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| Roadmap for Reform Symposium: the next steps |
| Communique |



The *Roadmap for Reform: Strong Families, Safe Children* (the Roadmap), released in April 2016, sets out once-in-a-generation changes designed to improve the lives of vulnerable children, young people and families in Victoria.

Through *Ending Family Violence: Victoria's Plan for Change* and the Roadmap, the Victorian Government is committed to an ongoing, sustained effort to improve outcomes for vulnerable children, young people and families.

# Progress to date

The Roadmap was accompanied by a 2016-17 State Budget investment of $168.2 million over two years to provide extra services for vulnerable families. This was bolstered by a further $161 million in the 2017-18 State Budget to strengthen the children, youth and families system.

Significant progress has been made over the last twelve months in implementing the directions outlined in the Roadmap.

##### Successes in building supportive and culturally strong communities and improving access to universal services, including:

* + Work to support the first authorisations under Section 18 of the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005. This allows the Secretary to authorise an Aboriginal Agency to perform specified functions for Aboriginal children subject to a protection order.
  + The expansion of Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies from nine to 18 sites, supporting at risk and vulnerable pregnant women to give children a healthy start to early development.
  + Aboriginal early years services will receive an additional $1.6 million in funding over the next two years to implement wraparound early intervention and prevention services.

##### Reforms aimed at supporting children, young people and families in need with integrated wraparound supports and targeted early interventions, including:

* + Support and Safety Hubs, which will be the central intake point for vulnerable children and families, and will strengthen the coordination and integration of services for families in need of support.
  + The $19 million state-wide expansion of the Cradle to Kinder program, which provides intensive family and early parenting support to vulnerable young mothers aged 25 and under.
  + The Aboriginal Cradle to Kinder program has been expanded from two to 10 sites across Victoria. Over $3.5 million has been allocated to Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) to deliver the initiative.
  + A new $1.7 million Risk Assessment Management Report Portal (L17 Family Violence Portal) to automate referrals from Victoria Police.
  + A Rapid Response Placement model has supported 16 vulnerable families in the Bayside area to help address safety and instability.

##### Steps to strengthen home-based care and improve outcomes for children and young people in out-of-home care, including:

* + The South Initiative project which includes design and delivery of 10 innovative service models for children and young people in, or at risk of entering, out-of-home care. They aim to divert children from entering care, improve experiences for those requiring care and develop more supported pathways out of care.
  + The development of the Intensive Support Service aimed at young people in residential care who have complex trauma and mental health issues. Along with $17.1 million to improve out-of-home care properties and make them more relaxing and ‘home-like’.
  + $1.2 million to roll out an innovative model of care – Better Futures – to help 100 vulnerable young people make a successful transition to adulthood.
  + An $8 million training commitment will ensure about 1,300 carers across the state will have access to quality training as Victoria moves towards mandatory minimum qualifications for residential care workers by the end of 2017.
  + A $5.6 million trial for a new model of foster care with the potential to transform the way vulnerable children and young people are supported.

# The Roadmap for Reform Symposium

On 14 June 2017, more than 180 representatives from across the child and family services sector, academia and government attended the Roadmap for Reform Symposium.

Minister for Families and Children Jenny Mikakos announced $29.2 million for Child FIRST and family services to work with more than 2,000 additional families at risk of becoming involved with child protection or out-of-home care at the Roadmap for Reform Symposium. The funding was provided in theVictorian Budget 2017-18 and incorporates $5.1 million to trial and evaluate evidence-based programs that improve family capability and child safety through a state-wide submission process.

Minister Mikakos also launched the Children and Families Research Strategy 2017-2019 at the Symposium, which will develop the evidence-base and provide grant funding opportunities for the sector. $800,000 in Learning System Grants was also announced to improve collaboration between practitioners and researchers in the sector, and to record their own evidence-based data.

Also announced at the Symposium was the creation of the Outcomes, Practice and Evidence Network (OPEN) where child and family services will be able to share their knowledge about the services and approaches that they know work. OPEN will be sector-driven and managed by the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare.

The Children and Families Research Strategy 2017-2019 can be accessed at [www.strongfamiliessafechildren.vic.gov.au](http://www.strongfamiliessafechildren.vic.gov.au).

Three thematic discussion sessions were held at the Symposium. A description of each session and a synopsis of participant responses are below.

*Disclaimer: content of the discussions are the views of invited sector participants (sought in the spirit of collaboration and co-design) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Victorian Government.*

## Session one: Building family capability and agency

### Session at a glance

The Victorian Government’s goal is to create a child and family service system that works together for the shared purpose of ensuring the safety, wellbeing and development of children through a focus on building family capability.

