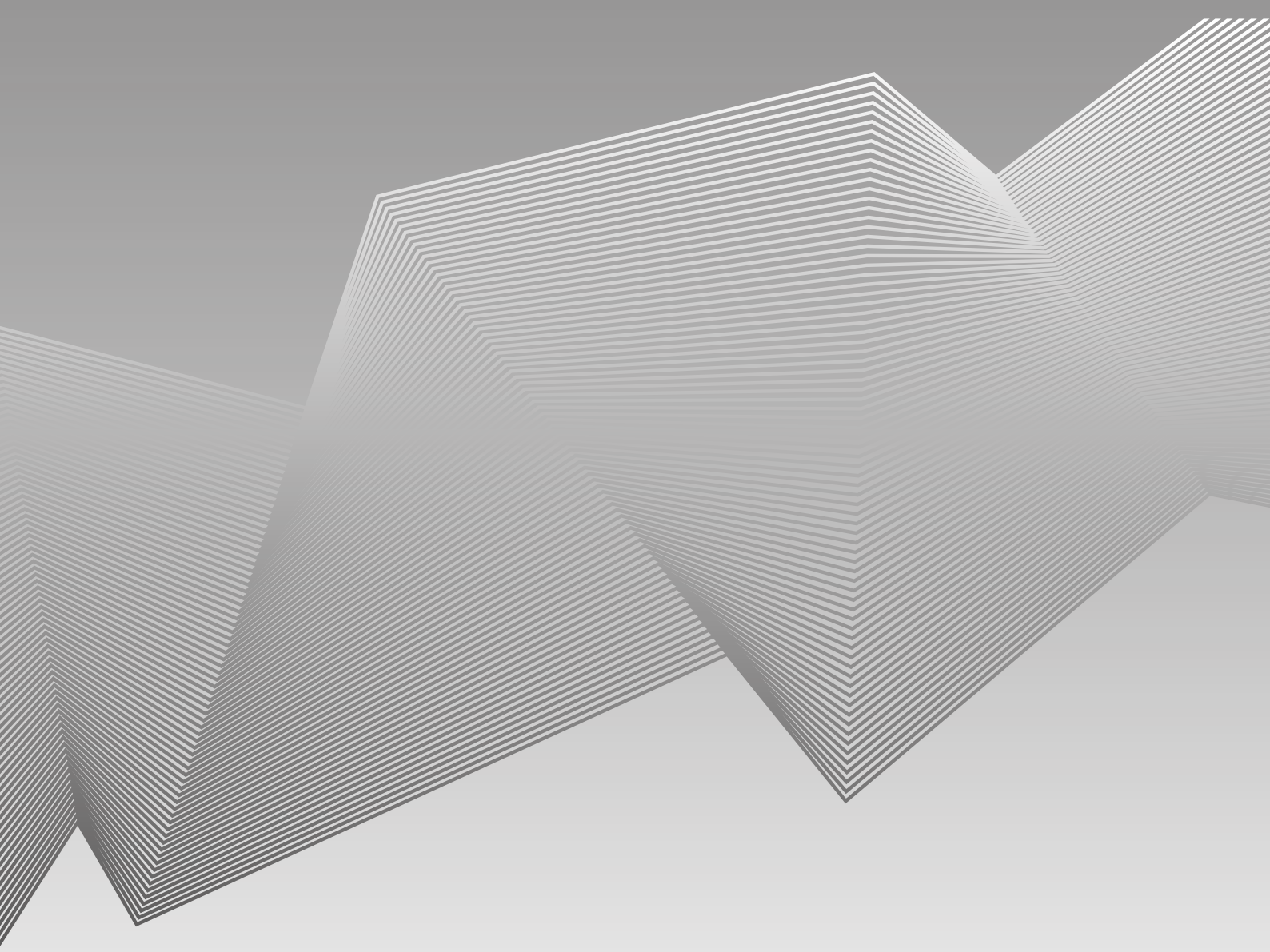


Queensland Family and Child Commission

ANNUAL REPORT 2020–2021



Queensland
Government

Communication objective

This annual report describes the progress towards achieving our long-term objectives during 2020–21. These objectives are published in the Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC) Strategic Plan 2020–2024.

The report also focuses on our financial position and compliance with legislative requirements. It explains how the QFCC is helping to address some of the main challenges affecting Queensland children and families. It also provides information on our forward plans.

To contain production costs, only in-house resources have been used to develop this report. Limited hard copies have been produced.

An electronic copy is available on the QFCC website at www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/annual-report.

Contact for enquiries

For enquiries, further information, or to receive a hard copy of the report, please contact us at:

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Acknowledgement

The Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC) acknowledges the Turrbal and Yuggera peoples as the Traditional Custodians across the land on which the QFCC meets and works.

We recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as two unique peoples, with their own rich and distinct cultures, strengths and knowledge. We celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures across Queensland and pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

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Queensland
Government

Queensland
Family & Child
Commission

Telephone: 07 3900 6000
Reference: CS-F21/165 – D21/9794

31 August 2021

The Honourable Shannon Fentiman MP
Attorney-General and Minister for Justice, Minister for Women and
Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence
1 William Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Attorney-General

I am pleased to submit for presentation to the Parliament the Annual Report 2020–2021 and financial statements for the Queensland Family and Child Commission.

I certify that this Annual Report complies with:

- the prescribed requirements for the *Financial Accountability Act 2009* and the *Financial and Performance Management Standard 2019*
- section 40 of the *Family and Child Commission Act 2014*, and
- the detailed requirements set out in the *Annual report requirements for Queensland Government agencies*.

A checklist outlining the annual reporting requirements is provided at page 46 of this annual report.

Yours sincerely

Cheryl Vardon
Chief Executive and Principal Commissioner
Queensland Family and Child Commission

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Principal Commissioner's report

This annual report provides detail on the many achievements and successes of the Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC) in 2020–21. I am very proud of the work we have continued to deliver, especially given the challenging times in which it has been undertaken. Despite the ongoing challenges COVID-19 presented, the QFCC continued to carry out meaningful and influential work to protect the rights of children and young people in Queensland.

A refreshed strategic agenda saw us place further emphasis on bringing children's rights to life and on ensuring that every child is safe, with opportunities to succeed. We are pursuing this by raising awareness of the rights of young Queenslanders, advocating for what matters to them and holding to account the systems responsible for the safety and wellbeing of our most vulnerable children and young people.

We have adapted and evolved during the past 12 months, making sure the voices of more young Queenslanders are being heard on issues that matter to them.

This annual report highlights our work on responding to and preventing the deaths of children and our ongoing engagement with our partners and colleagues on issues that matter to children, young people and families.

The year began with the establishment of the new independent Child Death Review Board (the Board) on 1 July 2020. I now hold the position of Chair of the Board in addition to my role as Principal Commissioner. Hosted by the QFCC, the Board carries out reviews following the death of a child who was known to the child protection system. It makes recommendations for improvements to legislation, mechanisms and systems, policies and practices intended to prevent the deaths of children that may have been avoidable.

Throughout the year, we continued to build on our strong and valuable work in overseeing the child protection and youth justice systems.

In September, we completed *Seeing they are safe*, a report on the responsiveness of the statutory child protection system to reports of harm to a child. We presented this to ministers and government agencies involved in investigating and assessing reports of child harm.

We also released *Changing the sentence: overseeing Queensland's youth justice reforms*, which was an oversight review of the Queensland Government's *Youth Justice Strategy*. The report assessed reforms against child rights, wellbeing, and safety and included 13 findings and eight opportunities for future investment. It brought together interviews of frontline service providers, families and children in Brisbane, Townsville and Mount Isa and included a media analysis and an in-depth look at three reform initiatives.

This year, we started our *Principle Focus* program, to help address the disproportionate representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in the statutory child protection systems. *Principle Focus* will monitor, evaluate and review the effective application of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle.¹ We have also begun a review to assess the safety of children subject to an intervention with parental agreement (which is when a child's parents agree to work cooperatively with Child Safety to keep their child safe).

¹ Under the *Child Protection Act 1999* this principle must be considered when placing an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child or young person in the child protection system. The five core elements of the Principle are Prevention, Partnership, Connection, Placement and Participation.

In April 2021, we launched *Voices of Hope: Growing Up in Queensland 2020*. This report outlined the views of more than 8,000 children and young people (aged 4–18) about their communities, their hopes and the issues that are important to them. These young people told us they would like more youth-friendly spaces in their communities, they hope for further education and employment, and they called for more action from leaders on mental health, education and the environment.

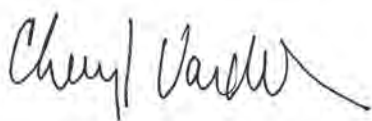
In addition, the government tasked us with undertaking a culturally appropriate community conversation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people about their interaction with the justice system. We have begun work on this.

Talking Families, our initiative for engaging with parents, continues to form relationships and partnerships with schools and services to embed parenting support messages. Currently, more than 175 schools and early childhood services deliver the *Talking Families* initiative across 15 Family and Child Connect² regions in Queensland.

This is also my last annual report after more than six years in the role of Chief Executive and Principal Commissioner of the Queensland Family and Child Commission.

I want to acknowledge the contribution of all staff who worked for the QFCC over the years. They continued to adapt and grow during times of uncertainty, meeting the many challenges they faced with an unwavering commitment to help protect the rights, safety and wellbeing of children and young people in Queensland. I also want to thank the many partners who worked alongside us.

The 2021–22 financial year will be no less challenging, but with these people and a strong strategic agenda, we will continue to make a difference for Queensland's children and young people.



Cheryl Vardon

Chief Executive and Principal Commissioner
Queensland Family and Child Commission

² Family and Child Connect are Queensland-wide, community-based referral services intended to enable families experiencing vulnerability to be assessed and linked with local services (for example, parenting or adult mental health services) that best meet their needs.



About us

Our role

Children, young people and their families are at the heart of everything the Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC) does.

We are dedicated to bringing children's rights to life and improving the child protection and family support system.

All of our work is underpinned by the following four general principles from the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child*:

- non-discrimination
- devotion to the best interests of the child
- the right to life, survival and development
- respect for the views of the child.

To deliver on this, we:

-
- ***hold to account the systems responsible for the safety and wellbeing of the most vulnerable children and young people*** by:
 - maintaining independence and recognising the important role of the family in children's lives
 - focusing on sector outcomes—measuring what matters to enable the oversight of systems responsible for upholding the rights of Queensland children and young people
 - advocating for systemic change to protect the rights and best interests of children and young people in Queensland, particularly those who experience inequity, vulnerability and marginalisation.
 - ***promote and raise awareness of the rights of children and young people in Queensland*** by:
 - gathering and using the perspectives of Queensland's children and young people to inform and influence government decision-making
 - using engagement methods that are purposeful, ethical and inclusive
 - using best practice and strong evidence to remain contemporary and current in our role as trusted advisor.
 - ***advocate for what matters in the lives of children and young people and their families*** by:
 - taking a stand on issues that affect the rights of children and young people in Queensland
 - using young people's experiences and data to tell a story
 - identifying, consulting and collaborating with our key stakeholders and partners and using the collective knowledge to influence outcomes for the benefit of children and young people.
-

We achieve this in partnership with government and non-government organisations.

Our legislation

The QFCC was established on 1 July 2014. The *Family and Child Commission Act 2014* (the Act) established the QFCC as a statutory body to:

- promote the safety, wellbeing and best interests of children and young people
- promote and advocate for the responsibility of families and communities to protect and care for children and young people
- improve the child protection system.

The Act also prescribes that two commissioners be appointed by the Governor in Council—one as the principal commissioner and chief executive. At least one commissioner must be an Aboriginal person or a Torres Strait Islander.

Our strategic plan

‘Bringing Children’s Rights to Life’

Commissioner’s Value Statement 2020

Our vision

Every child is safe with opportunities to succeed

Our purpose

Fulfilling our obligations under the *Family and Child Commission Act 2014*, building awareness of and accountability for the rights, safety and wellbeing of Queensland’s children, within the child and family support system and across the Queensland community. We will advocate for systemic change where children and young people experience inequity, vulnerability and marginalisation in Queensland.

Our opportunities

- Lead the development of a comprehensive children’s rights agenda to give practical effect to the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* for all children and young people growing up in Queensland
- Reaffirm the role and responsibilities of family, community and service providers in protecting children’s rights
- Position the QFCC as an authoritative source of advice and expertise on issues impacting the rights, safety and wellbeing of children and young people
- Provide evidence-based, high-impact advocacy on children’s rights and the issues that matter to children and young people in Queensland
- Give children and young people strong opportunities to participate in decision-making to give full effect to the realisation of their rights
- Extend our capability and influence to provide stronger oversight over the systems responsible for the safety and wellbeing of our most vulnerable children and young people

Our risks

- Limited access to high-quality data reduces our capacity to effectively monitor and provide oversight over the child and family support system, restricting our ability to drive improvements and build a culture of accountability
- A perceived lack of independence may diminish our reputation with stakeholders and our ability to influence positive change
- Without broad, strong engagement our ability to advocate and ensure accountability is limited

Children’s rights

We strive to uphold the four core principles of the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child*:

- Non-discrimination
- Devotion to the best interests of the child
- The right to life, survival and development
- Respect for the views of the child

Our priorities

	Awareness	Advocacy	Accountability
Objectives	We promote and raise awareness of the rights of children and young people in Queensland	We advocate for what matters in the lives of children and young people and their families	We hold to account the systems responsible for the safety and wellbeing of our most vulnerable children and young people
Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voice – We gather and use the perspectives of Queensland’s children and young people to inform and influence the decisions made by government. • Outreach – Our engagement processes are purposeful, ethical, and inclusive. • Trusted advisor – We use best practice and a strong evidence base to remain contemporary and current. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We Take a stand on issues that affect the rights of children and young people in Queensland. • Evidence – We use young people’s experiences and data to tell a story. • Harness the expertise of others – We identify, consult and collaborate with our key stakeholders and partners and use the collective knowledge to influence outcomes for the benefit of children and young people. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independence – We maintain independence and recognise the important role of the family in children’s lives. • Focus on outcomes – We measure what matters to enable the oversight of systems responsible for upholding the rights of Queensland’s children and young people. • Mandate – We advocate for systemic change to protect the rights and best interests of children and young people in Queensland, particularly those who experience inequity, vulnerability and marginalisation.
Indicators	Increased awareness of the rights of children and young people in Queensland and the responsibilities of families, communities and systems	Engagement of stakeholders and public entities in the promotion of children’s rights	The QFCC is respected as independent and the premier agency for oversight of children’s rights through the changes we have influenced in the child and family support system(s)

We contribute to Government’s *Unite and Recover* objectives for the community

Our objectives and strategies aim to support frontline service delivery in key areas such as community safety, health and education, particularly where the rights of Queensland children, young people and their families are impacted

Our performance

In the service delivery statements of the Queensland State Budget 2020–21, the QFCC had one service area objective. This was to promote the safety and wellbeing of children and young people and the role of families and communities in protecting and caring for them.

This is measured through the following service standard:

QFCC service standard	Notes	2020–21 target	2020–21 actual
Percentage increase in searches on the 'oneplace' Community Services Directory	1, 2	5%	-10%
Overall satisfaction with 'oneplace' community services directory user experience	3	70%	71.2%

Notes:

- This service standard reports on the number of searches undertaken by people accessing the *oneplace* Community Services Directory. This is an easily accessible directory of community services to assist all Queensland families get to the right service at the right time. In doing so, it addresses several of QFCC's statutory obligations, including supporting families to take responsibility and care for children and informing and educating the community about services.
- This service standard was introduced in 2019–20 to highlight the number of searches, rather than the number of site visits (predecessor measure used). The number of searches is a more valid representation of the value of the site to the community than the previous measure (which was the number of site visits). A visitor to the site who searches for a service has presumably benefited more from the site than a community member who visits the site but does not search for a service.
- This new service standard provides information on overall satisfaction of visitors to the *oneplace* Community Services Directory and is derived from an online user survey.

