



# Strengthening our sector

A strategy for working together for a responsive sustainable service system across the child and family support sector

2016–19

### **Acknowledgement**

The development of this strategy has been led by staff from the Advocacy, Policy and Sector Development Program of the Queensland Family and Child Commission. Our gratitude must be extended to the enthusiastic and willing partners and stakeholders across the Queensland child and family support sector who have contributed to the strategy's formulation.

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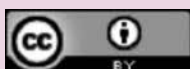
Strengthening our sector: A strategy for working together for a responsive sustainable service system across the child and family support sector.

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# Foreword

There is a fundamental truth to the saying, “It takes a village to raise a child”. Every person has a responsibility to help Queensland children thrive and reach their full potential. For children to flourish, they need the fundamentals of survival: healthy food, clean water, clothing and shelter. Importantly though, they need loving and nurturing home environments, families and carers who are supported and connected, safe communities, and opportunities to stimulate their intellect, spirit and creativity.

We know that the child and family support sector is a critical part of this village. Day in, day out, our services and workforce strive to protect children and young people and help keep them safe and well cared for. We need to continue our efforts to build and strengthen families and communities to care for their children, through responsive and high quality support services.

To achieve this we must identify, preserve and build on the strengths in our service system, our people and service providers. We must build our capacity and capability to align with the future vision of the child and family support sector. We must work collaboratively and learn from one another, so our organisations, our programs, our staff and the people we support succeed. We have the opportunity to deliver more services, better services, and to make sure children and families are able to access the right services, at the right time, and in the right place.

By listening to your voices, the Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC) has developed *Strengthening our sector*. This strategy sets out the path we need to travel together to build our sector into the one that our children and families need. We built this strategy together – now we must deliver it together.

The QFCC’s statutory functions provide the mandate to lead this change, but the QFCC cannot work in isolation. Each of us owns the development of our sector. By working better together we can learn from each other. We can improve our own organisations to better position them to deliver services.

We will offer our workforce more opportunities, build stronger organisations and work together to improve outcomes for children and young people. We need to focus on our people, improving how we attract and retain staff, building their skills and their opportunities in our sector. We must champion change to our own professional behaviour.

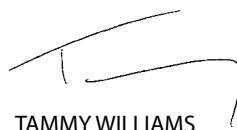
We must not lose sight of the unique contribution Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people bring to our workforce, especially when considering the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families impacted by social disadvantage. Their invaluable links to community across our state must be respected and valued. We must continue to strive to close the gap for our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in terms of health, education, employment, family connectedness and safety; and continue to support them to remain strong in spirit and connected to country.

We want to thank everyone who provided input into the QFCC hosted round tables and feedback channels. It demonstrates how we can work together to strengthen the child and family support sector. The insights gathered through these early engagements have shaped the direction of this strategy and the first action plan.

The sector that we want to be is in our sights. As leaders at the QFCC, and for this work under the reform program, we urge each and every one of you to work together with us to build it.



CHERYL VARDON  
Principal Commissioner



TAMMY WILLIAMS  
Commissioner

# Introduction

Keeping children and young people safe is one of the most important jobs there is.

To create the appropriate conditions for safety and care, vulnerable children and families need to receive quality services from a highly skilled workforce and capable organisations across the government and non-government child and family support sector.

Children and families should receive these services when and where they need them, in the way they want to access them and with respect for their family circumstances and culture.

We have been presented with a unique opportunity to develop new ways of working together to ensure our sector is positioned to deliver the best possible support system to improve outcomes for vulnerable children and their families.

Improving outcomes requires a robust and coordinated service system that is accessible, adequately skilled and resourced, and has the clear imperative that everyone involved in child and family services must take responsibility for their own role in keeping children safe.

We must harness this opportunity and use it to:

- Strengthen our workforce to not only meet the reform priorities, but to deliver responsive and high quality services to children and their families into the future.
- Strengthen the capacity of non-government service providers to enable them to provide more services and assume more responsibility.
- Strengthen our professional practice culture.
- Improve our ability to respond to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

The QFCC has been given the mandate to lead the development of sector wide workforce planning and development strategies, increase collaboration and build capacity across the child and family support system under section 9 of the *Family and Child Commission Act 2014*.

