



Government of South Australia
Department for Child Protection

DCP Practice Principles

The six pillars of our practice



DCP Practice Principles

The Department for Child Protection (DCP) is focused on ensuring the safety of children and young people in South Australia. DCP works in partnership with families and government and non-government agencies to support the most at risk and vulnerable children and young people in our community.

Ensuring children and young people and their families receive high quality services is a pivotal objective of DCP. It is essential that professional judgement is underpinned by a shared understanding of the essential elements of quality child protection practice. The Practice Principles encourage a focus on what matters most to achieve the best outcomes for children and young people, and their families.

The Practice Principles are an important element of the DCP Practice Approach and reflect best practice aligned with the department's legislative mandate under the *Children and Young People's (Safety) Act 2017*. The Practice Principles of child centred, cultural safety, strengthening families, supporting carers, partnership and collaboration, and learning culture have been identified as crucial pillars of practice. DCP understands the fundamental importance of working alongside Aboriginal children and young people, their families and communities to achieve lasting, positive change. The Practice Principles acknowledge that due to a history of injustice and dispossession, Aboriginal children and young people are overrepresented in every part of the child protection system. The Practice Principles recognise the strengths of Aboriginal approaches to parenting, Aboriginal family led decision making, and the importance of ensuring Aboriginal children and young people maintain connections to culture.

The Practice Principles are used across DCP to guide operational practice and inform the development of policy and guidance. The Practice Principles are used in supervision to support reflective practice.

The Practice Principles also assist partner agencies to work collaboratively with DCP to achieve better outcomes for children and young people.

DCP Practice Principles



Child centred

Child centred practice is crucial to ensuring children and young people's safety and that their long-term needs are met. Decision making responds to the unique needs of the child or young person and recognises critical developmental timeframes in childhood. Decision making should incorporate a rights based approach to ensure the child or young person's rights are respected, including their right to have their voices heard and to participate meaningfully in decision making concerning their care. Child centred practice also recognises the fundamental right of children and young people to be connected to family and culture.



What child centred practice looks like:

- The safety of children and young people is paramount.
- Children and young people's rights are respected.
- The importance of cultural, social and emotional wellbeing is reflected in decision making.
- The voice and behavioural cues of children and young people are listened to, recognised, and respected.
- Children and young people with developmental delays and disability are appropriately supported to express their views.
- The unique needs of all children and young people are identified and responded to.
- The critical need of children and young people to develop secure attachments in early childhood is reflected in case planning and timely decision making.
- Connection to family, culture and community is valued and actively promoted.
- Consistent with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle, urgent efforts are undertaken to identify the best placement for Aboriginal children and young people when safety at home can not be achieved.
- Contemporary knowledge of child protection practice and awareness of cultural implications of decision making underpins professional judgement.
- Ongoing assessment considers the child or young person and family's changing needs.
- Decision making and case planning reflects an understanding of the importance of stability, permanence, attachment relationships, culture, identity and belonging to children and young people's wellbeing.
- Decisions about the care of Aboriginal children and young people consider Aboriginal people's cultural values, needs and belief systems.
- Genuine commitment is demonstrated to improving outcomes for children and young people.

Reflection – Am I...

- Clear about the child or young person's needs?
- Able to separate the safety, wellbeing and needs of the child or young person from the needs and wants of their family and others?
- Dedicating enough time to developing a relationship with the child or young person in a warm and genuine way and being clear about appropriate boundaries?
- Actively seeking the child or young person's views and considering those views when making decisions?
- Ensuring conversations with the child or young person occur in a safe space and appropriate format so they can express themselves freely?
- Working with disability specialists to identify approaches that support the engagement of children and young people with developmental delay and disability in decision making?
- Engaging directly with the child or young person and listening to their views and responding accordingly where it is safe to do so?
- Giving the child or young person a range of options as to how they might choose to express their opinion or view?
- Considering the potential unintended consequence of decisions on the child or young person's rights?
- Considering how the relevant rights outlined in the Charter of Rights for Children and Young People in Care will be affected by decisions?
- Advocating on behalf of the child or young person to ensure their rights are recognised and prioritised?
- Thinking about how I am going to explain the reasons for the decision to the child or young person in a way they can understand?
- Thinking about how I will support the child or young person's needs when and after I communicate the decision?
- Thinking about what message decisions will send to the child or young person about their worth, value and safety?
- Undertaking my own learning about the child or young person's culture and communicating about this with the child or young person in a way that enhances their identity and self-esteem?