In 2021–22 the QFCC will introduce an efficiency measure, QFCC expenditure per young Queenslander. This measure will highlight the efficiency and value of the QFCC in fulfilling its obligations under its Act.

Our operating environment

The QFCC operates in a complex environment influenced by multiple reform agendas and industry initiatives at both state and national levels. We are actively involved in a number of these initiatives, including several related to child protection and youth justice reform.

We partner with the agencies responsible for leading the initiatives, and lead and participate in overseeing, governance and advisory groups to help create sustainable change across the child protection and family support sector. Our partnerships with both the government and non-government sector support a responsive, sustainable service system that benefits children and families.

Through these activities, the QFCC plays a vital role in promoting the safety, welfare and best interests of children and young people.

Reform environment

Working Together Changing the Story: Youth Justice Strategy 2019–2023

The Queensland Government's *Working Together, Changing the Story: Youth Justice Strategy 2019–23* has a strong focus on prevention, early intervention, and collaboration in order to tackle the underlying causes of youth crime.

In supporting this approach, the QFCC acknowledges the need to address serious recidivist youth offending and maintain community safety while at the same time upholding children's rights under the *Human Rights Act 2019* and the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child*.

We work to influence the Queensland Government's youth justice reform program. We do this primarily by providing opportunities for agencies to share system information and to identify and consider any unintended consequences for young people arising from agency actions. The work we did for *Changing the Sentence: Overseeing Queensland's youth justice reforms* also gave us the opportunity to examine options for future youth justice systems and processes.

The QFCC is also represented on the Senior Officers Group of the Youth Crime Task Force.

Queensland Audit Office *Family support and child protection system (Report 1: 2020–21)*

On 4 August 2020, the Queensland Audit Office tabled in parliament an audit of the family support and child protection system. The audit assessed how effectively Queensland public sector entities work together for the safety and wellbeing of Queensland children.

Recommendation seven from the report was that the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women (now the Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs—the department) collaborates with the QFCC to improve outcomes for children placed in out-of-home care.

In its role as an oversight agency, the QFCC is continuing to liaise with the department on the implementation of this recommendation and is playing an active role in its strategic implementation.

The out-of-home care findings from the Queensland Audit Office's report are similar to those the QFCC reported in its 2017 report, *Keeping Queensland's children more than safe: Review of the foster care system*.

Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability

The Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (the Disability Royal Commission) was established in April 2019. It is investigating how to:

- prevent and better protect people with disability from experiencing violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation
- achieve best practice in reporting, investigating and responding to violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of people with disability
- promote a more inclusive society that assists people with disability to be independent and live free from violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation.

In October 2020, Commissioner Natalie Lewis provided evidence to the Disability Royal Commission on behalf of the QFCC. Her statement highlighted the discrimination that First Nations parents with disability and First Nations parents to a child with disability face when accessing National Disability Insurance Scheme services.

It also made it clear that interactions with universal systems such as education, housing and health, as well as targeted, specialist supports such as domestic and family violence services, are compromised by inequitable access and lack of availability of inclusive, culturally affirming services. This increases families' vulnerability. It also makes it more likely that they will come to the attention of statutory child protection systems, and it increases the likelihood of their children being removed.

Commissioner Lewis reiterated the importance of not losing sight of the those most impacted when implementing any recommendations from the Disability Royal Commission. This is critical to ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability experience equitable, complete enjoyment of their human rights and are empowered to participate directly in the decisions that most profoundly impact on their lives.

It is Commissioner Lewis's hope that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, regardless of ability, have equitable access to the high-quality, culturally affirming universal and targeted supports they need to ensure children grow up safe and connected to kin, country and culture.

The remaining chapters of this annual report address the objectives and strategies outlined in the QFCC's *Strategic Plan 2020–2024*.

Accountability

Systems oversight

The oversight role of the Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC) focuses on monitoring, reviewing and reporting on Queensland's child protection system. As part of its role to help realise the rights of children, the QFCC is proactively overseeing the systems accountable for the safety and wellbeing of vulnerable children and young people. The *QFCC Oversight Strategy 2020–2022* details the schedule of proactive systemic reviews for the year.

Oversight Strategy 2020–2022

In 2020, the QFCC released its *Oversight Strategy 2020–2022*. It explains how we monitor system performance by focusing on children, families and system outcomes across three impact areas: system reliability, productivity, and sustainability.

It considers how well the child and family support system upholds and protects children's rights, wellbeing and safety and how well it generates positive outcomes.

It also identifies headline indicators and evidentiary sources for monitoring performance of the child and family support system.

We will review the strategy during 2021 to ensure it is compatible with our revised strategic plan.

We report annually on the performance of the child and family support system (see [Appendix D](#)).

In 2020–21, we undertook the following major work:

Changing the Sentence: Overseeing Queensland's youth justice reforms

The Director-General of the then Department of Youth Justice asked the QFCC to undertake an oversight project to examine options for future youth justice systems and processes. This was to ensure investment decisions were implemented to support the best outcomes for children, young people and the community.

This *Changing the Sentence* project allowed us to examine youth justice initiatives, multi-agency responses, good practice and agency success in achieving positive outcomes. In doing so, we considered whether youth justice reforms were ensuring that:

- a reliable, trusted system is built on shared connections and commitment
- children's rights, wellbeing and safety are being upheld and protected.

During data collection for the report, the project team conducted 83 meetings and interviews with 125 stakeholders from Mount Isa, Townsville, and Brisbane. Participants came from 43 organisations including:

- 13 government agencies
- 10 non-government agencies
- 9 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations.

Throughout the report, we recognised the significant over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the child protection system. One of the important themes that emerged was the need to return decision-making about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people to local communities and community-controlled organisations.

The report includes 13 findings and identifies future opportunities for the youth justice system. They identify a need to continue addressing the two ends of the spectrum, which means providing:

- very early interventions with families and children to reduce the risk of a young person coming in contact with the youth justice system
- specialised services for the small number of young people already in the statutory system who are committing most of the crime.

The report also calls for greater accountability by government agencies in upholding the rights and wellbeing of families and children with whom they are in contact.

The *Changing the Sentence* report released in June 2021 is available on the QFCC website.³ We will use it in future monitoring of the youth justice system.

Seeing they are Safe: Responsiveness to 5-day and 10-day notifications of child harm in Queensland

In September 2020, the QFCC presented the final *Seeing they are Safe: Responsiveness to 5 day and 10 day notifications of child harm in Queensland* report to ministers and government agencies involved in investigating and assessing reports of child harm.

This review examined the differing contexts in which the Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs (the department) delivers its investigation and assessment function and the complexities and challenges facing its frontline workforce.

The review found the department’s service centres have considerable autonomy and display innovation in their investigation and assessment approaches. It also found that, as a result of policy changes, there have been some improvements in response timeliness—specifically in the number of 5-day and 10-day notifications commenced and completed within the set timeframes.

However, the data showed there is an unacceptable delay between when an investigation and assessment process is commenced and a child safety officer sights (physically sees) the child.

The review also highlighted the value of partnerships in supporting timely and high-quality investigation and assessment responses. This was particularly true for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, where partnerships with community-controlled organisations support the increased participation of families in decisions that affect the safety and wellbeing of their children.

We continue to monitor the time taken from when a report is received and an investigation commenced, to when a child is sighted.

Child and family support sector workforce environmental scan

In 2020–21, the QFCC shared the *Child and family support sector workforce environmental scan* with key stakeholders across the sector including peak bodies, major employers in government and non-government agencies and local-level networks. The scan detailed the current state of the child and family workforce and identified challenges and opportunities in building a strong and sustainable workforce in the future.

The report examined publicly available data on the sector and provided demand and supply projections to 2030.

³ Queensland Family & Child Commission 2021, *Changing the sentence*, <https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/keeping-kids-more-safe/monitoring-reviewing-systems-protect-children/changing-sentence>

The qualitative research we gathered provided deep insight into workforce challenges and opportunities. As part of this, we conducted eight focus groups with a total of 65 stakeholders from government, non-government and community-controlled organisations; children and young people advocacy services; regional, rural and remote services; foster and kinship care services; and place-based, community and volunteer initiatives.

We found:

- The sector is under increasing pressure now, and will be in the future.
- The size and capability of the workforce need to grow to meet increasing demand.
- Workforce trends indicate an ongoing demand for tertiary child protection services, despite increased investment in family support services.
- There are recruitment and retention challenges, particularly in rural and remote areas, including recruiting to identified positions⁴ and finding staff with qualifications and specialist skillsets.
- The reasons for high staff turnover include comparative wages with other sectors, overtime and burnout.
- Learning and development needs (including supervision, support and mentoring) are unmet. This will not sustain a contemporary workforce.

We will continue to support peak bodies and sector leaders as they develop the future child and family workforce and will include workforce in our ongoing oversight work.

Rights, Voices, Stories

The QFCC engaged 11 youth researchers with lived experience and/or understanding of the out-of-home care system to work on our *Rights, Voices, Stories* project. This project focuses on listening to children and young people who rely on the child protection system to stay safe and well. The project hears their perspectives, finds out about their experiences, and identifies the sorts of outcomes they believe should be measured.

The youth researchers participated in a three-day workshop in March 2021 to:

- identify the outcomes that matter to children and young people in care (these will be monitored by the QFCC)
- undertake some research ethics and focus group facilitation skills training to support qualitative data collection (due to commence later in 2021).

A report describing this process and the outcomes identified by young people will be released later in 2021.

Review of interventions with parental agreement

The QFCC began a review of interventions with parental agreement (IPA) that will highlight areas of good practice and identify opportunities for system improvements to protect and keep children safe at home.

The core objective of this review is to determine:

- if children are safe when subject to an intervention with parental agreement
- if children subject to an intervention with parental agreement are at the centre of the intervention (rather than their parents or others), with their rights upheld and prioritised.

The review will focus at a system level and will include both qualitative and quantitative data to provide a picture of intervention with parental agreement practice as it is occurring in Queensland.

The review is due to be completed by mid-2022, with a report published soon after that.

⁴ An identified position means a job where the employer identifies that it is to be filled by a person with a particular attribute, such as cultural background or gender.

Principle focus—Systemic accountability for the safety and wellbeing of Queensland’s First Nations children: a child-rights approach

Significant commitments have been made in Queensland to implement systemic reforms (to legislation, policy, programs, processes and practice) that give effect to each of the five elements of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle—prevention, partnership, placement, participation and connection.

The *Principle focus* program seeks to increase system-level awareness, accountability and advocacy for the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children by monitoring, evaluating and reviewing the effective application of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle.

This program will help the QFCC exercise its statutory oversight functions regarding the improvement of the child protection system. It will also increase the likelihood that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle will deliver the intended outcomes of:

- significantly reducing the rate of over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in the child protection system
- improving the rights, safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

The program will also highlight areas of good practice and identify opportunities for system improvements to protect children.

Oversight groups

The QFCC chairs two oversight groups with child protection stakeholders, the Reviews Strategic Advisory Group and the Strategic Cross-agency Oversight Group.

The Reviews Strategic Advisory Group

The Reviews Strategic Oversight Group meets quarterly and is chaired by the QFCC Executive Director, Oversight. Its role is to help enable the implementation of government-accepted recommendations from reviews for which the QFCC is the delegated oversight agency.

Membership includes senior officers from across government agencies that have contributed to the implementation of these reviews.

The Strategic Cross-Agency Oversight Group

The Principal Commissioner chairs the Strategic Cross-Agency Oversight Group, which meets quarterly. Its purpose is to discuss sector-wide trends and issues, with a focus on systemic and cross-agency oversight. It is made up of representatives from the following agencies:

- QFCC
- Office of the Queensland Ombudsman
- Queensland Human Rights Commission
- Crime and Corruption Commission
- Queensland Mental Health Commission
- Queensland Office of the Health Ombudsman
- Office of the Health Ombudsman
- Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal
- Coroners Court of Queensland
- Office of the Public Guardian
- Queensland Integrity Commission
- Office of Child Protection Litigation
- Queensland Magistrates Courts Service.

In 2020–21, the QFCC was also responsible for:

Performance of the Queensland child protection system

Section 40 of the *Family and Child Commission Act 2014* requires the QFCC to report on:

- the performance of Queensland’s child protection system in achieving state and national goals
- Queensland’s child protection system’s performance over time in comparison to other jurisdictions
- Queensland’s progress in reducing the number of, and improving the outcomes for, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in the child protection system.

More detailed information on Queensland’s performance is available at [Appendix D](#).

Evaluation

The QFCC has legislative responsibility for analysing and evaluating, at a systems level, the:

- policies and practices relevant to the child protection system
- performance of relevant agencies in delivering services.

We conduct annual data collection activities to support this evaluation work, including surveys of the community and the frontline child protection and family support sector workforce. We also design and conduct system-level evaluations.

The QFCC has lead responsibility for evaluating the child protection reforms being implemented in response to the recommendations of the 2013 Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry report. This has been/is being done at three milestones over the 10-year reform program.

These evaluations assess how well the reform program has been implemented and its outcomes and impacts.

Outcomes evaluation

This evaluation examined the first five years of the reforms in the child protection and family support sector and the outcomes as they relate to the strategic directions of the *Supporting Families Changing Futures* reform program.

However, as data collection began in late 2019 and continued throughout 2020, some of the insights shared by stakeholders reflect progress in more recent years, as well as the impact of COVID-19 on service provision.

While the evaluation report is being finalised, the preliminary findings show:

- There is a need to measure what matters to children and young people in the system.
- The workforce (and the services it delivers) is stretched and demand is increasing across the system.
- The over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children is not decreasing.
- There are mixed views about the extent to which responsibility, risk and accountability are being shared.
- Governance of the reform program could be more strategic.

The final report will be released in late 2021.

Workforce survey

The workforce survey measures the perspectives of frontline workers and service providers in the child protection and family support sector on a variety of issues. It has been conducted in 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021.

We received 761 responses in 2020, which was more than double the sample sizes achieved in the previous surveys. The 2020 survey results were published on the QFCC website in August 2020.⁵

Findings included:

- Survey respondents' perceptions about their roles and organisations were generally more positive than their perceptions about the broader child protection and family support system.
- Respondents working for non-government organisations were often more positive than those from government agencies.
- Compared with the 2019 survey results, the 2020 survey shows some improvements in perceptions:
 - that work/caseloads are manageable
 - that organisations have a positive culture
 - about the performance of the system
 - that reforms are improving outcomes
 - regarding access to high-quality learning and development opportunities.

The 2021 survey, which closed in May 2021, received 763 responses. Analysis and reporting of the results is underway, and findings will be shared on the QFCC website later in 2021.

Community perspectives survey

The community perspectives survey measures the community's confidence in the Queensland child protection sector and in its ability to keep children safe. It also measures the community's awareness of the child protection system and how it operates.

It has been conducted in 2017, 2019, 2020 and 2021.

In 2020, we received 2,530 responses. The results were published on the QFCC website in August 2020.

Public confidence and trust in the Queensland child protection system was found to be holding steady. More respondents agreed (56 per cent) than disagreed (44 per cent) they had confidence and trust in the Queensland child protection system (excluding respondents who didn't know or had no opinion). This is consistent with the 2017 and 2019 results (where 56 per cent agreed in both).

The 2021 survey received 2,520 responses. Analysis and reporting of the results is underway, and findings will be shared on the QFCC website later in 2021.

⁵ Market & Communications Research (for Queensland Family & Child Commission) 2020, *Workforce Survey 2020: FINAL Research Report*, <https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-08/2020%20Workforce%20Survey%20report.PDF>

Prevention of child deaths

The QFCC maintains the Queensland Child Death Register. The QFCC analyses information from the register and produces an annual report on the deaths of all children in Queensland. This helps to improve understanding of risk factors and supports the development of new policies and practices to reduce child deaths.