The QFCC will serve as an independent facilitator creating momentum around the progress of this strategy. The QFCC will look to partners across our sector to share implementation responsibilities under a series of action plans over the next three years.

This strategy is intended as a platform for bringing together the whole sector to drive the required transformation. It is an opportunity to work together to prioritise areas for action and be the vehicle for the changes we collectively want to see in child and family support in Queensland.

*Strengthening our sector – A strategy for working together for a responsive and sustainable service system across the child and family support sector.*

# Guiding principles

*It is only by working together towards a common purpose that we will see results and fundamental changes that will allow all Queensland children and their families the opportunity to thrive.*

Five principles will guide our work in strengthening our workforce, building stronger organisations and working together to improve outcomes for children and young people.

## **1. We share ownership and responsibility for change**

We share the responsibility for caring for children and keeping them safe. All parts of our sector are responsible for working together to help families raise children who are safe and supported.

## **2. We respond to the needs of people and the places they live**

We understand, accept and listen to the needs of children and families in the communities and places where they live, work and seek support. We develop actions that are informed by the views of community, families, children and the professional advice from the workforce and organisations with responsibility for delivering services.

## **3. We respond to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce and organisations**

We listen to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce and organisations and respond to their cultural, community and practice needs.

## **4. We work together**

We recognise that people, organisations and professional culture are all intertwined and everyone must commit to working together to create a system for protecting children.

## **5. We recognise and build on strengths**

We value the existing strengths of our workforce and organisations. We recognise the cultural and community strengths offered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce and organisations. We recognise that our people and organisations delivering front line services, or with their local communities, offer valuable expertise and commitment on which we can build long term change.

# What we already know

## About our workforce

We know that our sector is passionate, hardworking, and committed to both keeping children safe, and helping families to thrive. We all strive every day to put children and families at the centre of what we do, in how we behave as professionals and how we deliver services to our communities.

Our workforce is a vital element of our service delivery system. Like any organisation or industry, the child and family support sector relies on the capacity and capability of the people who work within it. To work in our sector we must have strong connections to our clients and communities. We must build and maintain a network of personal relationships to support this work. We must be committed to our own professional development and practice improvement.

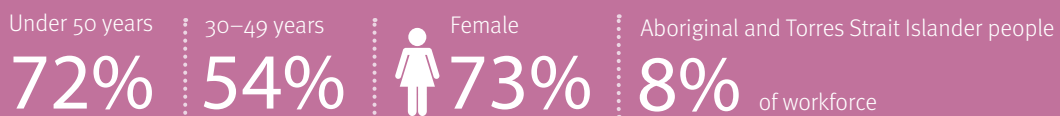
We also know that to meet the child protection reform priorities, we must do more to enhance our strategic, cross-sector workforce development.

We need to find ways to leverage the strengths and capacity of the of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce, address workforce shortages, increase our skilled workforce and create development opportunities in regional, rural and remote areas. We need to attract, develop and retain our workforce and create career pathways that promote our sector as an attractive place to work.

To meet these challenges, we need to know more about the existing workforce to prepare for the future. In 2016, the QFCC partnered with the Health and Community Services Workforce Council to develop a workforce profile, *Your Workforce, Your Future*, to obtain more insights into the child and family support sector workforce through an organisational survey. These results provide a foundation to this strategy's annual action planning process.

*A workforce with strong skills, abilities, knowledge, aptitude and attitude makes the task of supporting children and families easier.*