Reflection – Am I...

- Seeking to understand and reflect on how my own values and potential biases impact decision making?
- Proactively supporting the child or young person's connection to kin, culture, community and country?
- Considering what the child or young person's behaviour is communicating?
- Working with carers to identify opportunities that support the child or young person to develop positive self-esteem?
- Case planning in partnership with the child or young person, family and carers (the Care Team), people of significance and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations where appropriate?
- Making decisions that are consistent with the child or young person's developmental needs, and need for stability and certainty?
- Looking for opportunities where the child or young person can have a say in decisions that affect them such as including them in meetings and annual reviews in a way that they can manage?
- Ensuring that children and young people have connection to their family in a way that meets their cultural needs, individual needs, circumstances and development?
- Putting plans in place that support the child or young person to reach their full potential?
- Supporting the child or young person to develop a coherent, age and developmentally appropriate narrative regarding their experiences, family and entry to and experiences in care?
- Making sure important documents, photos and possessions are being cared for and kept for children and young people and/or they are being supported to develop a life story book?



Cultural safety

DCP is committed to ensuring practice is culturally safe when working with children and young people, families and communities. Culturally safe practice recognises the strength of culture in helping children and young people develop a positive identity, and promoting their health, wellbeing, self-esteem and development. Active work to ensure children and young people have an ongoing connection to culture, family, kin, community and country is recognised as a pivotal role of DCP. It is acknowledged that the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children and young people within the child protection system results from a history of injustice embedded within laws, policies and practices of our society, systems and institutions.

DCP recognises that culturally safe and responsive practice is essential to reduce this overrepresentation. We recognise the strengths of Aboriginal approaches to parenting, Aboriginal family led decision making, and the importance of ensuring Aboriginal children and young people in care maintain connections to culture.



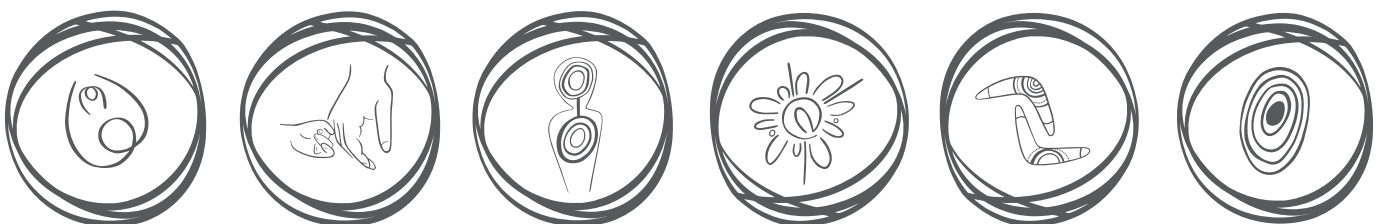
What culturally safe practice looks like:

- The precursor and the elements of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle: Identification, Prevention, Partnership, Placement, Participation and Connection are implemented through active efforts.
- Openness, honesty and a desire to understand how culture influences practice, and a willingness to enhance the cultural responsiveness of our practice.
- Cultural connection and participation is acknowledged as essential for ensuring good health, wellbeing and positive outcomes for children and young people, including identity and self-esteem.
- The impact of intergenerational trauma on Aboriginal children and young people, families and communities is recognised and understood.
- Ongoing reflection upon cultural differences and how this impacts engagement and decision making is actively undertaken.
- Partnership is demonstrated in planning and critical decision making with children and young people, families, kinship carers, the non-government sector (including Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations) and communities.
- Children and young people's right to know about and experience their family, culture and country is actively supported.
- Internal and external cultural collaboration and consultation strengthens decision making.
- The diversity of Aboriginal communities is recognised and respected.
- The cultural knowledge, authority and leadership of Aboriginal staff is valued and respected.
- The Aboriginal Cultural Identity Support Tool (ACIST), genograms and Life Story Books are used as living documents to support children and young people's knowledge of and connection with their family, culture and community.
- The CALD Identity Support Tool (CALD IST) is completed to ensure children and young people's connections to family, culture, kin and community.
- Accountability for culturally safe practice and identifying and challenging unsafe practice is shared by all staff.
- All staff working with Aboriginal children and young people and families have a high level of knowledge and skill in relation to cultural competence.
- Aboriginal staff members are assisted to manage the unique considerations involved in being part of a community that they support.