The register contains records of over 7,700 children whose deaths were registered with the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages between 1 January 2004 and 30 June 2021.

It provides a valuable evidence base that is used to:

- develop activities for safety and for the prevention of injury
- monitor the effectiveness of prevention activities
- provide detailed child death data to researchers and government agencies.

Supporting efforts to prevent child deaths

One way the QFCC contributes to the prevention of child death and injury is to make data held in the register available for research, public education, policy development and program design. Access to the comprehensive dataset is available at no cost to researchers.

In 2020–21, we responded to 25 requests from researchers and government agencies for detailed data from the register.

We have continued to monitor and support prevention of suicide deaths of children and young people by promoting mental wellbeing tips through our social media channels.

Participation in state and national advisory groups

The QFCC's child death prevention staff participated on several advisory bodies, such as the:

- Consumer Product Injury Research Advisory Group
- Queensland Government Births and Deaths Working Group
- Interim Queensland Suicide Prevention Network
- Queensland Paediatric Quality Council Steering Committee
- Infant Mortality Sub-committee
- Road Safety Research Network
- Australian and New Zealand Child Death Review and Prevention Group
- Multi-agency Advisory Group.

The Office of the State Coroner has initiated a 9-month pilot of a multi-agency advisory meeting for recent sudden unexpected death in infancy (SUDI) deaths.

The initiative was prompted by advocacy by the Queensland Paediatric Quality Council and the QFCC. The purpose of the multi-agency advisory meeting process is to provide advice and recommendations to the investigating coroner on sudden unexpected infancy deaths.

Improved collection of information on child deaths

The QFCC launched its new Child Death Register—Coda—on 12 March 2021. Coda brought new functionality and, with the migration of the full dataset of the previous 17 years of child death data, created greater opportunity to capture and use data in a more structured way.

These features will better support future research and child death prevention initiatives to help keep Queensland's children and young people safe.

Further enhancements and refinements of the system and its reporting tool will be made in the future.

Annual report on child deaths in Queensland

The QFCC's *Annual Report: Deaths of children and young people, Queensland 2019–20* was tabled in the Queensland Parliament on 17 March 2021.

The report found there has been a gradual decline in child mortality rates from natural causes (diseases and morbid conditions). However, deaths from natural causes still accounted for the majority of deaths of children (249 deaths or 66 per cent) while external (non-natural) causes of death accounted for 75 deaths (20 per cent).

Transport was the leading external cause of death, with 21 deaths. Suicide was the second leading cause of external deaths, with 20 deaths, a marked decrease from 37 suicide deaths in 2018–19.

Despite this, suicide remains the leading cause of death in young people aged 15–17 years over the last five years (37 per cent) and a leading cause for the 10–14 years age group (18 per cent).

For a summary of main findings, refer to the *Child deaths in Queensland* fact sheet, which is available on the QFCC website.⁶ Additional fact sheets provide summary findings for children known to the child protection system and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

The annual reports on child deaths, 16-year data tables and the latest statistics on child deaths in Australian states and territories and New Zealand are also available on the QFCC website.⁷

16-year review of child death data

The Queensland Child Death Register captures valuable data about children's lives, including where they lived, the families in which they were raised, their cultural backgrounds, any vulnerabilities they may have experienced, and the circumstances and causes of their deaths.

During 2020–21, the QFCC undertook a high-level overview of the information held within the register for deaths occurring between 2004 and 2019, aiming to identify patterns and trends in child mortality over time.

By analysing all deaths occurring during the 16-year period, we were able to identify patterns and conduct complex statistical analysis to generate new insights into risk and protective factors for particular causes of death.

Over this 16-year period, a total of 7,175 children lost their lives in Queensland. The vast majority of these deaths (72.5 per cent) were due to natural causes.

6 Queensland Family & Child Commission 2020, *Child death register key findings 2019–20: Child deaths in Queensland*, https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-03/All%20child%20deaths%202019-20%20fact%20sheet_0.PDF

7 Queensland Family and Child Commission 2014–21, *Home page*, qfcc.qld.gov.au

The review identified several significant trends:

- The overall rate of child mortality in Queensland has decreased by an average of 3 per cent per year.
- Unexplained infant deaths have decreased by an average of 13.2 per cent per year since 2011, with the rate of sudden infant death syndrome, in particular, falling by 17.4 per cent per year, on average, between 2011 and 2019.
- External cause deaths have decreased by an average of 4.1 per cent per year. There has been a strong downward trend in the number of transport deaths specifically, which have decreased since 2004, on average, by 7.9 per cent per year. This is largely due to a decrease in the rate of on-road incidents involving young people aged 15–17 years that has occurred since the introduction of a graduated licensing system in Queensland in 2007.
- The rate of youth suicide, however, has increased by an average of 2.6 per cent per year, primarily concentrated among young people aged 15–17 years.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children continue to be over-represented in child mortality statistics, dying at around twice the rate of non-Indigenous children. There has, however, been an encouraging downward trend in the annual rate of death for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children over time, decreasing by an average of 2.3 per cent per year.
- Infant mortality—a key marker of population health—has declined for both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous children, with an annual average decrease of 4.7 and 2.6 per cent per year respectively.
- Children known to the child protection system are also over-represented in child death statistics, dying at a higher rate than those in the general child population in Queensland. For the period 2015–2019, children known to the child protection system died at a rate of 58.6 per 100,000 children compared with 34.4 per 100,000 for all Queensland children.

Collectively, the findings have established some encouraging trends but identified room for improvement. More work needs to be done to learn from these deaths, to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in mortality statistics and to reduce the number of deaths of children known to the child protection system.

The *Counting lives, changing patterns: Findings from the Queensland Child Death Register 2004–2019* report was tabled in Queensland Parliament on 13 May 2021.

The findings of this review will influence the ongoing work program of the QFCC and inform broader research, policy and program development.

A copy of the report is available on the QFCC website.⁸

Red flags for filicide

A system review completed following the death of the child prompted the QFCC to explore the concept of ‘red flags’ to identify children who are at risk of fatal assault or neglect by a parent—an act known as filicide. A red flag is an act or intention (such as injury, threats of harm or death) or accumulation of risk factors likely to adversely affect a child’s immediate safety.

During 2020–21, the QFCC worked with researchers from the University of Queensland to develop an evidence base for red flags using data from the Queensland Child Death Register. This project identified several risk factors that, when occurring together, may indicate a child is at increased risk of filicide.

A system-wide resource highlighting the red flags that professionals must be aware of when working with families has been developed. The sector will be further consulted in the first quarter of 2021–22 with an expected release date to be scheduled in the second quarter.

⁸ Queensland Family and Child Commission 2021, *Counting lives, changing patterns: Findings from the Queensland Child Death Register 2004–2019*, <https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/keeping-kids-more-safe/preventing-child-injury-death/16-year-trend-review>

Child death prevention strategy

The QFCC is developing a child death prevention strategy with a focus on using the research and analysis of Queensland's child death data to influence child death prevention practices and policy changes. A draft strategy will be circulated for consultation within the next year.

Child Death Review Board

On 1 July 2020, amendments to the *Family and Child Commission Act 2014* were enacted to establish the independent Child Death Review Board (the Board).

The amendments were brought about by the QFCC report: *A systems review of individual agency findings following the death of a child*. The report recommended that the Queensland Government '... consider a revised external and independent model for reviewing the deaths of children known to the child protection system'.

The new child death review model includes:

- a two-tier approach, with more agencies responsible for conducting internal system reviews following the death or serious physical injury of a child known to the child protection system
- the Board sitting outside of these agencies to identify opportunities for policy, practice and system improvements
- the Board being hosted by the QFCC for administrative purposes.

The Board conducts systemic reviews following the death of a child connected to the child protection system, to identify opportunities to improve the child protection system and prevent future deaths. It does not investigate the deaths of individual children.

It held its first meeting on 23 July 2020. It is made up of 12 members with relevant experience and skills and includes 50 per cent non-government members and two Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander members. It is chaired by Cheryl Vardon, Principal Commissioner of the QFCC.

In 2020–21, with the support of the QFCC secretariat team, the Board:

- developed procedural guidelines, an evaluation framework and information-sharing agreements with review entities
- held six meetings, including one special meeting for the development of the first annual report and planning of future initiatives
- reviewed and analysed systemic issues arising from agency reviews of the deaths of 55 children
- requested information from several government and non-government agencies
- partnered with experts and commissioned research into sudden unexpected death in infancy and suicide prevention to identify patterns, trends and risk factors
- continued to lead the Cross-Agency Reviews Group in identifying emerging issues and sharing learnings from the new child death review model
- continued work on developing a cultural integrity approach for the Board.

Remuneration information for the Board will be reported in the Child Death Review Board Annual Report 2020–21.

Systems reviews following the deaths of children

In 2020–21, the QFCC delivered several system review reports to the responsible minister following the deaths and serious neglect of children.

We consulted with multiple agencies to inform the findings of the reviews, which identified gaps in the system responses intended to keep vulnerable children safe.

We continue to work with the Attorney-General and government agencies to implement the necessary changes.

Update of the Child Death Review Board database

The QFCC's new Child Death Register was enhanced in June 2021 to include separate role profiles for the Board Secretariat to enter relevant information from agency reviews.

This reduced the manual recording of data and will assist in developing future reporting of the Board.

The year ahead

In 2021–22, the QFCC will:

- use the findings from the *Changing the Sentence* report to continue monitoring the impact of Queensland's youth justice reforms on children
- release the findings from the outcomes evaluation examining the child protection reform environment
- strengthen its oversight focus on issues that disproportionately and adversely impact on the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in Queensland
- maintain and update the QFCC online Knowledge and Resource Hub (which provides easy access to important research papers and reports)
- hold agencies to account by reporting on the implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle
- finalise the systemic review into interventions with parental agreement
- begin reporting on the outcomes that matter to children who relied on the out-of-home care system for their safety and wellbeing
- share the findings from the 2021 frontline workforce survey and community perspectives survey and undertake the 2022 surveys
- start a post-implementation review of the Queensland Government's implementation of the *Recommendation 28 Supplementary Review: A report on information sharing to enhance the safety of children in regulated home-based services*
- develop a roadmap for future phases of the new Child Death Register
- complete and publish the *Child death prevention strategy*
- continue to research factors that contribute to the injury and death of children and young people and, in conjunction with key partners, identify system responses to deal with them
- deliver the inaugural annual report on the operations of the Child Death Review Board.

Awareness

The QFCC is committed to promoting and raising awareness of the rights of children and young people in Queensland through:

- gathering and using the perspectives of Queensland’s children and young people to inform and influence the decisions made by government
- purposeful, ethical and inclusive engagement with children, young people and families.

This aligns with QFCC responsibilities, under the *Family and Child Commission Act 2014*, to engage with, and take account of, the views of children, young people and their families and uphold the rights of children to participate in decision-making that affects their lives.

While all our work seeks to enable meaningful participation from children and young people, three key engagement mechanisms used in 2020–21 were the:

- *Growing Up in Queensland* project
- *Families are First* project
- QFCC Youth Advisory Council.⁹

Engagement and education

Growing Up in Queensland 2020

The *Growing Up in Queensland* project gives Queensland children and young people the opportunity to share their views about their community, their hopes and dreams, and the issues most important to them.

The project offers young Queenslanders aged 4–18 years a broad range of opportunities to communicate directly with government.

In 2020, the project collected data from more than 8,000 Queensland children and young people through an art activity, a postcard activity, a survey for children aged 8–12 years and another survey for young people aged 13–18 years. Data was collected between April and July 2020.

The project found:

- children and young people want more, youth-friendly public spaces for recreation and spending time with friends
- most young people believe their community is a place where they belong but, many do not feel heard by adults
- young people identify youth mental health, the environment and education as important issues for people their age. They hope for further education and for employment.

These findings were promoted through:

- publication in July 2020 of an interim report outlining the results of the first seven weeks of data collection
- a final report and fact sheets about key findings, published and launched in April 2021.

Growing Up in Queensland report launch

On 28 April 2021, *Growing Up in Queensland* report was launched at an event at the State Library of Queensland.

Members of QFCC’s Youth Advisory Council presented findings and the Minister for Children and Youth Justice and Minister for Multicultural Affairs delivered a speech. The event was attended online and in person by representatives of government organisations, community organisations and schools.

Growing Up in Queensland data was presented to the State Library of Queensland for archiving in its ‘Queensland Memory’ collection.

⁹ The QFCC’s Youth Advisory Council supports the voices of children and young people and provides youth perspectives and leadership to the QFCC. It is currently made up of 22 young people aged between 14 and 25, known as ‘Youth Advocates’, who represent regional and metropolitan areas and who provide advice on a range of QFCC initiatives, including policy submissions and system reviews.

Amplify—Through my eyes

As part of *Growing Up in Queensland*, the QFCC's Youth Advisory Council launched a visual arts opportunity for young Queenslanders called *Amplify—Through my eyes*. *Amplify* gave young Queenslanders aged 13–18 years the opportunity to visually show their worlds, their communities, their hopes and dreams, and the issues that are important to them.

In all, 46 pieces of artwork were received.

The winning artwork was chosen in a unanimous decision, and was featured on the front cover of the *Growing Up in Queensland* report. The other pieces of artwork will progressively appear in other QFCC publications and be highlighted on social media.

Amplify—Young minds can't wait hackathon

The hackathon¹⁰ was part of the QFCC's response to the findings of *Growing Up in Queensland 2020*.

Of the youth survey respondents, 33 per cent said they have an emotional or mental health condition. Young Queenslanders also said that mental health was a top issue of importance, with many sharing the specific barriers they face such as mental health stigma, the costs of accessing support, waiting times and the challenge of accessing services in regional and remote locations.

On behalf of the QFCC, the Youth Advisory Council, together with BOP Industries (a youth-led organisation run by and for young people), facilitated a hackathon workshop that gave young people the opportunity to come up with innovative responses to the concerns raised. The hackathon was attended by QFCC Principal Commissioner Cheryl Vardon and Tracey Adams, Chief Executive Officer of yourtown (a charity that provides services young people can access to find jobs, learn skills, become great parents and live safe, happy lives).

At the event, a total of 51 registered young people aged 15–25, (34 in person and 17 online) co-designed several youth-led responses to the mental health concerns raised by young Queenslanders. Projects were started in the areas of education curriculum, app development, teacher education, mentoring and web-based information portals.

The young people will continue to be supported in the further development of their projects as members of the BOP Industries Young Entrepreneurs Hub. These memberships have been funded by the QFCC to continue support of youth-led projects across Queensland.

Amplify blogs

Born out of the QFCC's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the QFCC, in partnership with the Youth Advisory Council, has created a monthly blog where Youth Advocates share their views about the issues most important to them.

Topics discussed in the *Amplify* blog include the COVID-19 lockdown, education and starting university. The QFCC actively promotes *Amplify* blog through its communication channels.

Queensland Youth Week—10–18 April

The QFCC supported several events during Queensland Youth Week in 2021.

Youth Advocates were invited to facilitate discussions for the Minister for Youth in Brisbane and in Rockhampton, providing more opportunities for young people across Queensland to connect and have their say about local issues.

The Youth Advisory Council also met with the commissioners to discuss results and next steps from the hackathon and *Growing Up in Queensland*. An *Amplify* blog entitled *Youth Champion, Youth Member* was released.

¹⁰ A hackathon is a workshop to delve into and 'hack' apart an issue so that solutions to the concerns raised about that issue can be developed.

Online safety—*Out of the Dark*

This initiative involves the collaboration of the QFCC with the Queensland Police Service Task Force Argos, the Department of Education, the Office of the eSafety Commissioner, yourtown and Bravehearts.