### Workforce profile



### Workforce size



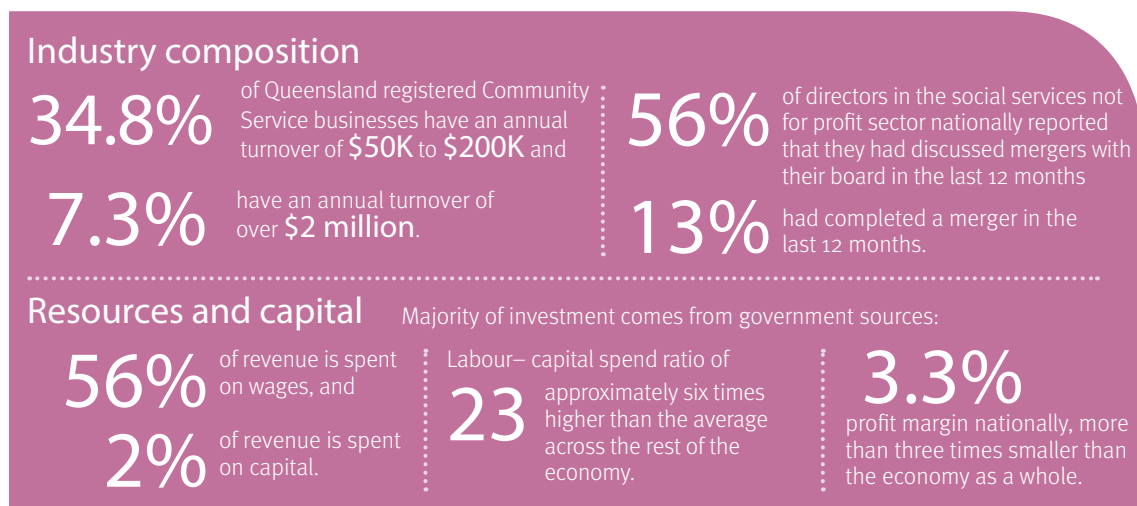
Source: Your Workforce, Your Future: 2016 Survey Report: Queensland's Child Protection and Family Support Workforce.

*The contribution of organisations delivering child and family support services is paramount to a strong and healthy child and family support system.*

## About our organisations

There are no specific statistics on the size and functions of organisations working in the child and family support sector. In a wider context, the 2016 *Forecasting the future: Community Services in Queensland 2025* report provides a profile of the community services industry, within which our sector operates. It can form the basis for our work to build a more informed profile of organisations operating in our sector.

Key findings about the wider community services sector include:



Source: Forecasting the Future - Community Services in Queensland 2025 (2016).

While child and family support organisations vary in size and reach, their contribution to supporting vulnerable children and their families is paramount to a strong and healthy child and family support system. Community controlled organisations are particularly important in supporting vulnerable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

Across our sector, many organisations that deliver services to children and families are small to medium size. This allows them to work closely with their local communities and to understand the needs of their clients. Sometimes however, this limits their ability to meet changes in demand or to sustain themselves through difficult funding circumstances. It also restricts their ability to invest for the future in areas such as ICT infrastructure or building partnership and collaboration skills.

Larger organisations may operate efficiently and have a wider service delivery scope, but this can create silos that restrict sharing of information or the creation of meaningful partnerships.

Encouraging all of our organisations to make greater use of existing business development resources is important to maintain organisational capabilities. There are also challenges that relate to determining our sector's desired future state as an industry and how we work together to achieve it. Equally important is how to achieve this future state while maintaining the connection to client and communities which is a strength of our sector.



## About our practice culture

Our culture is the way we do things as a sector. It underpins how we create the right experience for the children and families we deliver services to, as well as for our staff who deliver the services.