At the heart of this reform program is proactively building family agency and capability as the foundation for children’s wellbeing, safety and development. This would work to strengthen families of all types, to provide the environment in which children and young people develop and thrive.

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| Questions for discussion  1. How can Government and the sector work towards a more unified system of support for children and families? What would it look like when we get this right? 2. How would flexible or scalable support work across child and family services? What enablers are required to strengthen the relationship between family services, out-of-home care and Child Protection? 3. How should we measure progress towards effective self-determination for Aboriginal children and families? |

Key discussion themes:

**a) The system should be family-centred and focus on wraparound family supports across the service continuum**

* The system should prioritise the needs as well as the aspirations of children, young people and families, who should be asked if services are getting it right.
* We need to consider the range of challenges and opportunities for children and families so that the system is coordinated in its response. The wraparound needs of the family unit must be considered, rather than just one problem/one person. This should include the needs of both birth parents and any carers.
* Services need to collaborate with families, establish and maintain effective relationships with children and families, and they must have the flexibility to adapt services to the needs and aspirations of children and families.
* Employ approaches already being used by ACCOs as a good model for the whole system, such as early engagement with all parties involved with children and families, acknowledgement of culture and history, strengths based approaches, and long term relationships with family.
* The function of Child Protection should be limited to forensic investigation; with family support work and reunification work done by family services so that family services stays with the family no matter where in the system they are, from first contact to ongoing support.

**b) An enhanced role for universal services**

* There needs to be greater engagement with Department of Education and Training and secondary and tertiary services.
* Universal services, such as early childhood services, including pre-schools and kindergartens, schools, and maternal and child health services need to be better connected to targeted and statutory services and accessible to all members of the community.
* We need to build on universal services as a form of outreach to provide family services where they are required. They must have a much earlier link-up with early intervention services.
  + - * Adequate training for the universal services workforce is essential so they can identify and respond to risk and encourage early intervention.

**c) Funding models need to reflect the aim of a more unified, flexible system:**

* + - * Funding models are based on short term crisis and not long term outcomes.
      * Funding is currently designed around individual problems and programs rather than around people’s needs. There should be flexible and creative funding models that respond to the needs of the family, and offer children and families choice and control. We need to move away from a one-size-fits-all funding model.
      * Merge funding streams for family support, such as Cradle to Kinder, Stronger Families, placement prevention, and Integrated Family Services to remove artificial silos and different program requirements.

**d) Self-determination for Aboriginal children and families in building family capability**

* + - * Aboriginal communities and families should be asked what progress towards effective self-determination would look like for them.
      * We should think about the whole of community approach, as opposed to Western nuclear family ideals.
      * Build a culturally safe environment in government agencies and community organisations so more Aboriginal people are involved in policy making decisions. To do this there needs to be genuine partnerships between ACCOs, Community Service Organisations (CSOs) and the department.
      * Continue to build investment in ACCOs to deliver family support work. Move over the out-of-home care targets and funding with a clear timeline to ACCOs, to enable planning and capacity building.
      * Consult Aboriginal communities on whether they would feel culturally safe to access Support and Safety Hubs.

**e) Greater collaboration between government and non-government sector to address family needs**

* + - * We need strong leadership and authorising governance at the local level to make sure we can bring together the different services that families need, with a common vision and an understanding of priorities.
      * Recognise that the sector has expertise that when combined with government expertise, can be very effective. Encouraging and demanding collaboration between government and CSOs in tenders would assist the system to create innovation rather than competition.

**f) A multi-disciplinary and flexible workforce for wraparound support**

* + - * Service flexibility requires going beyond a 9-to-5 service model, including after-hours support and creating a mobile workforce. A workforce culture change and accompanying training is required for workers to provide families with flexible services. Invest in upskilling the current workforce and offer training to staff so that staff have the skills to identify and address complex needs.
      * Multi-disciplinary teams are required to provide flexible, wraparound support to families. One person in the team could be nominated to be the navigator/key worker, and this person would need to be a generalist rather than a specialist. It is a different way of working, rather than hiring more workers. This method could help to stabilise the workforce.

**g) Information sharing across the system**

* Flexible and scalable support work across child and family services requires strong information and skill sharing regimes.
* Information sharing requires compatible technology, such as a database that has varied access levels for organisations. New South Wales provides good examples of information sharing.