Reflection – Am I...

- Implementing the precursor and all five elements of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Placement Principle to ensure Aboriginal children and young people can maintain connection to culture?
- Proactively educating myself about the culture of families that I am working with?
- Seeking to understand Aboriginal history and its impact on Aboriginal people?
- Exploring all options for keeping the child or young person with family or kin and scoping appropriate family based placements?
- Recognising the individuality of each family and avoiding making judgements based on preconceived ideas or experiences with other families?
- Ensuring that I am not engaging in any practices or behaviours that diminish, demean or disempower the cultural identity of the child or young person and their family?
- Being responsive and understanding of the family's previous experience of welfare agencies or government authorities?
- Seeking to understand Aboriginal kinship systems, social organisations and family relationships?
- Seeking to understand the cultural beliefs and practices for children, young people and their families from CALD backgrounds?
- Actively demonstrating that the child or young person's cultural identity is valued and respected by showing genuine interest in cultural activities, relationships, events and stories?
- Consulting with DCP Multicultural Services when working with families from CALD backgrounds?
- Developing and regularly updating the child or young person's genogram?
- Meeting my commitments and demonstrating I am trustworthy?
- Ensuring that a placement in care supports the child or young person's connection to and expression of culture and spirituality?
- Actively engaging with the child or young person, carers, family, kin and community in developing and implementing the Aboriginal Cultural Identity Support Tool (and other relevant tools such as Aboriginal Life Story Books)? Monitoring and updating these tools on an ongoing basis?
- Actively engaging with the child or young person, carers, family, kin and community in developing and implementing the CALD Cultural Identity Support Tool (and other relevant tools)? Monitoring and updating these tools on an ongoing basis?
- Consulting with Principal Aboriginal Consultants, the Taikurtirna Warri-apinhi team, senior Aboriginal staff, DCP Multicultural Services and external cultural consultation (including Aboriginal recognised organisations and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations)?
- Mindful of my gender, dress, body language and demeanour in consideration of cultural protocols?
- Ensuring that building capacity and increasing skills in relation to cultural safety and responsiveness forms part of my professional development?
- Working alongside my colleagues from different cultural backgrounds, acknowledging the expertise and experiences that they bring to the work and actively integrating these learnings into my practice?
- Building relationships with and developing knowledge of local Aboriginal communities and services?



Strengthening families

We know that children and young people experience better outcomes across their life domains when they are safely cared for within their family and community. We also recognise the significant outcomes which can be achieved by enabling family led decision making.

A principle commitment of DCP is to do all we can to support families and prevent children and young people entering care. The DCP Practice Approach recognises that collaboration with and the full participation of families is critical in every case. We also recognise that due to intergenerational trauma, power imbalances, and experiences of racism and discrimination, some families may be reluctant to engage with the department. This is why we must work to build and re-build relationships centred on empathy, transparency, respect, trust and shared power.



What strengthening families looks like:

- Respect, compassion, persistence and patience underpins engagement.
- Commitment to building trusting, genuine relationships.
- The challenges of caring for children and young people are acknowledged.
- Families are recognised and acknowledged as experts in their own lives, needs and culture
- Families and communities are supported to lead decision making to establish and maintain safety for their children and young people.
- Early and effective intervention aims to prevent placement into care.
- Considering the impact of disability on the family and pursuing specialist supports that ensure the safety of children and young people.

- Partnerships are built with families to assist them to establish safety for their children and young people.
- Collaborative case planning is central to transparent and responsive practice.
- Strengths, including Aboriginal approaches to parenting and connections to culture, are recognised and celebrated.
- Realistic and achievable outcomes are identified with families and implemented in partnership with those families and their supports.
- Families, including extended families, are supported to develop and maintain best connections with their children in care.

We recognise that families in rural and remote regions may require different approaches to achieve desired outcomes.



Reflection – Am I...