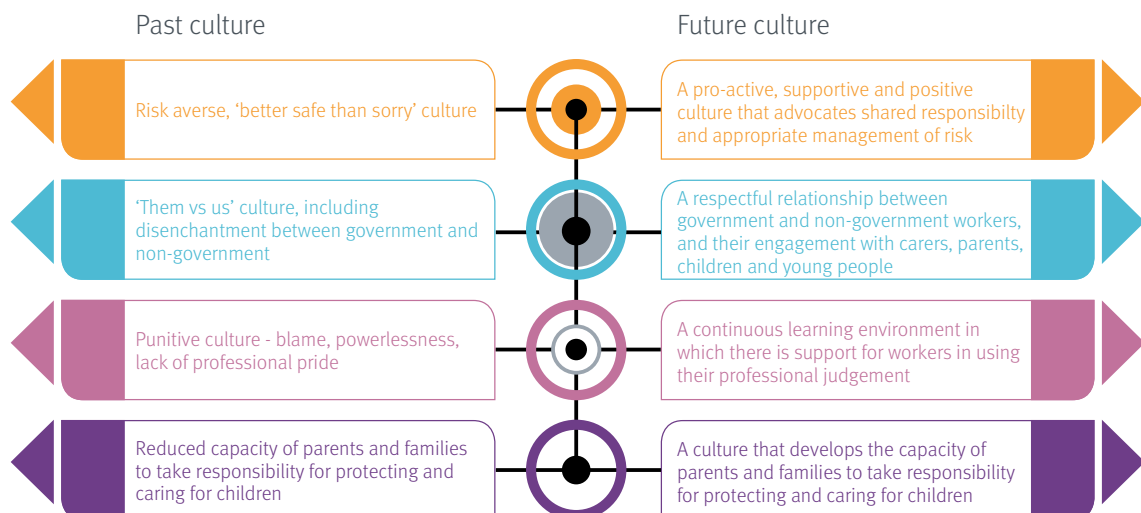
To meet the needs of the reform priorities, we have had to develop new ways of working. In order to support these changes in the way we practice, we must also challenge underlying attitudes and beliefs that have been identified as impacting the culture in our sector.

We must shift our culture from one of blame and risk aversion, to a positive and supportive culture, where we work together and share responsibility for delivering outcomes for children and families.

Four desired future culture states have been identified as key to beginning the journey to the transformational change required in our sector.

This strategy provides a strong foundation for our sector to develop the strategies, leadership approaches and local changes that will drive the cultural change in professional practice from now to the future. We will not be starting this process from scratch, but rather building on the many things we already do well.

*Our work requires a culture of promoting, supporting and safeguarding the wellbeing of children and young people.*



# Complexity of the reform environment

*Our sector is influenced by multiple reform agendas and industry initiatives progressing at the state and national level.*



The QFCC will maintain a watching brief on the implementation of these key reforms as each of this strategy's annual action plans are developed and implemented.

# Why do we need a strategy?

Change is needed. We must harness our collective strength as a caring and diverse sector. We must build more collaborative and proactive ways of working together, and support the capacity of children, families and communities to thrive.

This strategy is a platform for bringing together the whole sector to drive the required transformation in workforce and organisations, and build a positive culture in the way we work to support children and families.

This strategy provides a framework for the next three years and harnesses, and builds upon, the existing strengths of our sector.

By building a strong and sustainable sector committed to working together, we can learn from one another, share best practices, train together, share information and be committed to the same goals together.

*Building strong and lasting sector commitment to action that will help deliver support services for children and families, when and where they are needed, is key to seeing stronger families and safer children in Queensland.*

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## Definitions

### **Capability**

Capability refers to the knowledge, skills and aptitudes of the individual, group or organisation and the competence to undertake the responsibilities assigned to them (i.e. trained staff, governance skills, partnership building skills).

### **Capacity**

Capacity refers more broadly to the overall ability of the individual, group or organisation to actually perform the responsibilities (i.e. right number of staff, sustainable funding sources, efficient business models, effective partnerships in place etc).

### **Culture**

Culture refers to a system of shared assumptions, values, and beliefs, which govern how people behave in organisations and across the sector. It is constructed socially and is affected by environment and history.

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# What does our strategy look like?

*All parts of our sector are responsible for working together to help families raise children who are safe and supported, no matter where they live.*

## Scope

This strategy targets the child and family support sector.

Our sector is:

- The child safety system (tertiary/statutory system) – services provided under legislation when a child has suffered significant harm or is at risk of suffering significant harm.
- The family support system (secondary system) – services provided by organisations to vulnerable families or children and young people who have additional needs that, if unmet, are likely to lead to child safety intervention. These secondary services include adult focused services such as, parenting and anger management programs, domestic violence, counselling and substance abuse programs.
- The universal services (primary services) to the extent of their provision of services to children in contact with the child and family support sector including those with mandatory reporting obligations working in the universal service systems (e.g. teachers, medical staff, and certain police officers).
- Organisations which support or represent the sector's views or advocate aspects of service provision for children and families, such as peak or industry bodies.