Out of the Dark helps children, young people and adults to prevent, recognise and respond to online child sexual exploitation. It undertakes community education activities to raise awareness of the need for online safety, especially regarding online sexual grooming of children and young people.

Since March 2020, reports to eSafety about online harms have surged, demonstrating the importance of community education initiatives like *Out of the Dark*.

The *Out of the Dark* Steering Committee met twice in 2021. Outcomes included:

- discussing key information and trends on COVID-19 and how the increased reliance on the digital world has impacted young people
- commitment for the steering committee to focus on leveraging sector partnerships and collaborations to amplify important messages in the online safety
- re-circulation of the *#doiknowyou* awareness campaign in April 2021 through the Queensland Police Service. The videos had over 599,000 impressions¹¹ on a social media browser and 163,000 engagements¹² with social media posts.

Work is underway to plan the forward program.

Families are First

The *Families are First* program was launched in 2019 and is the culmination of work by the QFCC to showcase the stories of strong, proud, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities. *Families are First* celebrates the strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and uses community engagement and education activities to highlight the strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child-raising practices.

The *Families are First* program aims to contribute to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination by inspiring and empowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities to celebrate and share their stories by:

- exploring strengths (such as culture, connection and attitudes) used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities to raise thriving children over the past 60,000 years
- celebrating families' positive stories (for example, through a story-telling approach)
- sharing these stories throughout the community (the general public, media and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities) to show the value of support and supportive networks in child development and wellbeing.

During 2020–21, *Families are First* activities included:

- *Deadly Digi Yarns*: a capacity- and capability-building project teaching young people skills to capture their own stories and training organisational members to teach video-making skills. These workshops were held in Mossman and Cairns West
- *Story collection*: an ongoing activity where the *Families are First* program team works with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, families and communities to capture their stories in innovative ways
- *Yarn Up cards*: with support from the QFCC, *Yarn Up* cards were developed by the Tiddas Yarning Circle in Townsville. The set of 30 inspirational statements centre on the themes of family, culture, strength, identity and hope and were launched in November 2020. *Yarn Up* cards are a resource that can be used in schools, community groups and workplaces to get conversations started and encourage people to explore their cultural identity and recognise their strengths.

11 An impression is the number of times that a video or social media advertisement has appeared on a social media user's screen. In the context of the *#doiknowyou* campaign, the videos appeared on a social media user's screen over 599,000 times.

12 This number of engagements refers to actions taken by the social media viewer (such as comment, share, like, click on link).

All *Families are First* initiatives align with the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* by giving participants the knowledge to use their voice to express their thoughts. Participants can build on their talents and abilities, which in turn helps celebrate their identities, culture, country, community and family.

To date, the program has collected 45 stories from participants from Far North, North and South East Queensland. These stories have been shared through QFCC social media platforms and promoted online and through community radio. The *Families are First* webpage and YouTube channel host 32 video stories.

Talking Families

The QFCC has continued with *Talking Families*, a community education initiative designed to reduce stigma and instil confidence in parents about seeking and accepting support with the stresses of parenting. *Talking Families* empowers parents to seek information and support early, before problems escalate.

Key successes of the *Talking Families* initiative this year were:

- an increase of more than 70 schools joining up to *Talking Families*
- the launch of events at Bremer State High School and Carseldine Journey Early Learning
- continued high engagement with *Talking Families* content, with an average post reach of over 100,000 per month through the *Talking Families* Facebook page
- promotion of the *oneplace* Community Services Directory.

Schools and services that sign on to the *Talking Families* program are supported by their local Family and Child Connect service. This partnership provides schools and services with a local touchpoint for conversations or engagement when supporting families.

As at June 2021, 181 schools and services across Queensland were actively delivering the *Talking Families* place-based delivery model.

oneplace Community Services Directory

The *oneplace* website¹³ provides a single point of access to more than 59,000 community services across Queensland. It was developed to help children, families and professionals find the right service in their local area.

In 2020–21, 195,007 *oneplace* searches were conducted—a 10 per cent decrease on the previous year. During this period, more than 2,650 community and government organisations added their services to the directory.

The continued use of *oneplace* is a positive sign that Queenslanders are seeking support for challenges, before problems escalate.

Children’s Rights

The QFCC has continued its relationship with Children’s Rights Queensland¹⁴ in delivering a range of programs to educate the Queensland community about children’s rights under the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child*.

Highlights of the program this year included:

- Children’s Week 2020, which included:
 - a special event at the *Big Voices: Children’s Art Matters* exhibition in partnership with the State Library of Queensland
 - more than 65 public and private events held throughout Queensland
 - a youth-led webinar called ‘Generation of Change’, which had 47 attendees

¹³ Queensland Government 2020, *oneplace* Community Services Directory, <http://www.oneplace.org.au/>

¹⁴ Children’s Rights Queensland is a non-profit organisation that promotes children’s rights through initiatives (such as Queensland Children’s Week) that raise awareness of children’s rights, needs and achievements. It also engages, empowers, and supports children and their communities.

- the launch of the *Young Leader's Challenge*. This is a free, contemporary leadership program empowering high school-aged children to lead and engage others in initiatives that support the rights, needs and accomplishments of children
- affiliation membership of 16 organisations who agreed to champion the rights of children
- establishment of an Ambassador Program to generate awareness of children's rights in local communities
- launch of the TypeRights font competition to engage children and young people in designing a font to build awareness of children's rights.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's and young people's interactions with the justice system

In response to the Queensland Law Society's 2020 Call to Parties Statement, the Queensland Government has tasked the QFCC to undertake a culturally appropriate community conversation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people about their interaction with the justice system. This was part of the *Growing Up in Queensland* survey.

This project will:

- gather the perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in a culturally appropriate way
- give voice to the children and young people involved in Queensland's youth justice system
- identify opportunities to improve the Queensland youth justice system through the perspectives of children and young people.

This project is currently in the early stages of its development.

Speak up and make a complaint—National complaints project

Partnering with the Commissioner for Children and Young People Western Australia, the QFCC has developed a set of national resources to help children and young people know their rights and be able to make a complaint.

The resources were developed in response to the child safe standards recommended in the final report of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

The QFCC conducted face-to-face focus groups in Cairns, Townsville and South East Queensland and promoted an online survey across Queensland.

The majority of the young people we heard from were from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage. By engaging with Multicultural Australia,¹⁵ we were also able to capture voices of children and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Through this project, we provided key insights into what the resource should look like and who it should target. A key outcome was evidence that adults as well as children needed to know the rights of the child and also know how they can support young people in raising their concerns.

Core to the project's success was true youth participation, with members of the QFCC Youth Advisory Council leading a number of youth-led focus groups.

In December 2020, the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet released the *Speak up and make a complaint* resources.¹⁶

15 Multicultural Australia (formerly Multicultural Development Australia) is Queensland's settlement service provider for refugees, people seeking asylum, international students and other new arrivals to Queensland with the goal of creating a fairer, more prosperous society for all Queenslanders.

16 National Office for Child Safety 2020, *Speak up and make a complaint*, <https://childsafety.pmc.gov.au/resources/speak-up-make-complaint>

Child Rights Impact Assessment

During 2020–21, the QFCC prepared a Child Rights Impact Assessment to raise awareness of children’s rights. It enables officers to consider:

- the purpose of a particular policy, program or legislative reform
- the positive and negative impacts it might have on children’s rights
- the effect on different groups of children and young people
- whether measures can be taken to reduce, remove or mitigate those impacts.

An implementation strategy to encourage use by agencies across the broad child and family support sector is under development.

Partnerships

The QFCC develops and maintains partnerships with a broad range of peak bodies, industry partners, communities, advisory groups, academics, and government and non-government organisations.

In 2020–21, we worked with many partners, including:

- QFCC Advisory Council and Youth Advisory Council
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Health Service Brisbane (on *Young, Black and Proud* scholarship sponsorship)
- Australia and New Zealand Children’s Commissioners and Guardians
- Family and Child Connect
- Department of Education (a partnership on the *Talking Families* school initiative)
- Office for Youth (on Queensland Youth Week)
- Australian Institute of Family Studies
- Queensland Child Protection Week Committee
- Strategic Cross-Agency Oversight Group
- QFCC Reviews Strategic Oversight Group
- Family Matters
- Queensland First Children and Families Board
- Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak
- Queensland Council of Social Services
- Peak Care Qld
- Queensland Aboriginal and Islander Health Council
- Children’s Rights Queensland (collaboratively delivering programs advocating for the rights of children).

The QFCC also chairs the QFCC Community Partnerships Group, an advocacy alliance of non-government peak bodies and statutory bodies. This forum enables the QFCC to engage and partner with key stakeholders and system influencers to identify and discuss persistent and emerging strategic issues that impact on the rights, safety and wellbeing of children and young people.

By working collectively, the member agencies of the group strengthen their powers of advocacy, using their different roles and areas of influence. Meetings are held four times per year.

Advisory Council

In line with Part 4 of the *Family and Child Commission Act 2014*, the Principal Commissioner has established an advisory council to:

- help promote the shared responsibility all Queenslanders have for keeping children safe
- provide insight into the issues affecting children, families and the child and family support sector
- provide guidance on the work of the QFCC.

The Advisory Council met three times in 2020–21. The membership is currently made up of:

Cheryl Vardon	Chief Executive Officer and Principal Commissioner, QFCC (Chair)
Natalie Lewis	Commissioner, QFCC (from June 2020)
Kay Ganley	Former owner and Chief Executive Officer, Charlton Brown
Assistant Commissioner Cameron Harsley APM	Organisational Capability Command, Queensland Police Service
Hetty Johnston AM	Former founder and Chief Executive Officer, Bravehearts Inc
Zoe Rathus AO	Senior Lecturer in Law, Griffith Law School
Heather Watson	Director and Principal Lawyer, Watson Advisory & Consulting Pty Ltd
Dr Gerald Featherstone	Chief Executive Officer, Kummara Association

Youth Advisory Council

The QFCC's Youth Advisory Council champions the voices of children and young people and provides youth perspectives and leadership to the QFCC.

The Council meets regularly and provides advice to the commissioners and the QFCC on what is important to children and young people in Queensland. It works with other young people to identify the important issues, then it designs and implements responses to address these issues.

The Youth Advisory Council has up to 25 members, with a current active membership of 22 young people aged between 14 and 25. Members, known as 'Youth Advocates', have diverse backgrounds and represent regional and metropolitan areas. In 2020–21, they provided advice on a range of QFCC initiatives, such as *Growing Up in Queensland*, policy submissions and system reviews.

In recognition of the value of their contributions, the QFCC facilitates Youth Advocate participation in various internal and external opportunities including conferences, stakeholder events and media opportunities. Youth Advocates also receive ongoing professional development and guidance during their tenure, particularly in relation to communication and advocacy skills.

2020–21 also saw the Youth Advisory Council model expand to establish Critical Friend Networks. The functions of these networks are to create spaces to:

- connect existing youth advisory groups across Queensland and support collaboration
- allow Youth Advisory Council alumni to remain engaged with youth participation and areas they are passionate about
- empower all young Queenslanders who want to get involved and have their say.

In April 2021, five Youth Advocates facilitated youth-led discussions with Minister Scanlon (Minister for the Environment and the Great Barrier Reef and Minister for Science and Youth Affairs) during her three-stop *Speak Out Series* tour to connect with young Queenslanders and hear their ideas on what a future Queensland could look like and how young people think this can be achieved.

The Youth Advocates, current as per 30 June 2021, are:

Aastha	Aastha is a high school student who, as a young person with a passion for social change, brings a powerful voice and unique perspective to the Youth Advisory Council leadership team. She has undertaken voluntary work and believes that through active participation, she can truly make a difference in the lives of Queensland youth.
Aden	Aden has represented Queensland in futsal and is passionate about sports and nutrition. He was raised in Australia and has Arab heritage. Aden is committed to speaking out against racism and bullying and the negative impact it can have on the lives of young people growing up in diverse communities.
Aimee	Aimee is a proud Worimi woman and works in the out-of-home care space. She is a strong advocate on issues such as youth justice, homelessness, housing, disability, minorities and disadvantaged people. Aimee is committed to supporting vulnerable young people in having a voice and being heard.
Alyssa	Alyssa is studying for a Bachelor of Arts. She is a second-generation Japanese Australian who experienced the blending together of two different cultures growing up. This has given her a passion for multiculturalism and speaking out against racism. She is also a passionate artist with a sculpture featuring in the 2020 Swell Festival.
Ameya	Ameya is a high school student, a United Nations Youth Student Ambassador and a 2019 United Nations Voices of Youth state finalist, and she has been awarded a Rostrum public speaking award. As a proud second-generation Australian, Ameya enjoys a diversity of experience and tradition through her heritage and appreciates learning about other cultures and their beliefs and traditions.
Ben	Ben is studying for a Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Global Studies. He was a recipient of the Australian Future Leaders' Justice and Equity Award and the Peter Dutton Public Speaking Award. Ben has previously worked as a Youth Ambassador for Save the Children Australia, where he delivered the Youth Manifesto for Change to the Australian Government.
Bitá	Set to finish school in 2021 as College Leader for Spirit and Community, Bitá is heavily involved with United Nations Youth and was a finalist in the United Nations Youth Evatt Competition, winning two Diplomacy Awards at Bond University's Model UN conference. Bitá is passionate about youth engagement and diplomacy.
Bri	Bri grew up in Cairns, completing a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and English at James Cook University before relocating to Brisbane. She is studying for a Master of Teaching at the University of Queensland and is eager to teach in high schools soon. Bri is also a 2021 YMCA Youth Parliament member.
Brooke	Brooke is a Warajuri woman from New South Wales. She plays sport, in particular touch football. Brooke is studying a Bachelor of Criminology and Criminal Justice. She works at the JT Academy (with retired rugby league player Jonathan Thurston) and at Complete Corporate services (with retired rugby league player Scott Sattler). Brooke is passionate about youth engagement, amplifying the voices of First Nations young people, domestic and family violence and sexual assault prevention.
Caroline	Caroline is studying for a Bachelor of Human Services and a Bachelor of Criminology and Criminal Justice. She has a deep interest in the family and child support system. Caroline is a strong advocate for children and young people living in out-of-home care, having worked with the CREATE Foundation ¹⁷ to promote systemic change in the sector.
Gefion	Gefion is a Year 12 high school student studying the International Baccalaureate (IB). She is conscious of the environment and aims to study environmental engineering at university and apply her problem-solving skills to real-world issues. Having spent many years overseas, she aims to build an understanding with those around her to set an example for equality and to embrace diversity.

¹⁷ A national consumer body representing the voices of children and young people with out-of-home care experience.

