that there have been fewer children returning home once in care. There are now more than 4,000 children and young people in care. The majority of these children will be in care until they turn 18.

Our service models for children and young people in care have offered a largely standardised response that does not go far enough to recognise the individual needs of children and young people. Two thirds of children and young people exiting care have experienced more than two placements. Our care system has not kept pace with the contemporary expectations of carers or the aspirations for all children and young people in care.

Over a third of children and young people in care are Aboriginal. Aboriginal children are ten times more likely to be placed in care than non-Aboriginal children.

For Aboriginal children and young people, we recognise culture as a critical protective force. Aboriginal families, communities and service providers must be at the centre of decision-making and support for Aboriginal children and young people in care.

Children and young people in care and carers need to be able to participate in decisions that affect them. This includes ensuring that their voices have an influence over the policy matters, program development and services that impact them.

Coordinated notification responses

We recognise there needs to be a coordinated, collective effort to provide assertive, high quality responses to children and families notified to the child protection system. Where these families are not already connected with the supports they need, there needs to be clear, established pathways of referral.

Key directions:

- > Build workforce capacity to manage risk and enhance the non-statutory pathways for mandatory reporters to act on child wellbeing concerns.
- > Act on all screened-in notifications.
- > Increase the practice of referring matters from the Child Abuse Report Line to other departments or organisations, including non-government services, to provide the most appropriate service response at the most appropriate time.

Needs-based care and protection

Every child has different needs, challenges and strengths. Many children in care have complex behavioural and developmental needs. Comprehensive and ongoing assessment of a child's individual needs is crucial to getting placements right from the start. Commissioning services at a systems level is equally important to ensure services are meeting the needs of children and helping them to develop and thrive.

Key directions:

- > Invest in family group conferencing and embed family-led decision-making to support children to maintain relationships and, where appropriate, reunification with their families.
- > Develop a system of care that prioritises opportunities for family based care, permanency and reunification.
- > Engage specialist expertise to make evidence-based and timely arrangements to meet the needs of children and young people in care.
- > Maximise supports for children in care with disabilities, including those available through the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

Growing family based care

The future of the care system in South Australia is reliant on growing family based care. Family based settings provide the best opportunities for permanency and belonging for the majority of children and young people who come into care. They are essential in building long-term relationships that are important to child development and wellbeing.

Key directions:

- > Continue to grow family based care in line with national benchmarks.
- > Increase our understanding of carers' strengths and needs in caring for children and young people.
- > Enhance support, training and resources available to family based carers.
- > Build the capacity of carers to deliver trauma-responsive, developmentally informed care and provide care to children with complex behavioural and developmental needs.
- > Provide Aboriginal-led support for foster and kinship carers of Aboriginal children.

Transforming non-family based care

In some circumstances, non-family based care may be the most suitable option to support children and young people with complex needs. Over time, we will transform residential care settings from a placement of last resort to placements that are consistently therapeutic, culturally supportive and responsive to children and young people's needs.

Key directions:

- > Recommission residential care services to support best practice approaches.
- > Embed a therapeutic approach across residential care, starting with Department for Child Protection residential care.

Environments that keep children safe

Children and young people have a right to be safe and protected at all times, including when accessing services in the community. This requires systematic checks and balances to be integrated into our systems and services so that we remain vigilant against new threats.

Key directions:

- > Support the Australian Government to develop and implement a national strategy to prevent child sexual abuse.
- > Deliver initiatives to improve children's safety online.

Responding to perpetrators of child sexual abuse

When abuse occurs, the criminal justice system must provide a strong response to perpetrators and ensure that victims are supported in seeking justice.

Key directions:

- > Examine existing criminal justice responses to child sexual abuse offences to ensure they meet community expectations.
- > Continue the implementation of innovative approaches to support victims, especially children, participating in child sexual abuse prosecutions.



Actions over the next 12 months

Actions	Lead
> Implementation of the actions in 'South Australia's Children and Young People In Care Strategy'	> Department for Child Protection
> Implement a South Australian specific practice approach for child protection	> Department for Child Protection
> Implement a strategic commissioning approach for the Department for Child Protection	> Department for Child Protection
> Implement a robust assessment and placement matching system	> Department for Child Protection
> Assess the scope and benefits of implementing a Reportable Conduct Scheme in South Australia	> Attorney-General's Department
> Procure relative and kinship care support from an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation	> Department for Child Protection
> Procure and introduce Family Care Committees	> Department for Child Protection



Investing

Investing

Providing care for children who cannot live safely with their parents is about more than protecting them from harm and meeting their basic needs. Each child and young person in care is a valued citizen of South Australia and we want the best for them. We want to see them do well at all levels of learning and have skills to do well in life.

Young people leaving care are less likely to complete high school, and more likely to become parents at a younger age, suffer poorer health outcomes and experience homelessness. Based on the work of the Australian Centre for Child Protection, we have confirmed that intergenerational involvement with child protection exists. Children with a parent who has been in care are much more likely themselves to be placed in care when compared with the general population.