While this strategy is directed towards our sector, the real difference we want to make is in the lives of children and families. They are at the centre of our work and will continue to be the touchstone of success.

At this time, the unpaid workforce (e.g. foster carers and volunteers) are excluded from this strategy's scope except where their volunteer role is part of governance structures such as unpaid Board members.



Children and families will remain at the centre of what we do and first response should come from community and universal service provision. However, some families require additional support and these are provided through specialist secondary support services and as a last resort, the tertiary service system.

## Outcomes

The actions under this strategy have been designed to achieve the following high-level objective:

*Strengthen the capacity and capability of the child and family support sector and establish a positive culture in the way we work to support children and families.*

The high-level objective is underpinned by four supporting outcomes. These supporting outcomes will guide our work and help us understand if we are achieving our goals. The supporting outcomes are:

1. Strengthen our workforce – enhance the ability of our sector workforce to meet the needs of children and families.
2. Strengthen our organisations – enhance organisational capabilities and strengthen sector relationships.
3. Strengthen our professional practice culture – build a proactive and positive culture in the way we work to support children and families.
4. Harness the strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, organisations and community.

## Strategy framework

Strategic Direction	<b>Vision</b>	A capable, motivated workforce and client focused organisations			
	<b>Objective</b>	Strengthen the capacity and capability of the child and family support sector and establish a positive culture in the way we work to support children and families.			
	<b>Supporting outcomes</b>	Enhance the ability of our sector workforce to meet the needs of children and families	Enhance organisational capabilities and strengthen sector relationships	Build a proactive and positive culture in the way we work to support children and families	Harness the strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, organisations and community
	<b>Benefits for children and families</b>	Quality services from a skilled, capable and professional workforce	Cohesive and sustainable services that work together to strengthen their lives	Children and families are empowered and supported by professionals working together to meet their needs	Support to remain safe and connected to their communities and culture
	<b>Measures</b>	1. Increased capability of our sector		2. Increased capacity of our sector	
	<b>Partner strategies</b>	Partner strategies include: Queensland Community Services Jobs, Skills and Industry Development Strategy, NDIS Workforce Strategy; Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services Child and Family Reform Operational Workforce Plan 2015-2019			
Priority Actions	<b>Action areas</b>	Improve workforce capability and increase its capacity.	Improve organisational capabilities and increase industry capacity.	Promote recognition that keeping children safe is everyone's responsibility.	Create meaningful systemic changes that respond to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, organisations and community.
		Undertake regional level sector development initiatives that responds to local needs and priorities.	Build strong, effective sector relationships that help deliver real benefits to children and families.	Promote a professional practice culture that supports reflective learning and strives for continuous improvement.	
Implementation	<b>Action Plan</b>	The first Action Plan will cover 2016-2017. Subsequent annual action plans will be developed in consultation with stakeholder partners and informed by outcomes of initiatives under the first Action Plan.			
	<b>Partners</b>	Peak bodies representing our sector Local communities Government agencies operating in our sector Non-government organisations delivering services to children and families Industry bodies Vocational and university education sectors			

# Who do we want to be?



## Strengthen our workforce

### *Build a workforce with strong skills, abilities, knowledge, aptitude and attitude*

We need to attract and retain people of courage and compassion, who have the expertise and empathy required to manage the complex challenges which are common in child and family support work.

By increasing the capability and capacity of our workforce we will enhance the ability of our sector to meet the needs of children and families.

We can work together to develop tools that enhance career pathways and opportunities for progression across sectors and services and potentially beyond our industry.

Working together, we can develop industry-wide resources that will support a shared and cohesive identity and inform sector-wide workforce planning and development into the future. It is expected this will foster understanding across sectors and organisations, non-government and government services, with the potential for strategic partnerships and enhanced integration.

Achieving these outcomes will take collaborative effort between professional associations, peak bodies, education and training providers, industry bodies, regional networks, government and non-government organisations. This includes tertiary, secondary and relevant universal services, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and small organisations with limited resources. Participation and input from community, families, children and young people will also be critical to get it right.

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### What do we want to achieve?