The Youth Advocates, current as per 30 June 2021, are: *(continued)*

Gloriose	Gloriose is from a Burundian background and is passionate about changing the mindset of young people from low economic areas. She likes to get involved in activities that help young people achieve their dreams. Gloriose likes to share her own story as an empowerment tool and is very interested in youth mental health, especially how schools approach this topic. Gloriose is in her final year of school and is working for the JT Foundation. She is very active in her local community about youth participation.
Grace	Grace is a Bachelor of Psychology (Hons) student, minoring in Clinical and Counselling Psychology. Grace is a 2020 Millennium Fellow, an RSL Queensland and AVCAT Scholar, and the recipient of a Griffith Futures Scholarship and 2020–21 Health Dean (Research) Summer Scholarship. Grace uses her theoretical knowledge and lived experience to advocate for mental health, chronic illnesses, invisible illnesses, and the LGBTQIA+ community.
Holly	Holly is a Grade 12 high school student who hopes to study a dual Arts and Law degree. She is the Junior Deputy Mayor of the Gold Coast, the President of the Junior Chamber of Commerce and Queensland representative for the National Constitutional Convention. She is also a member of the Queensland Theatre Youth Ensemble, and a member of the Youth Women’s Council of Australia and the Australian Youth Climate Change Coalition.
Kathryn	Kathryn is a practising solicitor and an advocate for equality and inclusion. She is a member of Pride in Law, the only LGBTIQ+ legal network in Australia. She is also a member of the executive committee of the YMCA Queensland Youth Parliament, as mentor to the Child Safety, Youth and Women committee. Kathryn is experienced in helping young people who require special assistance.
Kilian	Kilian is a Grade 10 student passionate about bettering Queensland. As a proud French-born dual citizen, Kilian enjoys engaging with as many cultures as possible. He is passionate about ridding the world of bigotry and doubling down on climate action. Kilian enjoys playing basketball and guitar in his spare time.
Kiona	Kiona is a proud Gudjala/Birragubba woman. She sings and raps to express herself, and she loves helping people. Kiona is strongly passionate about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ issues. She loves learning more and more about her culture and loves meeting like-minded people along the way.
Li Xuan	Li Xuan is studying for a Bachelor of Economics and recently completed a student internship in an education start-up in China. Li Xuan volunteers with United Nations Youth Queensland, facilitating insightful conversations about critical global issues with high school students.
Madison	Madison was the 2019 Queensland Youth Volunteer of the Year and was a recipient of the International Diana Award for being an inspiring and exceptional volunteer, mentor and change-maker. Madison was shortlisted for 2019 Queensland Young Australian of the Year and was a finalist for the Australian Human Rights Commission Young People’s Human Rights medal. Madison is studying for a Bachelor of Business.
Malika	Malika is in Year 11 at high school and is a member of the school’s student council as well as an international student ambassador. Malika’s family immigrated to Australia from Vietnam. She truly understands the importance of embracing multiculturalism and enjoys listening to people of different backgrounds share their beliefs and culture.
Shannon	Shannon is studying for a Bachelor of Pharmacy and hopes to study medicine. She presented at the 2019 Youth Health Conference in Melbourne and attended CONVO2019 (a Queensland Government initiative to stop cyberbullying). Through her own experience of living with a chronic illness, she is very passionate about disability advocacy and awareness. Shannon is also interested in mental health, LGBTQIA+ rights, homelessness and education.
Sigrid	Sigrid is a recent high school graduate studying Humanities and Law. She plans to work in human rights advocacy. Her aim is to lead change through compassion, education and fairness. She is particularly passionate about mental health advocacy, domestic and family violence, LGBTQI+ and women’s empowerment, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, histories and cultures.

The year ahead

In 2021–22, the QFCC will:

- undertake deeper analyses of key themes from the *Growing Up in Queensland* 2020 project to further amplify the voice of young people to sector leaders and policymakers

- through initiatives based on the *Growing Up in Queensland* project, continue to give children and young people the opportunity to share their views about their communities, their hopes and dreams, and the most important issues to them

- continue to roll out the *Talking Families* and *Talking Families School's* initiative across the state in partnership with Family and Child Connect and schools

- continue the *Families are First* movement to hear and promote the stories and strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parenting in Queensland

- support ongoing Youth Advisory Council meetings and Youth Advocate participation in opportunities

- create opportunities, such as the *Amplify* blog, for children and young people to be heard on matters that affect them

- undertake additional youth participation and engagement activities to strengthen connections with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and young people with lived experience of the youth justice, care and disability systems

- continue to work with Children's Rights Queensland to develop and deliver initiatives to empower young leaders to advocate for children's rights

- implement the Child Rights Impact Assessment

- collaborate with key stakeholders to develop responses that promote behaviours that prevent, recognise and respond to online child sexual grooming

- promote the *Speak up and make a complaint* national resources through QFCC networks.

Advocacy

The QFCC advocates for what matters in the lives of children and young people and their families.

Advocacy blueprint and the Advocacy strategy

Advocacy is a core function of the QFCC. It is critical to achieving our intent of bringing the rights of the child to life through our functions, processes and practices.

To guide us in this, we developed the QFCC *Advocacy Blueprint* and the *Advocacy Strategy*.

Working with the Youth Advisory Council, we drafted a youth-friendly and youth-led version of the blueprint. The initiative included a series of short videos and posters encouraging young people to engage with this work.

Our advocacy agenda in 2020–21 strengthened our position on several critical items including youth justice, child death prevention, youth mental health, age of criminal responsibility, and the extension of support for young people in out-of-home care until the age of 21 years.

Our future advocacy positions will be informed and considered in the context of the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, our mandate, the voices and opinions of children and young people, evidence, and insights from our partners and stakeholders.

Research

The QFCC is responsible for translating research into easily usable information for policymakers and practitioners, to assist them in helping vulnerable Queensland children and families.

Some of the typical research activities we undertake to meet this responsibility are:

- conducting research forums, where researchers make presentations to influential stakeholders on their research and the implication of their findings for policy and practice
- producing and distributing regular research scans
- maintaining the Knowledge and Resource Hub on the QFCC's website, to provide easy access to important research papers and reports
- maintaining an ongoing research agenda.

Research Agenda 2019–22

The QFCC's *Research Agenda 2019–22* identifies opportunities and priorities to expand the evidence base on matters that are relevant to Queensland children, young people and families, with a focus on the most vulnerable groups.

It is used to identify priority areas of focus for our projects and programs and to make research accessible and useful for policy and practice.

The research agenda is also intended for use by academics, students and practitioners, to suggest areas of research focus that could inform policy or practice and increase the evidence base regarding children, young people and their families.

It covers six main topics, each of which is made up of multiple areas of research interest. The topics are:

1. Understanding the importance of the early years
2. Recognising the strengths of Indigenous families and communities
3. Supporting young people vulnerable to disengaging from education
4. Creating opportunities for young people leaving care
5. Improving youth mental health
6. Leading in changing times.

This year, the QFCC continued to meet with researchers from academic institutions and non-government organisations across Queensland to discuss the research they were conducting or planning.

Online Knowledge and Resource Hub

The QFCC's online Knowledge and Resource Hub contains research summaries, research scans and links to research papers, reports and data. It provides access to the latest research information to assist policymakers and practitioners in improving the quality of outcomes for children, young people and families.

It is publicly available on the QFCC website.¹⁸

Policy and advocacy for children and young people

The QFCC promotes and advocates for the rights, wellbeing and safety of all children and young people.

It does this in a variety of ways, by:

- developing submissions to inform reviews and inquiries
- making recommendations about relevant laws, policies, practices and services
- preparing position statements and information papers to influence policy or to advocate for change
- actively participating in national and state reference and working groups
- building and maintaining strong partnerships with government and non-government agencies, such as by being a participating member of the
 - Australian and New Zealand Children's Commissioners and Child Guardians and the associated Policy Officers' Network
 - Family Matters Policy Working Group (national)
 - CREATE Foundation G-Force committee
- consulting with children, young people and their families and communities.

¹⁸ Queensland Family & Child Commission 2014–21, *Knowledge and Resource Hub*, <https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/knowledge-and-resource-hub>

Queensland Family and Child Commission submissions

During 2020–21, the QFCC contributed to public submissions with recommendations to improve child safety and wellbeing and increase safety measures for children. Examples of papers, reviews and inquiries to which we contributed submissions are:

- *Productivity Commission draft Indigenous Evaluation Strategy* (August 2020)
- Child Protection and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2020 (August 2020)
- Online Safety Bill 2021 (February 2021)
- *Draft National Children’s Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy* (February 2021)
- Youth Justice and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2021 (March 2021)
- National Indigenous Australians Agency—Indigenous Voice co-design process (April 2021).

The Parliamentary Legal Affairs and Safety Committee held a public hearing in Brisbane on Monday, 22 March 2021 for its inquiry into the Youth Justice and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2021. Commissioner Lewis attended the public hearing as a witness for the QFCC, commenting on our submission on the reforms.

These submissions are routinely made available on the QFCC website.

The year ahead

In 2021–22, the QFCC will:

- maintain the commissioners’ public engagements to strategically strengthen opportunities between the QFCC and children, young people and their families
- continue to advocate for the rights, interests and perspectives of children, young people and their families, particularly those in the child protection or youth justice systems
- provide expert advice about laws, policies, systems and practices
- continue promoting the *oneplace* Community Services Directory as a help-seeking tool for Queensland families
- influence the direction of the youth justice system towards a more rights and wellbeing focus
- continue to promote practical advice and messaging on the prevention of child death and injury
- make research accessible through research scans and research summaries.

Governance

Executive and structure

Our executive

There were five members of the Executive Group as at 30 June 2021.

Cheryl Vardon

*Chief Executive
and Principal
Commissioner*

Cheryl has had a distinguished career as an educator and is recognised for her leadership in the protection of vulnerable children and young people.

She was awarded an honorary doctorate (Doctor of the University) from Griffith University.

Since 2016, Cheryl has led a series of reviews for the Queensland Government leading to practical measures for systems reform to keep vulnerable children more than safe.

She is an experienced reviewer of systems, using case studies and stories to influence policy and establish reforms.

Her work in Indigenous education and services for Indigenous children and young people has received a Prime Minister's Reconciliation Award.

She has held many leadership, board and statutory roles, as a Director-General, Chief Executive, Commissioner and Adjunct Professor, in private, public and not-for-profit organisations such as education departments, children's services departments, consumer affairs, a national charity, universities and tribunals.

Cheryl is a Fellow of the Australian Institute of Managers and Leaders, a Fellow of the Australian College of Educators, a member of the Australian Institute of Company Directors and a member of the Women's Leadership Institute Australia.

She is an experienced public speaker, having delivered a number of keynote speeches across Australia and internationally throughout her career.

Cheryl has held the office of Chief Executive and Principal Commissioner of the QFCC since October 2015.

Natalie Lewis

Commissioner

Natalie Lewis was appointed Commissioner and began in June 2020. A Gamilaraay woman, she brings with her a wealth of experience and knowledge in youth justice, child and family services, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs.

Natalie focuses strongly on the systemic and structural issues disproportionately affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

She joined the QFCC from the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak, where she held the position of Chief Executive Officer.

Prior to that role, she held officer and director level roles in the Department of Communities and in the United States.

Natalie has held influential positions on several important boards and councils. She has been a member of the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care national executive, Co-Chair of the Family Matters Board, and a member of the Council of Australian Governments Joint Council on Closing the Gap and the National Forum contributing to the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children.

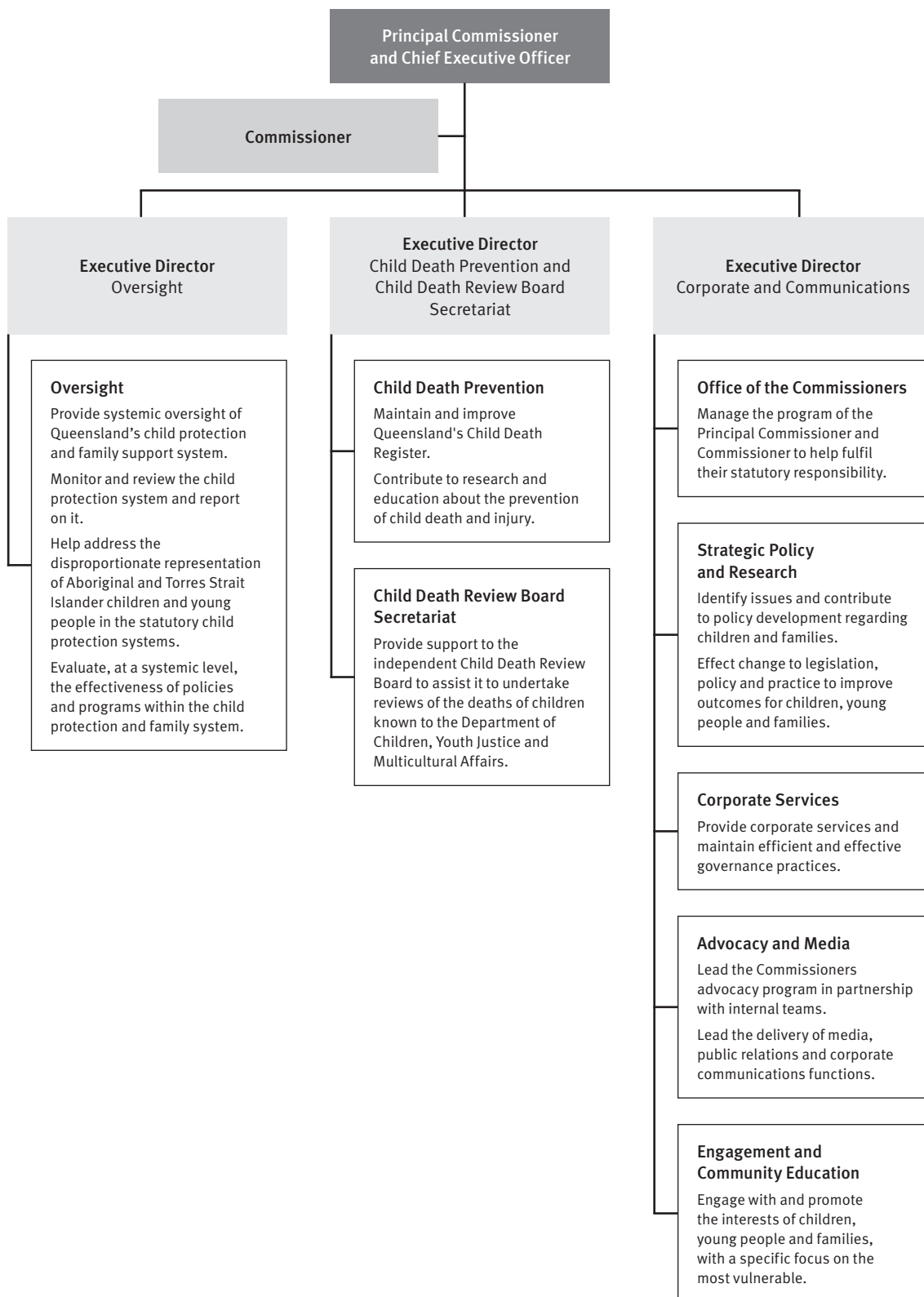
She is a member of the Australian Child Rights Task Force and of the Queensland First Children and Families Board, established to guide the implementation of the Queensland Government's *Our Way* strategy. She is also Adjunct Research Fellow at Griffith University.

<p>Tony King <i>A/Executive Director, Corporate and Communications (since December 2020)</i></p>	<p>Tony has an extensive background in senior leadership positions across the public sector and statutory authorities. Prior to joining the QFCC, Tony was the Executive Director (Data and Analytics) with the Department of Employment Small Business and Training. Tony joined the public sector in 2016 in the position of Executive Director, Office of the Director General and has undertaken similar roles for a number of Directors-General.</p> <p>Tony holds a Bachelor of Business degree, a Graduate Diploma in Applied Finance and Investment and a Diploma of Project Management.</p> <p>Tony joined the QFCC in September 2020. He leads the Office of the Commissioners in ensuring risks are managed and corporate activities including human resources, finance and procurement operate efficiently and effectively. Tony also oversees QFCC communication activities.</p>
<p>Jaime Blackburn <i>Executive Director, Child Death Prevention</i></p>	<p>Jaime is a senior executive and qualified accountant with extensive experience in both the public and private sector. She spent a significant period of her career delivering professional services within a ‘Big 4’ environment in Queensland and in the United Kingdom.</p> <p>She previously worked for the Queensland Department of the Premier and Cabinet and held roles in corporate governance, risk management and internal audit services. She also acted as a risk management advisor to the Audit and Risk Management committee of the Queensland Art Gallery.</p> <p>Jaime manages the Child Death Prevention team and the Child Death Review Board Secretariat team and oversees the QFCC child death reviews. She joined the QFCC in October 2018.</p>
<p>Penny Creamer <i>Executive Director, Oversight</i></p>	<p>Penny has extensive experience working in Indigenous education, setting up early childhood programs in remote areas of Queensland, such as Cape York, the Torres Strait Islands and the Gulf of Carpentaria. Further to this work, Penny led the implementation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child and family centres across 10 Queensland communities.</p> <p>Working both internationally and in Queensland, Penny has led a variety of youth programs, such as the foundational Bullying. No Way! campaign that provides information and ideas for students, parents and teachers to combat bullying. She joined the QFCC in June 2018.</p>

Our structure

The QFCC delivers services through the structure outlined in the following high-level organisational chart.