- Engaging with genuineness, non-judgement and respect?
- Taking into account cultural considerations and engaging in a way which is culturally safe and responsive?
- Being clear about my role and reason for involvement?
- Keeping in regular contact to build relationships and trust?
- Following through on what I agree to do?
- Giving the family a chance to tell their story?
- Reflecting to the family my understanding of their story, and checking I have understood correctly?
- Being considerate of the social and structural disadvantages experienced by Aboriginal families and communities?
- Being clear about safety concerns and the impacts on children or young people's wellbeing?
- Specifying required changes and non-negotiables in a way that the family can understand?
- Being creative when engaging with families for whom comprehension of information is a challenge?
- Engaging early through Family Group Conferencing or family led decision making?
- Using the expertise of Aboriginal staff when working alongside Aboriginal families?
- Utilising interpreters and translators where communication in the English language may be a barrier to the family having a comprehensive understanding of the information I am presenting?
- Engaging respectfully and demonstrating empathy when discussing child protection concerns and having difficult conversations?
- Considering how discussions can be conducted in a culturally safe and responsive manner (for example the right people are involved, the venue is appropriate and consideration is given to cultural protocols such as men's and women's business, and Sorry Business)?
- Acknowledging the family's experiences and resilience and reflecting their skills and strengths back to them?
- Considering the possibility that perceived resistance may be a response to the anxiety associated with statutory involvement rather than a lack of willingness to cooperate or capacity to change?
- Considering that historical practices, intergenerational trauma, power imbalances, and experiences of racism and discrimination may cause Aboriginal families to feel fearful of engaging with the department?
- Actively supporting the family to engage with support services?
- Acknowledging that circumstances may change and responding appropriately in a timely manner?
- Keeping the family informed of their children and young people's social, emotional and cultural wellbeing if they are in care?
- Having regular supervision to support reflective practice and development of my skills and knowledge?
- Consulting with my supervisor to ensure quality case planning?
- Engaging in professional development activities to build my skills in engaging families, risk assessment, case planning and effective intervention?

Supporting carers

Where the safety needs of children and young people can not be met at home, they may require placement in care. DCP recognises the critical role carers play in supporting the safety and wellbeing of children and young people, and is committed to supporting and working in partnership with carers. In recognition of the importance of carers, DCP has partnered with the non-government sector to sign a Statement of Commitment that outlines DCP's commitment to ensuring carers are informed, supported, consulted, valued and respected.



What supporting carers looks like:

Informed

- Relevant information about children and young people, their needs and the trauma they have experienced is shared with carers proactively.
- Ensuring access to relevant information and culturally appropriate services.
- Requests for information are responded to in a timely manner.
- Decision making is transparent and carers are updated on progress.
- Clear rationales are provided for decisions.
- Carers are informed of their right to provide feedback, raise concerns or seek an internal or external review of decisions made (consistent with the CYPS Act).

Supported

- Regular contact from DCP case workers supports the development of strong, collaborative partnerships.
- Placements are actively supported by the care team.
- Requests for advice and support, including cultural needs, are responded to in a timely manner.

Consulted

- Developing positive, collaborative relationships with carers is a core professional responsibility for DCP staff.
- Carers are included in the care team, in meetings and decision making processes.

Valued

- The role of carers in supporting children and young people is deeply valued and this value is communicated through actions and words.
- The important relationships between children and young people and their carers' is valued and nurtured.
- Caring for children and young people who have experienced trauma is acknowledged as an often complex and challenging task.

Respected

- Carers are recognised as holding invaluable information and having in-depth knowledge of children and young people's needs, developed through providing day to day care.
- Differences of opinion are discussed openly and respectfully.



Reflection – Am I...

Informing

- Gathering and sharing information about the needs of the child or young person in a timely manner?
- Communicating how and why decisions have been made?
- Keeping carers updated on the progress of agreed actions?

Supporting

- Establishing when and how often carers would prefer to communicate?
- Following through on what I agree to do?
- Talking regularly with carers about their support needs and ensuring their needs are met?
- Working as a team with carer support workers to meet each carer's individual needs?