## Session two: Effective support pathways

### Session at a glance

Vulnerable children, young people and families are best supported when services are accessible, coordinated and tailored to their unique needs and circumstances. Families requiring support have increasingly complex needs relating to family violence, physical and mental health, alcohol and drug misuse, legal or financial needs, housing, disabilities etc. that impact their capacity to provide the safe and nurturing environment that children and young people need.

Developing simpler and more effective pathways of support for children, young people and families is central to improving the access to, and engagement with, service and interventions and ensuring they meet the needs of the people they service.

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| Questions for discussion  1. What does an integrated child and family services system look like; how far are we today? 2. What will be the greatest implementation challenges in building integrated support pathways; and how will we address them? 3. How will the bringing together of family violence, family services, community based Child Protection and perpetrator expertise in the Hubs work to support implementation of integrated support for children and families across the service system? |

Key discussion themes:

1. **The importance of early intervention and prevention**

* We need to move away from a crisis driven service system. For example, family services has to ration funding to use on the most needy and other families miss out on support. Child Protection cannot currently keep up with the demand and are constantly ‘putting out fires’ and often other cases are left behind. Resources are mostly allocated to high risk cases.
  + - * Use the community to respond to families and children, recognising that the ultimate child protection system is a caring community. Learn from ACCOs – their work is less tiered and more community-oriented. Non ACCOs see themselves as separate from people who use their services.

1. **Establish clear referral pathways and a service continuum**
   * + - The current system is competitive. CSOs cannot effectively work towards integrated pathways and cross-agency collaboration on a referral pathway if they are in competition.
       - The infrastructure is aged and no longer fit for purpose. System coordination needs to be improved through IT coordination and industry guidelines / incentives.
       - There is a delineation of roles and responsibilities across the system. The system has a number of points where service providers may withdraw because their funding ceases.
       - An integrated child and family services system requires a central and unified contact point where workers have broad skills and knowledge, as well as access to resources and services for families.
       - Outreach services need to be integrated with other targeted family services to support parents and carers, and also identify issues early, based on an understanding of the developmental stages and needs of children within their families.
       - Family services should continue to be provided to families when they are in the Child Protection system. Information sharing must improve between Child Protection and family services.
       - Specialist workers need to be available to family services workers for secondary consultation on clients.
2. **Support both birth parents and foster/kinship carers** 
   * + - Develop a service platform for families, whether their child has been removed or whether they are carers. Family services should be available to both birth parents and carers.
       - A family should get the support they need when they need it at the earliest possible point. For example, placement prevention is a wraparound service for families and children, with case workers working continuously with the whole family, with a dedicated case worker for parents and carers, and for the child or children.
       - Devolve decision making as close to families as possible.
3. **Improve service responses to enable family reunification**
   * + - Continuous engagement with birth parents is necessary to make reunification possible. Families need support before they enter the statutory system. The department does not use CSOs to work with birth families. But CSOs can help start the reunification process. There is a need to work together for reunification.
       - Communication mechanisms required between parties (CSO and the Department of Health and Human Services) to ensure handovers and an appropriate transition to statutory care, and continued family building to promote reunification.
       - Parents need to be provided with education and employment opportunities, and other support services to enable opportunities for reunification.
4. **Provide culturally competent support pathways for Aboriginal children and families** 
   * + - Commit to a plan and progress the work around transfer of the case management and care of Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care to ACCOs, and authorisation of ACCOs under section 18 so that they can assume full responsibility for Aboriginal children on Child Protection orders.
5. **Establish a common vision and language between government and the service system**
   * + - We need to take a strengths-based perspective and not just focus on deficits.
       - A common language needs to be used and shared across services. Language should also be person-centred and help reduce stigma.
       - A common and unified operating and care framework is essential for a more integrated service system. Common tools and frameworks will help to establish consistency.
       - Greater understanding of family complexity is required to deal with the multifaceted needs of families and children as well as communities.
6. **The role of Support and Safety Hubs**
   * + - *(There was agreement across tables that the participants could not provide constructive feedback on Hubs as the Concept Paper was not public at the time)*
       - The outreach model needs an experienced workforce, both in the front and back of house.
       - There should be clear coordination and distribution of work and responsibility between Hubs and Child Protection officers.
       - There needs to be a feedback loop back through to Hubs in order to know what outcomes have been achieved.
       - The Hubs will not work unless there is a common operating framework. There needs to be integrated practice, not just co-location. The Hubs have potential, but there needs to be a whole system change for them to be successful.
       - The safety of family violence victims needs consideration, as perpetrators also have access to Hubs.
7. **Support and Safety Hubs should not have such a strong family violence focus**
   * + - There is great stigma attached to family violence. Setting up a hub around family violence is not ideal, and will not lead to early intervention. Develop a different way of messaging to encourage more families to come to Hubs earlier.
       - 40-50% of families in the child and family services system don’t need family violence services, so the messaging should not be family violence-centric. For a lot of people CSOs see, the prevalent issue is not family violence, but other issues such as financial hardship, housing, homelessness, drugs and alcohol, etc.
       - Consider how Aboriginal and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities will interact with the Hubs.