The QFCC organisational structure as of 30 June 2021



Our values

Queensland public service values

The QFCC has embraced the Queensland public service values, as shown below. These values guide our staff's behaviour and the way we conduct business.



Customers first

- Know your customers
- Deliver what matters
- Make decisions with empathy



Ideas into action

- Challenge the norm and suggest solutions
- Encourage and embrace new ideas
- Work across boundaries



Unleash potential

- Expect greatness
- Lead and set clear expectations
- Seek, provide and act on feedback



Be courageous

- Own your actions, successes and mistakes
- Take calculated risks
- Act with transparency



Empower people

- Lead, empower and trust
- Play to everyone's strengths
- Develop yourself and those around you

Queensland Family and Child Commission values

Our staff, through their participation in QFCC values sessions, named 288 individual values-words which were condensed into the top six QFCC values:

• Respect

• Integrity

• Honesty

• Accountability

• Connection

• Courage.

Governance framework

The QFCC governance framework underpins the application of governance within the organisation. Our *Governance Blueprint* was reviewed and updated this financial year.

We operate several internal committees to help maintain effective governance.

The *Executive Group* meets fortnightly and comprises of the QFCC executives. This group oversees QFCC performance relative to its strategic plan, financial performance and high-level risk. It also addresses stakeholder engagement and partnership opportunities.

The Executive Operations Group performs a range of operational governance functions, such as developing, implementing, maintaining and monitoring operational plans, performance and risk management plans; overseeing QFCC project and program governance; and overseeing the effective integration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' perspectives across the QFCC.

The *Leader Group* is made up of the QFCC executive, directors and managers. Meeting monthly, members discuss strategic issues, provide updates on the progress of QFCC initiatives, identify opportunities to leverage off other projects or upcoming stakeholder interactions, and seek peer input into potential initiatives.

The *Staff Advisory Insights Committee* is made up of the Principal Commissioner, Commissioner and staff representatives. Meeting monthly, this group focuses on providing a safe, positive and professional working environment within the QFCC. An important role of the forum is to facilitate communication between the executive and the staff about whole-of-QFCC matters.

Internal Communications Strategy

The 2021 *Internal Communication Strategy* includes several recommendations covering infrastructure, effective staff forums and feedback mechanisms, strategic and operational planning, organisational culture, leadership communication, and organisational communication flow.

The strategy was informed by:

- the 2020 *Working for Queensland Employee Opinion survey* results
- an internal communication audit, which involved evaluating the effectiveness of the QFCC's internal communication by consulting with senior management and staff members.

The audit sought to identify information gaps and unclear messages and to assess the efficiency of information channels. Key areas identified for improvement included:

- organisational fairness and leadership, particularly in terms of transparent communication around recruitment processes
- fair and consistent acknowledgement of staff performance.

Audit and Risk Management committee

Established in 2018, the Audit and Risk Management committee meets quarterly, with the chair and deputy chair positions held by members external to government.

The purpose of the committee is to provide independent assurance and advice to the Principal Commissioner on the QFCC's:

- risk and compliance management frameworks
- accountability responsibilities as prescribed in the:
 - *Financial Accountability Act 2009*
 - *Statutory Bodies Financial Arrangements Act 1982*
 - Financial and Performance Management Standard 2019.

The committee oversees risk management, financial management, compliance and internal controls, and internal and external audit.

Some of the committee’s responsibilities and achievements for 2020–21 were the:

- review and ongoing monitoring of the corporate and operational risk registers
- monitoring of risk mitigation controls of QFCC major projects
- monitoring of the register of previous audit recommendations
- review and endorsement of the annual audit plan for the upcoming financial year.

Remuneration for external members is \$500 (Chair) and \$300 (Deputy Chair) per meeting.

As at 30 June 2021, there were four standing members and three regular observers of the Audit and Risk Management committee. The committee met four times in 2020–21.

Standing members

Heather Watson	Director and Principal Lawyer, Watson Advisory & Consulting Pty Ltd (Chair)
Peter Dowling (AM)	Accountant and experienced company director (Deputy Chair)
Jaime Blackburn	Executive Director, Child Death Prevention, QFCC
Tony King	A/Executive Director, Corporate and Communications, QFCC

Regular observers

Phillip Airey (since February)	Director, Queensland Audit Office
Martin Linnane	Manager, Audit Services, Corporate Administration Agency
Lyle Gerbich	Director, Corporate Services, QFCC

Risk management

Overseen by the Audit and Risk Management committee, the QFCC strategic and operational risk registers are reviewed twice a year, with teams providing operational updates to Corporate Services.

This year, Corporate Services maintained the strategic and operational risk registers and updated them to address the COVID-19 pandemic risk.

Corporate Services also maintained the QFCC *Risk Management Framework*.

Internal audit

The internal audit plan for the period 2021–23 was reviewed by the Corporate Administration Agency (CAA) and endorsed by the QFCC’s Executive Operations Group.

In 2020–21, the CAA undertook internal audit assessments of the QFCC. In accordance with the 2019–21 QFCC Audit Plan, the CAA conducted reviews of our information security and risk management functions.

The objective of the information security audit was to assess whether we have appropriate policies, procedures and processes in place to comply, to the extent applicable, with the Queensland Government’s Information Security Policy IS18: 2018.

The CAA internal auditor:

- determined there was a reasonable framework in place for the management of our information security
- identified seven low-priority issues. We have begun work on addressing these audit findings.

The objective of the risk management audit was to evaluate the process by which risks are identified, evaluated, reported and managed. The CAA internal auditor:

- determined that overall, there is a sound framework in place for the management of risk and, based on the Queensland Audit Office’s risk management maturity model, the QFCC has appropriate processes and practices in place for a statutory body
- made two findings for process improvements. We began working on addressing these audit findings.

External audit

The Queensland Audit Office performed an audit assessment of the design and implementation of the QFCC's internal controls (the processes and people in place to ensure the organisation meets its financial and security responsibilities). This audit focused on key controls over expenditure, payroll and selected assets.

At the time of release of the Queensland Audit Office interim report in late March 2021, no significant deficiencies had been identified in our internal controls, which were assessed as being 'Effective'. The final report is expected to be delivered early in the next financial year.

The QFCC participated as an active stakeholder in the Queensland Audit Office's state-wide performance audit of how effective Queensland initiatives are in preventing and responding to domestic violence. This audit is scheduled to be tabled in parliament later this year.

All internal and external audit reports were presented to the Audit and Risk Management Committee for consideration.

Human Rights Act 2019

QFCC staff undertake annual mandatory online training on human rights for public sector employees.

The QFCC received no complaints under the *Human Rights Act 2019* in 2020–21.

External scrutiny

The Parliamentary Legal Affairs and Safety Committee (the Committee) held a public hearing on 14 June 2021 as part of its statutory role in overseeing the QFCC's performance.

At this hearing, the Principal Commissioner and Commissioner briefed the Committee on our work to protect the rights of children and young people in Queensland. Committee members asked questions on a broad range of topics including:

- the *Growing Up in Queensland* report
- the narrative around young people in the public domain (particularly in relation to youth crime)
- the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the child protection system
- the experience of young people as victims of domestic and family violence.

The Committee's report will be available on the Queensland Parliament website in the 2021–22 financial year.

Information systems and record keeping

The QFCC operates under the requirements of the *Public Records Act 2002* and the Financial and Performance Management Standard 2019. It maintains full and accurate records of its activities in accordance with the Queensland Government Records Governance Policy.

We use a Hewlett-Packard Content Management application to meet our record-keeping governance obligations.

Preparing the QFCC for the future

In 2020, the *Preparing the QFCC for the future* program was commissioned to provide an independent review of the QFCC's governance processes and performance. The scope of the program was to ensure we are responsive to the changing environment, with agile governance and forward-focused planning. The program guided strategic discussions about how we could continue to evolve to best meet the needs of Queensland's children, young people and families into the future.

As the only agency in Queensland with a system-wide focus on child protection and family support, it was important that the QFCC remained a contemporary children's commission (one that remains up to date with current issues and concerns and with research on how to deal with them).

Extensive and widespread staff and management discussions occurred during the process, which was conducted in phases. Numerous improvement opportunities were identified, including a number of governance process improvements.

Many of these were progressively implemented to enable the QFCC to continue to deliver its core business efficiently. Our leaders and staff shared their thoughts and aspirations for the QFCC's future and contributed ideas as to how the agency could minimise risk, improve governance and remain contemporary. *Preparing the QFCC for the future* updates were provided to staff during the process.

Financial performance

The QFCC is a statutory body under the *Family and Child Commission Act 2014* and for the purposes of the:

- *Financial Accountability Act 2009*
- *Statutory Bodies Financial Arrangements Act 1982*
- Financial and Performance Management Standard 2019.

Financial summary 2020–21

This summary provides an overview of the QFCC's financial performance for 2020–21 as well as a comparison with 2019–20.

A detailed view of the financial performance for 2020–21 is provided in the financial statements included in this annual report.

The QFCC is committed to maintaining fiscal responsibility while meeting its objectives.

Financial results

Queensland Family and Child Commission	Actual 2020–21 \$'000	Actual 2019–20 \$'000
Income from continuing operations		
Grants and other contributions	13,687	12,692
Other revenue	34	67
Total income from continuing operations	13,721	12,759
Expenses from continuing operations		
Employee expenses	9,550	8,881
Supplies and services	2,998	3,866
Depreciation and amortisation	97	256
Other expenses	135	367
Total expenses from continuing operations	12,780	13,370
Operating result from continuing operations	941	(611)

In 2020–21, the QFCC received total revenue of \$13,687 million in comparison to \$12,692 million in 2019–20. The QFCC maintained a sound net asset position in the 2020–21 financial year.

Financial position

Queensland Family and Child Commission	Actual 2020–21 \$'000	Actual 2019–20 \$'000
Current assets		
Cash and cash equivalents	3,233	3,394
Receivables	258	220
Prepayments	130	169
Total current assets	3,621	3,783
Non-current assets		
Plant and equipment	23	21
Intangible assets	754	91
Total non-current assets	777	112
Total assets	4,398	3,895
Current liabilities		
Payables	412	938
Accrued employee benefits	498	410
Total liabilities	910	1,348
Net assets	3,488	2,547
Equity		
Contributed equity	2,427	2,427
Accumulated surplus	1,061	120
Total equity	3,488	2,547

Further information

As required by annual reporting guidelines, information relating to consultancies engaged by the QFCC in 2020–21 is published online through the government's Open Data website. As no overseas travel was undertaken in 2020–21 an overseas travel expenditure report will not be published.

Our workforce

The QFCC's workforce is employed under the *Public Service Act 2008*, except for the Principal Commissioner and Commissioner, who are employed under the *Family and Child Commission Act 2014*.

Workforce profile

As at 30 June 2021, the QFCC employed 61.34 full-time equivalent¹⁹ staff, with total employee expenses for the year of \$9.550 million, representing 75 per cent of the QFCC's operating expenditure.

Our staff profile was 80 per cent female and 20 per cent male, with:

- 10.14 per cent identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander
- 2.90 per cent identifying as having a disability.

Separation rate

In 2020–21, our permanent staff separation rate was 3.51 per cent. No redundancy packages were paid during the period.

Strategic Workforce Plan

Our *Strategic Workforce Plan* is regularly reviewed to make sure our workforce strategies and initiatives remain relevant and consider the needs of the staff and the organisation.

In 2020–21, the focus areas were:

- supporting our workforce in adapting from traditional to flexible work practices during the COVID-19 pandemic
- enhancing opportunities for our staff to engage in learning and development opportunities
- implementing a range of health and wellbeing initiatives to support staff physical, psychological, financial and social wellbeing
- providing information and communication technology capability to support an agile and mobile workforce
- assisting staff to maintain an inclusive work environment while working in a decentralised work environment
- incorporating findings from the *2020 Working for Queensland Employee Opinion* survey.

We have continued to fine-tune our organisational structure and governance arrangements to best support our strategic direction and work priorities.

Attraction and retention

The QFCC has implemented several initiatives to attract and retain an inclusive, diverse and capable workforce, by:

- using strategies and initiatives from our *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Strategy*
- effectively engaging with our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and stakeholders to ensure their perspectives are considered and represented in our work
- providing opportunities to partner with and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in delivering community-led initiatives and services that respond to community needs.

¹⁹ Minimum Obligatory Human Resources Information (MOHRI) FTE (Full Time Equivalent) data for fortnight ending 18 June 2021.

Performance management framework

The QFCC implemented several initiatives to support staff performance and development during 2020–21, such as:

- completing annual performance development plans to identify individual and organisational learning and development initiatives
- developing a new learning and development policy to provide the principles and process that underpin staff professional development, while encouraging and supporting staff members to pursue professional career development as an integral component of employment with the QFCC
- providing mandatory online training on code of conduct, information privacy, right to information, bullying, domestic and family violence, and cultural capability
- encouraging staff to take up development opportunities offered by the Public Service Commission.

Supporting staff wellbeing

The QFCC offered several health and wellbeing initiatives to staff, such as:

- a flu vaccination program
- an integrated employee support program to help staff in dealing with sensitive child-related information
- ongoing access to, and promotion of, an employee assistance program, which provides professional, confidential counselling, coaching and support to employees and their immediate family on a broad range of work and life issues
- a range of seminars to help staff build financial security
- a range of physical and mental health initiatives (such as Pilates and yoga) to promote employee health and wellbeing
- supporting a number of staff in undertaking training to be certified Mental Health First Aid Officers so they could gain an understanding of how to:
 - recognise symptoms of different illnesses and mental health crises
 - offer and provide initial help
 - guide a person towards appropriate treatments and support.

Flexible working arrangements

The QFCC provides flexible employment options to assist staff to effectively blend work, family and life responsibilities. Many opportunities are available to staff and are regularly promoted.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the majority of our staff continued to work remotely from home in some capacity. Consistent with government policy, staff attendance at the QFCC office progressively increased in the latter part of the financial year.

However, following the easing of COVID-19 restrictions, the majority of staff elected to formalise flexible work arrangements as set out in the *State Government Entities Certified Agreement 2019*, *Industrial Relations Act 2016* and the 2020 Queensland Government election commitments.

Code of conduct

QFCC staff are covered by the single code of conduct established for the Queensland Public Service. Code of conduct principles and their associated set of values form part of induction training for new staff, and staff are required to complete mandatory online code of conduct training.

Our performance and development framework and processes also address code of conduct expectations. Staff are encouraged to raise any workplace issues with their line manager, with local resolution the preferred option.

The year ahead

In 2021–22, as part of its governance responsibilities, the QFCC will:

- continue to offer a diverse range of workforce and health and wellbeing initiatives to support and develop our staff
- enhance learning and development opportunities across the organisation
- participate in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Career Pathways Program Service, which supports the career progression of employees who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples into leadership and decision-making roles
- implement a new performance and development agreement that aligns with the positive performance management principles directive
- contribute to the review of the *Family and Child Commission Act 2014* (the Act) and the independent review of the QFCC's performance (in accordance with section 42 of the Act).