The decisions and actions we take now are important and can help young people in care to have the same future opportunities as others. By investing in the education and development of young people in care, we can help break intergenerational cycles of trauma, abuse and neglect.

We must help all children and young people in care to develop a strong sense of their identity and aspirations for their futures. We want to ensure that the years of support and nurturing provided by carers have the intended effect of preparing these young people to do well in their adult life.

A therapeutic approach to specialised needs

We believe that to best support children's development, the environments in which they are cared for should be safe, stable, culturally secure, trauma-responsive and therapeutic.

Key directions:

- > Provide support that meets the diverse and specialised needs of children and young people in care.
- > Deliver trauma-responsive and development-focused service models.
- > Maximise supports accessed by children in care through their NDIS plans.

Supporting survivors of abuse

We acknowledge the significant challenges that survivors face in disclosing their experience of abuse. Institutions have a significant responsibility to systematically and sensitively assist the disclosure of child sexual abuse to authorities and provide trauma-responsive support to survivors of abuse.

Key directions:

- > Continue as a participating institution of the National Redress Scheme, offering timely information to the Australian Government's decision-making body and direct personal responses to survivors, when requested.
- > Support the Australian Government in establishing a National Centre to raise awareness and understanding of the impacts of child sexual abuse, support help-seeking and guide best practice advocacy, support and therapeutic treatment.

Cultural connection and identity

Culture and connection to community are important protective factors in the health and wellbeing of families, children and young people. Keeping Aboriginal children and young people connected and safe in their community is one of the best ways we can reduce their disproportionate vulnerability.

Key directions:

- > Embed the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle.
- > Grow the Aboriginal workforce and cultural accountability of non-Aboriginal staff.
- > Increase procurement of Aboriginal-led services.
- > Promote Aboriginal children and families' participation in decision-making.

Opportunities to access education and development activities

Education and learning are essential to a young person's health and wellbeing, as well as their future productivity and contribution to society. Enabling participation and educational attainment for young people in care is a priority.

Key directions:

- > Improve preschool and school attendance and the educational performance of children and young people in care.
- > Continue to roll out a personalised learning plan that supports a child or young person's inclusion and achievement in their preschool or school.
- > Continue to build the capacity of preschools and schools to support the learning of children and young people affected by trauma.
- > Enable sharing of information to support a child's learning, safety and wellbeing needs as they transfer to and between schools.

Transition to adulthood and independence

All young people in care should have the same opportunities as others as they transition to adulthood. In addition to the love and commitment provided by carers over the years, we have a role to support children and young people to plan and prepare them for their adult life. This may be through reunification with parents and siblings, living independently or staying longer with their care family.

Key directions:

- > Equip young people to develop skills and knowledge that enables their successful transition to adult life.
- > Create more opportunities for young people to access education, employment, housing and specialist services to meet their needs.
- > Support young people to develop their identity and maintain relationships through connection to culture and family.

Hearing from children and carers

We value the involvement of children and carers in both the design and delivery of services as well as in the decisions that affect and interest them. Their involvement assists us to better meet their needs and preferences.

Key directions:

- > Increase co-design and engagement with children, young people and carers.
- > Enhance the collection and availability of information and evidence, including insights from children and carers, to plan and deliver better services.
- > Ensure case planning reflects the views of children and their carers.



Actions over the next 12 months

Actions	Lead
> Diversify and increase procurement of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations	> Department for Child Protection
> Continue to implement strategies for managing abuse-related trauma in education settings to support the capacity of children and young people in care to learn	> Department for Education
> Continue to implement One Plan, which focuses on replacing a range of different learning plans which might exist for a child or student in government preschools and schools with a single learning plan	> Department for Education
> Continue to pilot and evaluate programs to support young people transitioning from care	> Department for Child Protection
> Build capacity across government to prioritise access to mainstream supports and provide the best possible service for young people in care and leaving care	> Department for Child Protection > All
> Co-design a child and youth engagement strategy with young people who have a lived experience of being in care	> Department for Child Protection > Department of Human Services
> Review supported independent living and other innovative housing models, including share housing, to make housing options more accessible to young people leaving care	> Department for Child Protection > South Australian Housing Authority



**A strong
system**

A strong system

We are accountable to the South Australian community to administer a system that supports families, ensures the safety and wellbeing of children when they come into care and is sustainable into the future.

We will focus on developing the skills, professionalism and sustainability of the workforce to work with families and children in need of our services, building quality and safeguarding into all parts of the child protection system. We will develop a learning culture, where research, data, evaluation and sharing our learnings is a valued part of our work. Carers and the government and non-government workforce will all be encouraged with further training and support to provide trauma-responsive and culturally-informed care.

We know that every choice we make affects children and families across all life domains, and we must be confident in our workforce to apply professional judgement to every decision. Supporting staff to make decisions based on best practice and supported by clinical governance and supervision will enable continuous improvement.