## Session three: Shared accountability for outcomes

### Session at a glance

To deliver shared accountability, there needs to be a shared approach to client and system level outcomes that builds a common purpose, measures progress and derives greater understanding of what is and isn’t working.

The system’s funding, accountability, workforce development, information systems and oversight structures could better support coordinated and continually improving services and interventions.

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| Questions for discussion  1. What does a shared approach to outcomes look like? What are the critical elements that will make it work? 2. What does best practice look like in respect of evidence-based interventions and data driven service delivery? 3. What approaches to regulation and oversight will best drive outcomes for children, young people and families? |

Key discussion themes:

1. **Developing outcomes is a shared responsibility**
   * + - There is a need for a shared and transparent outcomes framework across the child and family service system, where outcomes are driven by the community, where government is transparent about its performance, and everyone is on the same page about their roles and responsibilities. There must be some kind of horizontal and vertical accountability mechanism around outcomes to enable this collective understanding.
       - A shared approach to outcomes must be supported by funding (addressing perverse incentives) and real-time data collection and reporting. A consistent guide for workers can assist them on what to look for and what to ask the client.
2. **The client’s voice is integral to developing outcomes** 
   * + - Outcomes should ideally come from the perspective of the families and children we work with. It should begin by families and children determining their ideal outcomes and aspirations, and from that starting point all other stakeholders should be working to achieve those outcomes, rather than the service being focused on the goals of the agency or government.
       - Outcomes measures need to be flexible and based on customised outcomes - one size fits all is not always appropriate.
3. **More sophisticated and robust evaluation models are required**
   * Evaluation frameworks need to be developed at the outset. The price of evaluation should be costed into programs.
   * Sufficient time needs to be given to evaluate the impact of services - 12 months is not long enough.
4. **Evidence-informed practice that allows flexibility on what works**
   * Service providers need the ability to flexibly draw upon elements of evidence-based models so workers can match the interventions to the characteristics of the families, noting that evidence-based models need to be evolved over time and will not work for all.
   * Evidence-based interventions need to be applied as intended, and fidelity checks are required in new settings, accompanied by an accreditation and inspection process. Question the usefulness of evidence bases from different contexts, and are hesitant to solely implement evidence-based interventions.
   * We need to find a balance between using evidence-based interventions, and allowing scope for flexibility and innovation. Approaches can be evidence-informed and allow for flexibility and adaptation to context. There also needs to be agreement on what ‘good evidence’ is.
5. **Data and analytics capability needs to improve**
   * Investment is needed so that we can use data to inform service design, not performance reporting. We need to have a mandatory investment strategy for IT services to capture data; this should include the systems capability to compare and analyse data. We need the support of privacy commissioner in sharing information safely.
   * There needs to be consistency between data systems in order capture and compare data more efficiently.
   * Adequate training about how to use data collection tools and implement technical responses is imperative.
6. **Invest in workforce capability**
   * We need a flexible workforce that visits families, supported through equipment and workforce structures to enable flexibility (e.g. after hours, laptops).
   * Standardised assessment tools will lead to delivery of the best interventions based on assessment.
   * We need a key worker navigating services for children and families.
   * There has to be a balance between a multi-skilled workforce and the need for the sector to keep a specialised skilled workforce.
7. **Addressing compliance burden**
   * A review needs to be undertaken on the level of compliance requirements, with a view to reducing the compliance burden. This will enable a greater focus on outcomes.
   * The burden for small agencies in complying with regulation is huge.

## Next Steps

The next components of reform activity to be released to the sector by the end of 2017 include:

* A detailed family services operating model for sector consultation ahead of finalisation
* The development of a detailed implementation plan for out-of-home care reform and the co-design of a new kinship care model
* The release of a Roadmap Workforce Strategy
* Further development of the Menu of evidence-based practices and programs
* Consultation on a draft community services industry plan driven and owned by the industry to guide the sector over the next ten years
* Proposed new funding model for child and family services
* Preparation for testing of client outcomes measurement in family services and out-of-home care.

## More information

For more information and to stay informed about implementation of the Roadmap for Reform visit [strongfamiliessafechildren.vic.gov.au](http://strongfamiliessafechildren.vic.gov.au/)

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