Appendix A

Glossary of acronyms and initialisms

ARRs Annual Report Requirements

CAA Corporate Administration Agency

COVID-19 Coronavirus disease 2019

FAA *Financial Accountability Act 2009*

FPMS Financial and Performance Management Standard 2019

QFCC Queensland Family and Child Commission

Appendix B

Annual report compliance checklist

Summary of requirements		Basis for requirement	Annual report reference
Letter of compliance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A letter of compliance from the accountable officer or statutory body to the relevant minister/s 	ARRs—section 7	p. i
Accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Table of contents Glossary 	ARRs—section 9.1	p. 1 p. 45
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public availability 	ARRs—section 9.2	Inside front cover
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interpreter service statement 	<i>Queensland Government Language Services Policy</i> ARRs—section 9.3	N/A
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Copyright notice 	<i>Copyright Act 1968</i> ARRs—section 9.4	Inside front cover
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information licensing 	<i>Queensland Government Enterprise Architecture—Information Licensing</i> ARRs—section 9.5	Inside front cover
General information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introductory information 	ARRs—section 10	pp. 2–8
Non-financial performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government’s objectives for the community and whole-of government plans/specific initiatives 	ARRs—section 11.1	pp. 6–8
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agency objectives and performance indicators 	ARRs—section 11.2	p. 6
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agency service areas and service standards 	ARRs—section 11.3	p. 7
Financial performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Summary of financial performance 	ARRs—section 12.1	pp. 40–41
Governance – management and structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organisational structure 	ARRs—section 13.1	p. 35
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Executive management 	ARRs—section 13.2	pp. 33–34
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government bodies (statutory bodies and other entities) 	ARRs—section 13.3	N/A
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public Sector Ethics 	<i>Public Sector Ethics Act 1994</i> ARRs—section 13.4	p. 44
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Human Rights 	<i>Human Rights Act 2019</i> ARRs—section 13.5	p. 39
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Queensland public service values 	ARRs—section 13.6	p. 36

Summary of requirements		Basis for requirement	Annual report reference
Governance – risk management and accountability	• Risk management	ARRs—section 14.1	p. 38
	• Audit committee	ARRs—section 14.2	pp. 37–38
	• Internal audit	ARRs—section 14.3	p. 38
	• External scrutiny	ARRs—section 14.4	p. 39
	• Information systems and recordkeeping	ARRs—section 14.5	p. 39
	• Information Security attestation	ARRs—section 14.6	N/A
Governance – human resources	• Strategic workforce planning and performance	ARRs—section 15.1	pp. 42–44
	• Early retirement, redundancy and retrenchment	<i>Directive No.04/18 Early Retirement, Redundancy and Retrenchment</i> ARRs—section 15.2	p. 42
Open Data	• Statement advising publication of information	ARRs—section 16	p. 41
	• Consultancies	ARRs—section 33.1	N/A
	• Overseas travel	ARRs—section 33.2	p. 41
	• Queensland Language Services Policy	ARRs—section 33.3	N/A
Financial statements	• Certification of financial statements	FAA—section 62 FPMS—sections 38, 39 and 46 ARRs—section 17.1	pp. 48–76
	• Independent Auditor’s report	FAA—section 62 FPMS—section 46 ARRs—section 17.2	pp. 77–79

FAA *Financial Accountability Act 2009*

FPMS *Financial and Performance Management Standard 2019*

ARRs *Annual report requirements for Queensland Government agencies*

Appendix C

Financial statements

Queensland Family and Child Commission

Financial Statements

for the year ended 30 June 2021

Queensland Family and Child Commission

Financial Statements 2020-21

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Queensland Family and Child Commission
STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME
for the year ended 30 June 2021

	Notes	2021 \$'000	2020 \$'000
Income from Continuing Operations			
Grants and other contributions	3.	13,687	12,692
Other revenue		34	67
		<hr/>	<hr/>
Total Income from Continuing Operations		13,721	12,759
<hr/>			
Expenses from Continuing Operations			
Employee expenses	4.	9,550	8,881
Supplies and services	5.	2,998	3,866
Depreciation and amortisation		97	256
Other expenses	6.	135	367
		<hr/>	<hr/>
Total Expenses from Continuing Operations		12,780	13,370
		<hr/>	<hr/>
Operating Result from Continuing Operations		941	(611)
		<hr/>	<hr/>
Total Comprehensive Income		941	(611)
		<hr/>	<hr/>

The accompanying notes form part of these financial statements.

Queensland Family and Child Commission

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

as at 30 June 2021

	Notes	2021 \$'000	2020 \$'000
Current Assets			
Cash and cash equivalents		3,233	3,394
Receivables	7.	258	220
Prepayments		130	169
Total Current Assets		3,621	3,783
Non Current Assets			
Plant and equipment		23	21
Intangible assets	8.	754	91
Total Non Current Assets		777	112
Total Assets		4,398	3,895
Current Liabilities			
Payables	9.	412	938
Accrued employee benefits	10.	498	410
Total Current Liabilities		910	1,348
Total Liabilities		910	1,348
Net Assets		3,488	2,547
Equity			
Contributed equity		2,427	2,427
Accumulated surplus		1,061	120
Total Equity		3,488	2,547

The accompanying notes form part of these financial statements.

Queensland Family and Child Commission

STATEMENT OF CHANGES IN EQUITY

for the year ended 30 June 2021

	Accumulated Surplus \$'000	Contributed Equity \$'000	TOTAL \$'000
Balance as at 1 July 2019	731	2,427	3,158
Operating Result from Continuing Operations	(611)	-	(611)
Balance as at 30 June 2020	120	2,427	2,547
Balance as at 1 July 2020	120	2,427	2,547
Operating Result from Continuing Operations	941	-	941
Balance as at 30 June 2021	1,061	2,427	3,488

The accompanying notes form part of these financial statements.

Queensland Family and Child Commission

STATEMENT OF CASH FLOWS

for the year ended 30 June 2021

	2021 \$'000	2020 \$'000
Cash flows from operating activities		
<i>Inflows:</i>		
Grants and other contributions	13,628	12,835
GST input tax credits from ATO	482	352
GST collected from customers	13	6
Other revenue	34	67
<i>Outflows:</i>		
Employee expenses	(9,574)	(8,695)
Supplies and services	(3,425)	(3,936)
GST paid to suppliers	(414)	(412)
GST remitted to ATO	(13)	(5)
Other	(131)	(26)
Net cash provided by (used in) operating activities	601	186
Cash flows from investing activities		
<i>Outflows:</i>		
Payments for plant and equipment	(8)	(16)
Payments for intangibles	(754)	-
Net cash provided by (used in) investing activities	(762)	(16)
Net increase (decrease) in cash and cash equivalents	(161)	170
Cash and cash equivalents at beginning of financial year	3,394	3,224
Cash and cash equivalents at end of financial year	3,233	3,394

The accompanying notes form part of these financial statements.

Queensland Family and Child Commission

STATEMENT OF CASH FLOWS

for the year ended 30 June 2021

NOTES TO THE STATEMENT OF CASH FLOW

Reconciliation of Operating Result to Net Cash provided by Operating Activities

	2021 \$'000	2020 \$'000
Operating surplus/(deficit)	941	(611)
Depreciation and amortisation expense	97	256
Loss on disposal of property, plant & equipment	-	239
<i>Changes in assets and liabilities:</i>		
(Increase)/decrease in receivables	(107)	106
(Increase)/decrease in GST input tax credits receivable	69	(59)
(Increase)/decrease in prepayments	39	(132)
Increase/(decrease) in accounts payable	(526)	312
Increase in accrued employee benefits	88	75
Net cash provided by (used in) operating activities	601	186

Queensland Family and Child Commission

NOTES TO AND FORMING PART OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2020-21

Section 1: About the QFCC and this Financial Report

- Note 1: Basis of Financial Statement Preparation
- Note 2: Objectives of the QFCC

Section 2: Notes about our Financial Performance

- Note 3: Grants and Contributions
- Note 4: Employee Expenses
- Note 5: Supplies and Services
- Note 6: Other Expenses

Section 3: Notes about our Financial Position

- Note 7: Receivables
- Note 8: Intangible Assets
- Note 9: Payables
- Note 10: Accrued Employee Benefits

Section 4: Notes about Risks and Other Accounting Uncertainties

- Note 11: Commitments
- Note 12: Contingencies
- Note 13: Financial Risk Disclosures
- Note 14: Events Occurring After Balance Date
- Note 15: Future Impact of Accounting Standards Not Yet Effective

Section 5: Notes on our Performance compared to Budget

- Note 16: Budgetary Reporting Disclosures and Significant Financial Impacts from COVID-19

Section 6: Other Information

- Note 17: Key Management Personnel (KMP) and Related Party Disclosures
- Note 18: Taxation
- Note 19: Insurance
- Note 20: Accounting Estimates and Judgements
- Note 21: First Year Application of New Accounting Standards or Change in Accounting Policy
- Note 22: Climate Risk Disclosures

Queensland Family and Child Commission

NOTES TO AND FORMING PART OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2020-21

1. Basis of Financial Statement Preparation

General Information

This financial report covers the Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC). It has no controlled entities.

The QFCC is a statutory body established on 1 July 2014 as part of the Queensland Government's response to the Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry (Carmody Inquiry). The QFCC provides oversight of Queensland's child protection system to ensure government and non-government agencies are delivering best practice services for the families and children of Queensland.

The head office and principal place of business of the QFCC is:

Level 8, 63 George Street, Brisbane.

A description of the nature of the QFCC's operations and its principal activities are included in the notes to the financial statements.

Compliance with Prescribed Requirements

The QFCC has prepared these financial statements in compliance with section 39 of the *Financial and Performance Management Standard 2019*. The financial statements comply with Queensland Treasury's Minimum Reporting Requirements for reporting periods beginning on or after 1 July 2020.

The QFCC is a not-for-profit entity and these general purpose financial statements are prepared on an accrual basis (except for the statement of cash flows which is prepared on a cash basis) in accordance with Australian Accounting Standards and Interpretations applicable to not-for-profit entities.

New accounting standards early adopted and/or applied for the first time in these financial statements are outlined in Note 21.

Presentation

Currency and Rounding

Amounts included in the financial statements are in Australian dollars and rounded to the nearest \$1,000 or, where that amount is \$500 or less, to zero, unless disclosure of the full amount is specifically required.

Comparatives

Comparative information reflects the audited 2019-20 financial statements.

Current / Non-Current Classification

Assets and liabilities are classified as either 'current' or 'non-current' in the Statement of Financial Position and associated notes.

Queensland Family and Child Commission

NOTES TO AND FORMING PART OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2020-21

1. Basis of Financial Statement Preparation (cont'd)

Presentation (cont'd)

Current / Non-Current Classification (cont'd)

Assets are classified as 'current' where their carrying amount is expected to be realised within 12 months after the reporting date. Liabilities are classified as 'current' when they are due to be settled within 12 months after the reporting date, or the QFCC does not have an unconditional right to defer settlement to beyond 12 months after the reporting date. All other assets and liabilities are classified as non-current.

Basis of Measurement

Historical cost is used as the measurement basis in this report.

Under the historical cost, assets are recorded at the amount of cash or cash equivalents paid or the fair value of the consideration given to acquire assets at the time of acquisition. Liabilities are recorded at the amount of proceeds received in exchange for the obligation or at the amounts of cash or cash equivalents expected to be paid to satisfy the liability in the normal course of business.

Accounting Policy - Cash and Cash Equivalents

For the purposes of the statement of financial position and the statement of cash flows, cash assets include all cash and cheques received but not banked as at 30 June.

Implementation of the Shared Service Initiative

The Corporate Administration Agency (CAA) provides the QFCC with corporate services under the "Shared Services Provider" model. The fees and terms of the services are agreed through a Service Level Agreement, negotiated annually and include:

- Financial Services
- Human Resources Recruitment and Payroll
- Information Systems and Support
- Internal Audit Services.

Authorisation of Financial Statements for Issue

The financial statements are authorised for issue by the Chief Executive Officer & Principal Commissioner and the Acting Executive Director Corporate & Communications at the date of signing the Management Certificate.

Queensland Family and Child Commission

NOTES TO AND FORMING PART OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2020-21

2. Objectives of the QFCC

The QFCC has the following objectives:

- Hold to account the systems responsible for the safety and wellbeing of our most vulnerable children and young people by:
 - maintaining independence and recognising the important role of the family in children's lives
 - focusing on outcomes, measuring what matters to enable the oversight of systems responsible for upholding the rights of Queensland children and young people
 - advocating for systemic change to protect the rights and best interests of children and young people in Queensland, particularly those who experience inequity, vulnerability and marginalisation
- Promote and raise awareness of the rights of children and young people in Queensland by:
 - gathering and using the perspectives of Queensland's children and young people to inform and influence the decisions made by government
 - engaging in a purposeful, ethical and inclusive manner
 - using best practice and strong evidentiary facts to remain contemporary and current in our role as trusted advisor
- Advocate for what matters in the lives of children and young people and their families by:
 - taking a stand on issues that affect the rights of children and young people in Queensland
 - using young people's experiences and data to tell a story
 - identifying, consulting and collaborating with our key stakeholders and partners and using the collective knowledge to influence outcomes for the benefit of children and young people

	2021	2020
	\$'000	\$'000
3. Grants and Contributions		
Grants received from State and Commonwealth departments	13,687	12,692
Total	13,687	12,692

Queensland Family and Child Commission

NOTES TO AND FORMING PART OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2020-21

3. Grants and Contributions (cont'd)

Accounting Policy - Grants and Contributions

Grants, contributions and donations revenue arise from non-exchange transactions where the QFCC does not directly give approximately equal value to the grantor.

Where the grant agreement is enforceable and contains sufficiently specific performance obligations for the QFCC to transfer goods or services to a third-party on the grantor's behalf, the transaction is accounted for under AASB 15 *Revenue from Contracts with Customers*. In this case, revenue is initially deferred (as a contract liability) and recognised as or when the performance obligations are satisfied.

Otherwise, the grant is accounted for under AASB 1058 *Income of Not-for-Profit Entities*, whereby revenue is recognised upon receipt of the grant funding, except for special purpose capital grants received to construct non-financial assets to be controlled by the department. Special purpose capital grants are recognised as unearned revenue when received, and subsequently recognised progressively as revenue as the department satisfies its obligations under the grant through construction of the asset.

The QFCC received grant funding from the Department of Justice and Attorney-General and Commissioner for Children and Young People Western Australia during the 2020-21 financial year. The funding has been recognised as revenue on receipt under AASB 1058 as the QFCC's obligations are not sufficiently specific.

	2021	2020
	\$'000	\$'000
4. Employee Expenses		
Employee Benefits		
Wages and salaries	7,107	6,606
Employer superannuation contributions	949	845
Annual leave levy	715	665
Long service leave levy	188	159
Employee Related Expenses		
Payroll tax	442	394
Other employee related expenses	149	212
Total	9,550	8,881
	2021	2020
Full-Time Equivalent Employees *	63	65

* FTE data as at 30 June 2021 (based upon the fortnight ending 2 July 2021).

Queensland Family and Child Commission

NOTES TO AND FORMING PART OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2020-21

4. Employee Expenses (cont'd)

Accounting Policy - Wages and Salaries

Wages and salaries due but unpaid at reporting date are recognised in the Statement of Financial Position at the current salary rates. As the QFCC expects such liabilities to be wholly settled within 12 months of reporting date, the liabilities are recognised at undiscounted amounts.

Accounting Policy - Sick Leave

Prior history indicates that on average, sick leave taken each reporting period is less than the entitlement accrued. This is expected to continue in future periods. Accordingly, it is unlikely that existing accumulated entitlements will be used by employees and no liability for unused sick leave entitlements is recognised. As sick leave is non-vesting, an expense is recognised for this leave as it is taken.

Accounting Policy - Annual Leave

The Queensland Government's Annual Leave Central Scheme (ALCS) became operational on 30 June 2008 for departments, commercialised business units and shared service providers. Under this scheme, a levy is made on the QFCC to cover the cost of employees' annual leave (including leave loading and on-costs). The levies are expensed in the period in which they are payable. Amounts paid to employees for annual leave are claimed from the scheme quarterly in arrears.