Most importantly, the system is only as strong as the relationships between the people we work with. Partnerships and professional accountability will be integrated throughout the system. We are committed to fostering trusting, respectful connections as we work together to improve outcomes for children and young people.

Growing a skilled and stable workforce

To support our children and young people, we must support our staff who undertake this complex work. This means ensuring staff have the right knowledge, skills and tools, and recognition of their work.

Key directions:

- > Support our staff to use professional judgement and clinical expertise in the decisions they make to keep children and young people safe.
- > Embed a restorative and relational practice approach that is solutions-oriented and supports creative problem solving.
- > Develop a future workforce strategy to ensure sustainability of our services.

Enhancing quality and safeguarding

Children and young people should have every opportunity to express their views about the services they receive. Our immediate priority is to ensure they are safe, healthy and well. When they are not, we must be consistent and efficient in the way in which we respond.

By being thoughtful in our policy, process and service design, requiring good governance and being consistent in our escalation and mitigation measures, we will prevent and respond effectively to crises and continue to deliver service excellence.

Key directions:

- > Embed an integrated incident management system to provide stronger safeguarding and bring together critical information to keep children and young people safe.
- > Implement quality measures to ensure consistency and accountability in service design and delivery.

A learning culture built on research, data and reporting

We acknowledge that the complexity of our work with children and young people means we will always have more to learn. We will continue to support valuable research and build a strong evidence base to ensure we invest in what we know works. We recognise that collecting the right data and reporting on this data is an important part of demonstrating that we are transparent and accountable to our actions and focused on building a dynamic and contemporary child protection system.

Key directions:

- > Invest in the collection and use of data to inform planning and service design, and report on this data for transparency, accountability and shared learnings.
- > Drive performance improvement through performance measurement and evaluation.
- > Ensure resources are directed towards evidence-based services designed for specific populations.

Partnering together for better outcomes

Strong partnerships are essential in driving positive outcomes for children and young people. Our government, non-government and community partners offer valuable insights and support complex decision-making that helps us be innovators in child protection reform. By working collaboratively and creating positive relationships across the sector, we can strengthen decision-making and accountability to ensure nothing slips through the cracks.

Key directions:

- > Establish an industry partnership approach.
- > Strategically commission services to stimulate market diversity and meet the needs of children and young people in care, ensuring we meet service demand across a variety of settings.
- > Build a trauma-responsive carer population and a government and non-government workforce to ensure consistency in our approach to protecting children and young people.

Actions over the next 12 months

Actions	Lead
> Undertake contract and procurement reform	> Department for Child Protection
> Introduce a performance framework to establish consistent service standards and professional accountability in the sector	> Department for Child Protection
> Establish a data dashboard under the Vulnerable Children Project	> Department of the Premier and Cabinet
> Publish a Manual of Practice that reflects South Australian specific Practice Principles, that is trauma-responsive, restorative and relational	> Department for Child Protection
> Implement a clinical governance framework	> Department for Child Protection
> Implement service level and family level outcomes monitoring and evaluation for the Safer Family Services.	> Department of Human Services



Delivering our strategy

We all have an important role to play in keeping children safe. Government, non-government organisations, service providers and the community will need to work together if we are to deliver better outcomes for our most vulnerable children.

Through all this, we must highlight the views of children and young people and ensure we are truly reflecting what is important to them in the decisions we make and the actions we take.

This strategy outlines how we will organise and prioritise what we will do over the next three years. Delivery of this strategy will be enabled by further engagement and planning within relevant departments and genuinely consulting, co-designing and collaborating with our partners including:

- > Children and young people
- > Carers
- > Families
- > Communities
- > Non-government providers, with a particular focus on Aboriginal controlled organisations
- > Private sector.

Keeping children safe and well is broader than the work of the Department for Child Protection. Many government agencies deliver critical services to support families and protect children.



Governance

Ongoing oversight for the delivery of the strategy will be provided by the cross-government Child Protection Reform Portfolio Management Board. This Board includes chief executives and senior officers from:

- > Department of the Premier and Cabinet (including the Aboriginal Affairs Directorate)
- > Department of Treasury and Finance
- > Attorney-General's Department
- > Department for Child Protection
- > Department of Human Services
- > Department for Health and Wellbeing
- > Department for Education
- > South Australia Police.

Accountability

We will continue to review our progress and share how we are tracking, as we refresh our annual priorities with annual reporting on progress. Reporting on our progress implementing the recommendations of the two Royal Commissions will be combined in a single progress report from 2020, framed around the priorities in this strategy.

The companion document, 'Safe and well: Supporting families, protecting children - Royal Commission Recommendation Index', outlines the relationship of this strategy to other government plans, frameworks and strategies. It also provides a reconciliation of the recommendations from both Royal Commissions that still require action and how these align with the focus areas detailed in 'Safe and well'. This can be found at www.childprotection.sa.gov.au.

¹ The figure does not include 4 recommendations of the Child Protection Systems Royal Commission that were not accepted by the State Government.



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