- A highly skilled, capable and supported workforce across the government and non-government child and family support sector that delivers quality services to vulnerable children and families.
  - A child and family support sector promoted as a rewarding, supportive and engaging place to work, with clear pathways and opportunities for development, progression and recognition.
  - A valued learning and development culture through shared professional development and training opportunities across our sector which draw on the strengths of existing experts across the service system.
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## Strengthen our organisations



### *Build organisational capability and capacity, and strong collaborative relationships across our sector*

Organisations will be asked to support professional development, continuous learning and practical programs that build organisational capabilities across our sector. The organisational capabilities needed to participate in place-based responses to local needs will be particularly important

By building strong sector relationships, organisations will be able to create new types of collaborative and respectful relationships, within and across traditional sector boundaries that go beyond preparation for procurement. Doing this will help harness the efforts of all organisations working to help children and families.

We need to work together to create a shared understanding about the organisational strengths that exist now and the key challenges that need to be met now, and in the future. Strong sector relationships will help build a workable and balanced industry development approach that supports long term growth and sustainability.

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### What do we want to achieve?

- Strong, effective organisations that work together to deliver real benefits to vulnerable children and their families.
  - Longer term industry development that drives growth and sustainability, without losing the connection to community and clients that is a strength of our sector.
  - Supported communities who work together to identify local priorities in responding to the challenges they face, and in building community and organisational capacity to meet local needs.
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## Strengthen our professional practice culture

### *Build a proactive and positive culture in the way we collectively work to support children and families*

This outcome will only be successfully achieved through joint efforts. The key action areas provide an opportunity for all partners, dedicated to protecting vulnerable children and families in our community, to drive professional behaviour change and embed a positive culture in the way we do our work.

Striving to work better together as a sector requires everyone supporting children and families to genuinely believe we can change the way we practice, and together, do our business better. Governments cannot do this alone, nor can government influence the entire service system. Real change takes commitment from everyone: everyone must play their part. It must be clear that we have a shared commitment to keeping children safe. We must be united. We must go together.

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### What do we want to achieve?

- A proactive, positive and supportive culture in the way we work to support children and families, that recognises the shared responsibility for keeping children safe and supporting families to reach their full potential.
  - Respectful relationships between government officers, staff of non-government organisations, carers, parents, family, children and young people.
  - A more open and responsive approach that recognises shared government and non-government goal responsibility, emphasises areas of agreement and acts responsively to work through barriers.
  - A vibrant and inclusive culture that promotes reflective learning and continuous improvement in which there is recognition of good practice, and opportunities to showcase success.
  - Opportunities to collectively learn, value and improve from our successes and failures through appreciating the complexity of problems faced by families, communities and service environment.
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## Harness the strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, organisations and community



### *Build the role of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce and organisations to respond to the needs of children, families and communities*

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are over represented in the statutory child protection system, comprising over one third (42.0 per cent) of all children in out-of-home care in Queensland as at 30 June 2015.<sup>1</sup> This number has continued to rise in recent years, despite the commencement of early reform initiatives. Over representation is a complex issue that requires sector-wide ownership including all levels of government, and the whole community.

To help to reduce over representation, the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities must be valued and heard. We must draw on their strengths and provide opportunities that allow community level decision making. The system, our workforce and organisations must be culturally responsive and accessible, and adequately skilled and resourced.

We need to acknowledge and value the skills, inherent attributes and lived experience Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people bring to our sector. Cultural knowledge, relationships with children and families, community connections and engagement are all invaluable.

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### What do we want to achieve?

- A child and family support sector with the capacity and capability to adequately deliver a suite of prevention and early intervention services relevant to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.
  - A culturally capable workforce across the government and non-government child and family support sector that delivers culturally responsive service provision to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families.
  - Increased participation by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and those with lived experience of the child and family support sector.
  - Community controlled organisations that are empowered and have the capacity to play a significant role in reforming the system.
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<sup>1</sup> Source: Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services (<https://www.communities.qld.gov.au/childsafety/about-us/our-performance/summary-statistics/child-protection-orders>) Accessed 15 June 2016

# Implementation

A series of actions focused on building on the existing strengths of our sector will be implemented across three annual action plans. The action plans will identify a range of initiatives designed to realise supporting outcome areas outlined under this strategy. More broadly, each action plan will contribute to the vision of child and family reforms in Queensland. Specific priority programs and actions will be detailed under each annual plan. Learnings from initial plans will be incorporated into subsequent action plan priorities.

