

Principal Commissioner's report

I am pleased to present the Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC) Annual Report for 2021–22. This is my first report as the Principal Commissioner, having commenced in the role in January 2022.


I would like to acknowledge and thank the former Principal Commissioner, Cheryl Vardon, for her service to the commission and the children and families of Queensland. I also acknowledge and thank Commissioner Natalie Lewis with whom I share the powers of the commission. I would also like to extend appreciation to all staff at the QFCC for their diligent and dedicated service to Queensland children and families.

The QFCC has been charged by government with significant responsibilities to review and improve the systems that protect our children and their families. We do this by assessing performance, collaborating for impact and amplifying the voices of Queensland's children and their families.

In 2021–22, the commission expended \$13.482 million to deliver its functions and as at 30 June 2022 there were 64 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff working in the commission. Our staff are passionate, culturally responsive, and dedicated to making a positive difference to the lives of children, young people and the families of Queensland.

Significant activities of the QFCC this year included:

- releasing *Principle focus a child-rights approach to systemic accountability for the safety and wellbeing of Queensland's First Nations children*
- launching our *Growing up in Queensland: Living through COVID 2021* survey which examined the impact of lockdowns and collected the suggestions of young people (aged 13–18) about how government and community leaders could best communicate to them about matters relating to the pandemic
- providing QFCC youth advocates with opportunities to share their voices through mediums including the Mental Health Select Committee, the Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce and the Human Rights Commission Roundtable
- releasing *Rights, Voices, Stories: identifying what matters to children and young people involved with the Queensland child protection system*
- publishing the Child Death Review Board's (CDRB) inaugural annual report and the 2020–21 report on deaths of children and young people in Queensland
- initiating a review of 208 recommendations from 10 QFCC system reviews to determine if they were contributing to system improvement, and consequently if the QFCC was influencing positive change
- releasing our Child and Youth Participation Framework, outlining how we give children and young people genuine opportunities to participate in decision making, to give full effect to the realisation of their rights
- commencing *Yarning for change* – a process of speaking directly to young people with lived experience in the youth justice system to identify systemic improvements
- releasing *Taking Lives: A Queensland study on parents who kill their children* and corresponding paper *Final report – A study of indicators of red flags for fatal child assault and neglect in Queensland*
- gifting *The Right to Be Me* books to every foster and kinship care home in Queensland
- publishing our *Safer pathways through childhood* strategy which outlines the commission's approach to preventing the deaths of children and young people over the next 5 years
- launching a new, user-friendly website including a dedicated 'Youth' space so that the community can better connect to our work and findings.



In addition to our targeted reviews, we continue to monitor the performance of the child and family support system in Queensland. This year's system performance assessment, contained in this annual report, describes what is working well including:

- the number of Queensland families being referred to family support services is growing, and there is evidence that these services are improving outcomes
- the majority of children living in out-of-home care have a health passport and a number of initiatives have been developed by Queensland Health to address reported inconsistencies of health care coordination
- improvements for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in readiness for school, infant mortality, housing and the use of police diversions.

Unfortunately, our analysis shows there are more children and young people entering the out-of-home care system than are exiting and Queensland has one of the lowest proportions of children in care living in home-based care compared with other Australian jurisdictions. Queensland also has one of the highest rates of young people in youth justice supervision and our rates of youth suicide remain of concern. Understanding our ongoing role to influence positive change for Queensland's children has been a key focus over the last financial year.

Internally, the 2021–22 financial year has been a transformational year for the commission. Two reviews of our effectiveness were conducted, the most significant – the ACIL Allen independent review – was tabled in Parliament on 13 January 2022. This review found that the commission was effective and trusted but could optimise its impact by exploring opportunities to work strategically with other statutory agencies and streamlining or reallocating activities where the QFCC does not have a strong impact. In response we have refreshed our strategic plan, implemented new governance and operating models, and challenged ourselves to adopt new oversight and partnership approaches that will maximise our ability to influence positive change.

We are a commission that can make an immense impact on the lives of Queensland's children and their families. In the year ahead, the commission remains focused on our core objectives of raising awareness, advocating for improvement and ensuring system accountability. We will do this through our independent reviews and strategic alliances, recognising that we form part of a broader child safety ecosystem that includes dedicated frontline workers who are equally committed to making a positive difference to the lives of children and young people. We are targeting our efforts to redress inequity for children, young people and their families who are experiencing vulnerability. We will consequently consider the holistic wellbeing of families in our approach, and we will pay particular attention to the gaps in statutory systems, and those created by a lack of access to coordinated universal and targeted supports. The disproportionate representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families in our statutory systems and across multiple indicators of disadvantage is unacceptable. We believe that families are strengthened by inclusive, safe and thriving communities where respect for culture and the rights of children is at the centre.

As we head into the 2022–23 year, I am confident that we will continue to grow, learn, and improve how we influence positive change for the safety and wellbeing of Queensland's children.



Luke Twyford
Chief Executive and Principal Commissioner
Queensland Family and Child Commission