

## Factsheet 1

# Understanding the approach

### 1. How was the National Framework developed?

In response to the increasing number of Australian children who are being exposed to child abuse and neglect the Community and Disability Services Ministers' Conference agreed to work together to develop a comprehensive national approach to protecting children.

Over the past twelve months, the Community and Disability Services Ministerial Advisory Committee (CDSMAC), through a dedicated Working Group, developed a National Framework for consideration by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG). The National Framework reflects a high level of commitment from the Australian and all States and Territory governments.

Critical to the development of the National Framework has been the contribution of stakeholders. A targeted and intensive consultation process was undertaken following the May 2008 release of the Commonwealth's discussion paper, *Australia's children: safe and well – A national framework for protecting Australia's children*. This consultation process included:

- ▶ All States and Territories
- ▶ many non-government organisations
- ▶ academics, child welfare experts and child protection practitioners
- ▶ foster carers, grandparents and other relatives caring for children
- ▶ young people who had been in out of home care or engaged with child protection services.

Approximately 200 submissions were received in response to the discussion paper.

The non-government sector, including representatives of the Coalition of Organisations Committed to the Safety and Wellbeing of Australia's Children were also closely involved in developing the National Framework and provided valuable advice and input to the CDSMAC Working Group.

### 2. Is the National Framework based on an early intervention and prevention model?

The National Framework recognises that the best way to protect children is by preventing abuse and neglect from occurring in the first place. We need to move from seeing child protection as a response to abuse and neglect to promoting the safety and wellbeing of children.

Leading researchers and practitioners in Australia and overseas have found that applying a *public health model* to care and protection will deliver better outcomes for children and young people. A public health model ensures that adequate support is provided to families to prevent problems from escalating in most cases, but that specialist support remains for those families and children that need it 'at the pointy end'.

States and Territories are currently implementing reforms to their statutory child protection systems- all focused on early intervention. These are significant and substantial reforms.

The National Framework recognises however, that for these reforms to be truly effective, they need to be coordinated with Australian Government programs, policies and payments- a large part of the early intervention response.

The National Framework also progresses strategies and actions to better identify children at risk. This involves actions to improve information sharing, referral and assessment processes and workforce development projects.

Together, these actions will help improve the capacity of the system to recognise and respond to children at risk including in adult-focused services such as mental health, drug and alcohol and homelessness. Likewise, when a child is the client, the issues parents or other family members may have, which could be contributing to the child's problems, need to be recognised and the necessary support provided.

The National Framework contains a commitment from all governments to step-up the early intervention effort. This commitment will be delivered through targeting existing services to reach the most vulnerable families and/or expanding prevention and early intervention services.

### **3. What issues does the National Framework cover?**

Child abuse and neglect affect not just the victims and their families, but have implications for all parts of the community, for all services and for all levels of government. Preventing child abuse and neglect from occurring increases children's chances of being able to fully participate in their broader community to achieve better education outcomes and to effectively participate in the workforce.

Governments' commitment to the National Framework is based upon the Australian community wanting to support, nurture and care for our children.

Consequently, the National Framework seeks to cover a broad range of issues to achieve the six supporting outcomes. The three year action plans provide an opportunity to review progress and identify further action and emerging issues to address.

### **4. Will it stand the test of time?**

The National Framework which is designed to achieve long term change to 2020, takes effect through a series of three year action plans.

Governments' agree that working together to put in place a system for the future is critical. Australia's new approach to protecting children includes:

- ▶ Universal responses to reduce identified risk factors in the community and building families' capacity through services, programs and payments targeted to the whole population
- ▶ Early intervention for vulnerable families, to provide additional support and education before serious problems arise
- ▶ Targeted services to address specific problems and prevent escalation

- ▶ Statutory child protection services to respond to suspected and actual cases of child abuse and neglect, and to support children who need to be removed from their families.

This approach represents best practice and positions Australia at the forefront of policy development for child protection.

The National Framework will be monitored and reported annually during its first three years to COAG.

## **5. What difference will the National Framework make?**

Over time the National Framework will help to ensure that:

- ▶ Children who cannot live with their parents, get the quality care they need through agreed national out-of-home care standards. Indigenous children in particular, receive appropriate care and protection services
- ▶ Vulnerable families get extra help to care for their children through more early intervention programs
- ▶ Adult services such as homelessness and mental health are more responsive to the needs of families and children at risk
- ▶ Children at risk are identified earlier so they can get the support they need before a crisis occurs
- ▶ Young people leaving care get extra help to make a more effective transition to adult life
- ▶ Communities are more aware of how to protect children and can engage more effectively to keep children safe
- ▶ Vulnerable families find it easier to get the integrated support they need through better links between all the services they need, regardless of how they are funded
- ▶ Survivors of child abuse and neglect recover from the trauma they experience so they can participate fully in life, as children and as adults
- ▶ Researchers and practitioners build an enhanced evidence base that influences the design and implementation of programs.