Consulting

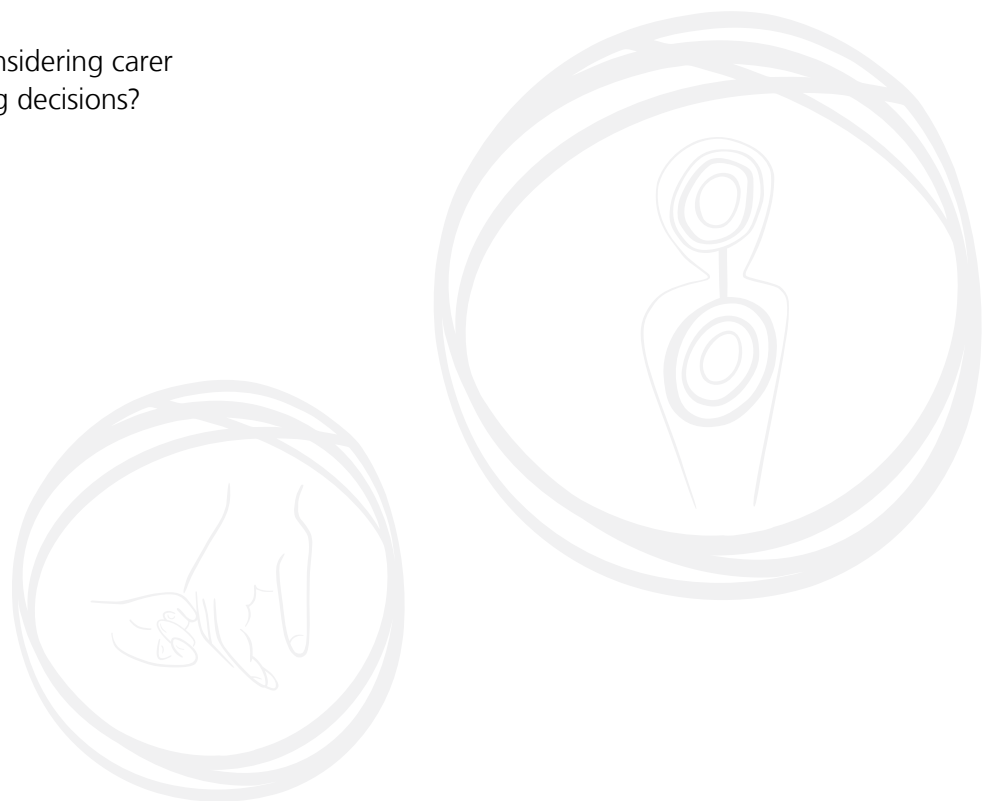
- Investing in my relationships with carers through regular contact and using relationship based practice skills?
- Providing flexible ways for carers to participate in care team meetings and decision making processes at a time that suits them and their family?
- Genuinely valuing and considering carer perspectives when making decisions?

Valuing

- Demonstrating, through actions and words, that I understand the pivotal importance of carers' relationships with children and young people?
- Acknowledging that caring for children and young people with trauma experiences is often difficult and requires significant energy, commitment and expertise?
- Acknowledging that caring for Aboriginal children and young people impacted by intergenerational trauma is complex and requires cultural support and knowledge.
- Regularly highlighting carer strengths and providing positive feedback and encouragement?

Respecting

- Communicating in a way that demonstrates respect for the carer role?
- Taking into account cultural considerations and engaging in a way which is culturally safe and responsive?
- Resolving points of difference or disagreement quickly, professionally and respectfully?



Partnership and collaboration

Protecting children and young people requires a highly collaborative approach. Working in partnership with children and young people, families and carers is essential if we are to achieve lasting change that ensures the safety of children and young people. Developing strong, respectful relationships in the child or young person's care team ensures that together we can provide the best possible care, tailored to the individual needs of children and young people. Practice is enhanced when we partner with government and non-government organisations and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations as we benefit from the knowledge, skills and perspectives shared through collaboration. At risk and vulnerable children and young people, and their families, benefit from a service system that works together to ensure best outcomes. Staff across DCP work together to ensure better outcomes for children and young people, their families and carers.