As this strategy is implemented, the QFCC will watch other key reforms impacting our sector. By aligning the implementation of the action plans with related initiatives and agendas, we reduce duplication and maximise efforts to support and develop our sector. Where appropriate, the QFCC will partner with agencies responsible for leading these reform agendas and participate in oversight, governance and advisory groups to maximise investment across our sector.

## First action plan: 2016 – 17

The first action plan will be focused on the foundations required to:

- establish programs that will support long term workforce participation
- create a space for discussing future industry direction and managing tensions between maintaining community and client connection and establishing development priorities
- generate momentum for cultural change in the way we work together across our sector, and with families and communities.

## Second action plan: 2017 – 18

The second action plan will continue to implement initiatives highlighted under the first plan, and build upon the supporting outcome practices under this strategy. Emphasis will be placed on profiling best practice, and identifying future focused priorities for sector development.

## Third action plan 2018 – 19

The third and final action plan under this strategy will continue the delivery of key programs, as well as highlight work required in the future to build on the foundations established under the first two plans. Evidence from prioritised evaluation will also be coordinated and provided back to our sector under the third action plan.

Input from across our sector will be sought in developing each action plan. The QFCC will be looking to partner with peak bodies, local level alliances and regional child and family committees to assist with place based implementation activities where appropriate.

# Governance and oversight

The governance model for this strategy is multi-layered. It provides space for the voices of sector stakeholders to help to determine future investment and implementation priorities.

The layered approach reinforces that everyone from senior sector leaders, to community elders and front line professionals, have a role in sharing in the responsibility for keeping children safe and supporting families to reach their full potential. The approach encourages the views of stakeholders from across our sector to be heard.

We encourage reflective learning at all levels of implementation monitoring and oversight. This makes sure that when things go right and wrong, we embrace and recognise the success and actively respond to the challenges. If our collaborative approach to the implementation of this strategy is to be truly transparent and based on one of partnership and collaboration, those messages that are the hardest to hear must be given our priority response.


The governance model draws on existing oversight mechanisms, as well as those that have been established by the QFCC. Each layer provides a unique level of oversight to different implementation elements of this strategy.

<b>Oversight</b>	Interdepartmental CEO Committee Child Protection Reform Leaders' Group QFCC Advisory Council
<b>Influencers</b>	Inter-Agency Working Group for the <i>Towards a Queensland action plan for vulnerable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families</i> Jobs and Industry Sub Committee Child and Family Reform Sub Committee QFCC Community Partnership Group Community, Elders, families, children and young people
<b>Implementation</b>	QFCC sector partners and stakeholders Regional Child and Family Committees Local Level Alliances Local community service network Service providers Universal services

# How will we measure success?

The Evaluation Framework will provide an evidence base for the success of this strategy and its outcomes and ensure the effectiveness of initiatives can be monitored, as well as providing an important contribution to building sector knowledge through establishing a strong evidence base on which to leverage future investment decisions.

The Evaluation Plan will prioritise areas of focus during the implementation of this strategy. The Evaluation Plan will serve as a critical monitoring tool to ensure the outcomes of this strategy are being met through the selected implementation priorities under this strategy's action plans. Where appropriate, the Evaluation Plan will capture the views of stakeholders and ensure mechanisms to regularly check in with implementation partners are appropriately reflected.



# How will we know the strategy is working?

The QFCC will monitor the plan's implementation and progress towards achieving its vision and outcomes. Progress reports will be published on the QFCC website outlining implementation to date, progress against the strategy outcomes and actions to be prioritised under future action plans.

The outcomes of the strategy will also be reviewed within five years as a part of the broader evaluation of the reform program. The focus of this evaluation will be to determine if it has contributed to strengthening the capacity and capability of the child and family support sector and establishing a positive culture in child protection practice.







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