What working in partnership and collaboration looks like:

- Commitment is demonstrated across the agency to building transparent, respectful and enduring partnerships with:
 - children and young people
 - families
 - carers – (foster, kinship and residential)
 - communities
 - service providers (including therapists) and interagency partners
 - Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations
 - The Commissioner for Children and Young People
 - The Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People
 - Office for the Guardian for Children and Young People (including the advocate for Aboriginal children)
 - researchers and universities.
- Collaborative interagency practice and information sharing promotes child safety and wellbeing.
- Clarity on roles and responsibilities is established to ensure effective intervention.
- Sharing knowledge in teams and across DCP and sector builds practice wisdom.
- Genuine partnership with other agencies leads to better decision making and improved outcomes.
- Aboriginal families and communities are actively engaged in critical decision making for their children and young people.
- Local service providers and communities work collaboratively to implement place based responses.
- Seeking cultural guidance and consulting with appropriate Aboriginal partners?
- Clear about the roles and responsibilities of interagency partners?
- Communicating with, and keeping updated of, the progress of intervention undertaken by other agencies?
- Engaging with disability specialists to ensure that the child or young person's needs are met?
- Responsive to feedback from children and young people/families/carers/interagency partners?
- Thinking about how I can use feedback to improve my practice?
- Considering what I could do differently to improve relationships when difficulties occur?
- Supporting key partners (the child or young person, the family, the carer) to participate in decision making?
- Providing information to partners to allow them to participate in decision making, and making informed decisions?
- Ensuring procedural fairness in my decision making?
- Engaging with internal partners including Principal Aboriginal Consultants, the Taikurtirna Warri-apinthe team, and external partners including recognised Aboriginal organisations and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations when working with Aboriginal children, young people, families and communities?
- Explaining to partners (including families, carers and agencies) the rationale for decisions that have been made?
- Communicating with others in the way I would expect to be communicated with and in a way which reflects their cultural values and beliefs?
- Considering the most effective and respectful method of communication for particular issues?

Reflection – Am I...

- Working in partnership with the care team including the child's carer?
- Ensuring I schedule care team meetings in a way that maximises participation of all parties?
- Open to the advice and the professional and cultural expertise of others?
- Seeking consultation for complex or potentially contentious issues?



Learning culture

A culture of reflection and learning is a cornerstone of high quality service provision. Children and young people, families, carers and communities benefit from services provided by a workforce that is continually striving to do better.

Staff capacity to continue to do the difficult work of protecting children and young people is enhanced when they regularly reflect on their practice and build new skills and knowledge.



What a learning culture looks like:

- Reflective practice and regular supervision is embedded and valued at individual, team and organisational level.
- Supervision arrangements for Aboriginal staff supports staff to be culturally safe and acknowledges the unique considerations for those staff members being empowered and supported to be courageous.
- Staff are accountable in decision making.
- Expertise is continually developing.
- Staff are energetic and have a desire for continual improvement of practice and to achieve positive outcomes for all children and young people.
- Professional skills and practice wisdom is supported by evidence.
- Ongoing professional development takes staff on a cultural learning journey and supports increased cultural proficiency.
- Learnings from stakeholder feedback, reviews, research, evaluation and reflection drives practice improvements.

Reflection – Am I...

- Frequently thinking about ways I can improve my practice?
- Open to different ideas, perspectives and ways of thinking?
- Using my Performance Development Plan and supervision to identify my learning needs and career aspirations?
- Considering practice areas where I lack confidence and identifying ways that I could address this through supervision, co-working or professional development opportunities?
- Regularly referring to policy and guidance to inform my work?
- Identifying sources of cultural guidance (policy, documents, senior Aboriginal staff and business units, or external partners) when working with Aboriginal children and young people and their families?
- Finding opportunities to seek feedback on the quality of my practice (including feedback from children and young people, families, carers other stakeholders and colleagues)?
- Striving to remain up to date on best practice and new developments in child protection?
- Respectfully and supportively helping my colleagues reflect on their own practice through providing encouragement and constructive feedback?
- Creating opportunities to pause and reflect on practice?
- Changing and adapting my practice based on new information I am learning?
- Thinking about new ways to approach my work and sharing ideas with others?



DOCUMENT CONTROL

Commencement date	6 July 2023
Review date	6 May 2025

REVISION RECORD

Approval date	Version	Revision description
6 July 2023	V2.2	Minor update to reflect new commencement date
14 June 2023	V2.1	Update to diagram
May 2022	V2.0	Review as per review cycle
November 2019	V1.0	Final document



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