Accounting Policy - Long Service Leave

Under the Queensland Government's Long Service Leave Scheme (LSLS), a levy is made on the QFCC to cover the cost of employees' long service leave. The levies are expensed in the period in which they are payable. Amounts paid to employees for long service leave are claimed from the scheme quarterly in arrears.

Accounting Policy - Superannuation

Post-employment benefits for superannuation are provided through defined contribution (accumulation) plans or the Queensland Government's QSuper defined benefit plan as determined by the employee's conditions of employment.

Defined Contribution Plans - Contributions are made to eligible complying superannuation funds based on the rates specified in the relevant enterprise bargaining agreement (EBA) or other conditions of employment. Contributions are expensed when they are paid or become payable following completion of the employee's service each pay period.

Defined Benefit Plan - The liability for defined benefits is held on a whole-of-Government basis and reported in those financial statements pursuant to *AASB 1049 Whole of Government and General Government Sector Financial Reporting*. The amount of contributions for defined benefit plan obligations is based upon the rates determined on the advice of the State Actuary. Contributions are paid by the QFCC at the specified rate following completion of the employee's service each pay period. The QFCC's obligations are limited to those contributions paid.

Queensland Family and Child Commission

NOTES TO AND FORMING PART OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2020-21

4. Employee Expenses (cont'd)

Accounting Policy - Workers' Compensation Premiums

The QFCC pays premiums to WorkCover Queensland in respect of its obligations for employee compensation. Workers' compensation insurance is a consequence of employing employees, but is not counted in an employee's total remuneration package. It is not employee benefits and is recognised separately as employee related expenses.

Key management personnel and remuneration disclosures

Key management personnel and remuneration disclosures are detailed in Note 17.

	2021 \$'000	2020 \$'000
5. Supplies and Services		
Building services *	905	1,017
Administration costs	110	100
Contractors and consultants	957	1,440
Corporate services provider costs	488	567
Advertising and promotions	110	79
Minor plant and equipment	37	266
Other supplies and services	391	397
Total	2,998	3,866

Office accommodation

* Payments for non-specialised commercial office accommodation under the Queensland Government Accommodation Office (QGAO) framework arise from non-lease arrangements with the Department of Energy and Public Works (DEPW), formerly the Department of Housing and Public Works (DHPW), who has substantive substitution rights over the assets used within these schemes. Building Services includes office rental payments to DEPW of \$728k (2020 - \$889k) and these are expensed in the periods in which they are incurred.

Queensland Family and Child Commission

NOTES TO AND FORMING PART OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2020-21

	2021 \$'000	2020 \$'000
6. Other Expenses		
Insurance premiums (QGIF)	4	4
External audit fees *	22	23
Loss on disposal of assets	-	239
Sponsorships paid	82	101
Trustee/Board Fees	27	-
Total	135	367

* Total audit fees quoted in the Queensland Audit Office's plan for 2020-21 is \$22,500 (2019-20: \$22,500).

7. Receivables		
Trade debtors	-	5
GST receivable	86	155
Annual leave reimbursements	132	53
Long service leave reimbursement	40	7
Total	258	220

Accounting Policy - Receivables

Receivables are measured at amortised cost which approximates their fair values at reporting date.

Trade debtors are recognised at the amounts due at the time of sale or service delivery (i.e. the agreed purchase/contract price). Settlement of these amounts is required within 30 days from invoice date.

Impairment of Receivables

Accounting Policy - Impairment of Receivables

The loss allowance for trade and other debtors reflect lifetime expected credit losses and incorporates reasonable supportable forward-looking information. Economic changes impacting the QFCC's debtors, and relevant industry data from part of the QFCC's impairment assessment.

The QFCC's other receivables are from Queensland Government agencies or Australian Government agencies. No loss allowance is recorded for these receivables.

No impairment losses have been recognised for receivables in 2020-21.

Queensland Family and Child Commission

NOTES TO AND FORMING PART OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2020-21

8. Intangible Assets	2021 \$'000	2020 \$'000
Software Purchased: At cost		
Gross	433	433
Less: Accumulated amortisation	(404)	(342)
	29	91
Software Internally Generated: At cost		
Gross	1,876	1,146
Less: Accumulated amortisation	(1,176)	(1,146)
	700	-
Software Work in Progress: At cost		
Gross	25	-
	25	-
Carrying amount at 30 June	754	91

Intangible Assets - Balances and Reconciliation of Carrying Amounts

	Software Purchased		Software Internally Generated		Work in Progress		Total	
	2021 \$'000	2020 \$'000	2021 \$'000	2020 \$'000	2021 \$'000	2020 \$'000	2021 \$'000	2020 \$'000
Carrying amount at 1 July	91	152	-	151	-	-	91	303
Acquisitions	-	-	-	-	755	-	755	-
Transfers in/(out)	-	-	729	-	(729)	-	-	-
Amortisation expense	(62)	(61)	(30)	(151)	-	-	(92)	(212)
Carrying amount at 30 June	29	91	700	-	25	-	754	91

Queensland Family and Child Commission

NOTES TO AND FORMING PART OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2020-21

8. Intangible Assets (cont'd)

Recognition and Measurement

Accounting Policy

Intangible assets of the QFCC comprise of purchased and internally generated software. Intangible assets with a historical cost or other value equal to or greater than \$100,000 are recognised in the financial statements. Items with a lesser value are expensed. Any training costs are expensed as incurred.

There is no active market for the QFCC's intangible assets. As such the assets are recognised and carried at historical cost less accumulated amortisation and accumulated impairment losses.

Expenditure on research activities relating to internally generated intangible assets is recognised as an expense in the period in which it is incurred. Research and development expensed during the period is included in 'supplies and services expenses'.

Costs associated with internal development of computer software are capitalised and amortised under the amortisation policy below.

No intangible assets have been classified as held for sale or form part of a disposal group held for sale.

Impairment

Accounting Policy

All intangible assets are assessed for indicators of impairment on an annual basis. No significant indicators of impairment were present at reporting date.

	2021	2020
	\$'000	\$'000
9. Payables		
Trade creditors	256	690
Other payables	156	248
Total	412	938

Accounting Policy

Trade creditors are recognised upon receipt of the goods or services ordered and are measured at the agreed purchase/contract price, gross of applicable trade and other discounts. Amounts owing are unsecured and are generally settled on 30 day terms.

10. Accrued Employee Benefits

Current

Salaries and wages outstanding	268	213
Annual leave levy payable	184	152
Long service leave levy payable	46	45
Total	498	410

Queensland Family and Child Commission

NOTES TO AND FORMING PART OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2020-21

10. Accrued Employee Benefits (cont'd)

Accounting Policy

No provision for annual leave or long service leave is recognised in the QFCC's financial statements as the liability is held on a whole-of-Government basis and reported in those financial statements pursuant to AASB 1049 *Whole of Government and General Government Sector Financial Reporting*.

11. Commitments

(a) Office Accommodation

The Department of Energy and Public Works (DEPW) provides the QFCC with access to office accommodation under government-wide frameworks. From 1 July 2019, these arrangements are now categorised as procurement of services rather than as leases because DEPW has substantive substitution rights over the assets. The related service expenses are included in Note 5.

(b) Other Expense Commitments

The other material expenditure commitments of the QFCC (inclusive of non-recoverable GST input tax credits) contracted for at reporting date but not recognised in the accounts are payable as follows:

	2021	2020
	\$'000	\$'000
Not later than one year	1,466	1,595
Later than one year and not later than five years	3,306	3,854
Total	4,772	5,449

Queensland Family and Child Commission

NOTES TO AND FORMING PART OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2020-21

12. Contingencies

There were no other known contingent assets or liabilities as at 30 June 2021.

13. Financial Risk Disclosures

Financial Instrument Categories

Financial assets and financial liabilities are recognised in the statement of financial position when the QFCC becomes party to the contractual provisions of the financial instrument. No financial assets and financial liabilities have been offset and presented net in the Statement of Financial Position.

The QFCC has no financial assets/liabilities recognised at fair value.

The QFCC has the following categories of financial assets and financial liabilities:

Category	Note	2021 \$'000	2020 \$'000
Financial Assets			
Cash and cash equivalents		3,233	3,394
Financial assets at amortised cost:			
Receivables	7.	258	220
Total financial assets		3,491	3,614
Financial Liabilities			
Financial liabilities at amortised cost:			
Payables	9.	412	938
Total financial liabilities at amortised cost		412	938

Financial risk management

The activities undertaken by the QFCC do not expose it to any material credit, liquidity or market risk.

14. Events Occurring After Balance Date

No events have occurred after balance date that has a material effect on these financial statements.

15. Future Impact of Accounting Standards Not Yet Effective

At the date of authorisation of the financial report, there are no Australian accounting standards and interpretations with future effective dates that are applicable to the QFCC's activities or have no material impact on the QFCC.

Queensland Family and Child Commission
NOTES TO AND FORMING PART OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2020-21

16. Budgetary Reporting Disclosures and Significant Financial Impacts from COVID-19

This section contains explanations of major variances between the QFCC's actual 2020-21 financial results and the original budget presented to Parliament.

Budget to Actual Comparison - Statement of Comprehensive Income

		2021	2021	
	Variance	Actual	Original	Budget
	Notes	\$'000	budget	variance
		\$'000	\$'000	\$'000
Income from Continuing Operations				
Grants and other contributions	1.	13,687	13,762	(75)
Other revenue		34	52	(18)
Total Income from Continuing Operations		13,721	13,814	(93)
Expenses from Continuing Operations				
Employee expenses	2.	9,550	10,261	(711)
Supplies and services	3.	2,998	3,301	(303)
Depreciation and amortisation	4.	97	191	(94)
Other expenses	5.	135	61	74
Total Expenses from Continuing Operations		12,780	13,814	(1,034)
Total Comprehensive Income		941	-	941

16. Budgetary Reporting Disclosures and Significant Financial Impacts from COVID-19

This section contains explanations of major variances between the QFCC's actual 2020-21 financial results and the original budget presented to Parliament.

Explanations of Major Variances

Statement of Comprehensive Income

1. Funding received for amortisation was not required due to the timing of implementing the Child Death Register software and is now recognised as unearned revenue.
2. Delays in filling vacant positions and staff on extended leave or secondment to other government agencies have contributed to lower salary costs. On-line training opportunities have also reduced employee expenses.
3. Supplies and services vary each year as projects are developed. The timing of project delivery, reduced travel and working from home arrangements have contributed to the underspend in this area.
4. Depreciation and amortisation expenses have decreased due to the timing of implementing the replacement Child Death Register software.
5. The increase in other expenses is primarily due to the funding agreement with Children's Rights Queensland.

Statement of Financial Position and Statement of Cash Flows

The QFCC was granted relief from preparing a budgeted Statement of Financial Position and a budgeted Statement of Cash Flows in the 2020-21 SDS. Consequently, these were not presented to Parliament for the 2020-21 financial year.

Queensland Family and Child Commission

NOTES TO AND FORMING PART OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2020-21

17. Key Management Personnel (KMP) and Related Party Disclosures

Details of Key Management Personnel

The following details for key management personnel include those positions that had authority and responsibility for planning, directing and controlling the activities of the QFCC during 2020-21 and 2019-20.

Position	Position Responsibility
Chief Executive Officer & Principal Commissioner	<p>As the Chief Executive Officer of the agency, the role provides strategic and cross-sectorial leadership and direction to government and non-government agencies to strengthen laws, policies, practices and services that improve the child protection and family support system.</p> <p>The role is responsible for providing expert advice on child protection practices, underpinned by research, to improve the safety and wellbeing of children and young people. Maintaining the rights of children in all situations continues to drive the work of the agency.</p> <p>This role is also the Chair of the independent Child Death Review Board.</p>
Commissioner	<p>The role supports the Principal Commissioner to provide strategic direction and leadership to develop and deliver integrated strategies designed to build capability and capacity and improve the culture of the child protection and family support system.</p> <p>The role has a strong focus on collaboration, partnerships and networks across the sector and improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.</p>
Deputy Commissioner	<p>The role was responsible for supporting the Commissioners and leading and maintaining the QFCC's strategic and operational frameworks, achieved through a broad range of activities, projects and services to support children, families and communities across the State.</p>
Executive Director, Corporate and Communications	<p>The role leads the agency corporate services, communications and education and community engagement activities. It is responsible for making sure the QFCC has the appropriate controls, administrative, legal and corporate governance arrangements, media and corporate communications, reporting procedures, and people oriented systems in place to effectively support the operations of the QFCC in line with key legislative and policy obligations.</p>

Queensland Family and Child Commission

NOTES TO AND FORMING PART OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2020-21

17. Key Management Personnel (KMP) and Related Party Disclosures (cont'd)

Details of Key Management Personnel (cont'd)

Position	Position Responsibility
Executive Director, Child Death Prevention	<p>The role leads the QFCC's research and child death prevention functions and during 2020-21 was responsible for the transition of the Child Death Review Board (CDRB) secretariat functions from the then Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women.</p> <p>The role oversees the QFCC maintaining a register on all child deaths in Queensland to inform prevention activities and make available better information on risk factors and causes of death.</p>
Executive Director, Oversight	<p>The role strategically leads the oversight and Indigenous outcomes function of the QFCC.</p> <p>The role provides leadership to the systemic oversight of Queensland's child protection and family support systems to assess whether the systems are reliable, sustainable and productive. The role also drives activities to influence policy and practice to address the disproportionate representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in the child protection and family support systems.</p>

Queensland Family and Child Commission

NOTES TO AND FORMING PART OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2020-21

17. Key Management Personnel (KMP) and Related Party Disclosures (cont'd)

Remuneration Policies

Remuneration for the Principal Commissioner and Commissioner are set by the Governor in Council in accordance with Division 3, *Family and Child Commission Act 2014*. The remuneration and other terms of employment for the other key executive management personnel are in accordance with directives issued under the *Public Service Act 2008* by the Public Service Commission Chief Executive or the Minister responsible for public sector industrial relations.

Remuneration expenses for those KMP comprise the following components:

- Short term employee expenses, including:
 - Salaries, allowances and leave entitlements earned and expensed for the entire year, or for that part of the year during which the employee occupied a KMP position.
 - Non-monetary benefits - consisting of provision of vehicle parking together with fringe benefits tax applicable to the benefit.
- Long term employee expenses including amounts expensed in respect of long service leave entitlements earned.
- Post-employment expenses including amounts expensed in respect of employer superannuation obligations.
- Termination benefits are in accordance with government industrial instruments and individual contract of employment arrangements.
- Performance bonuses are not paid.

Queensland Family and Child Commission

NOTES TO AND FORMING PART OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2020-21

17. Key Management Personnel (KMP) and Related Party Disclosures (cont'd)

Remuneration Expense

The following disclosures focus on the expenses incurred by the QFCC attributable to non-Ministerial KMP during the respective reporting periods. The amounts disclosed are determined on the same basis as expenses recognised in the statement of comprehensive income.

1 July 2020 - 30 June 2021

Position	Short Term Employee Expenses		Long Term Employee Expenses	Post-Employment Expenses	Termination Benefits	Total Expenses
	Monetary Expenses \$'000	Non-Monetary Benefits \$'000	\$'000	\$'000	\$'000	\$'000
Chief Executive Officer & Principal Commissioner	286	1	7	26	-	320
Commissioner	221	3	5	22	-	251
Deputy Commissioner (from 1 July 2020 to 31 March 2021)	149	2	4	16	42	213
Executive Director, Child Death Prevention	190	3	4	20	-	217
Executive Director, Oversight	185	4	4	19	-	212
Executive Director, Corporate and Communications (from 20 December 2020) (Acting)	106	2	2	10	-	120
Total Remuneration	1,137	15	26	113	42	1,333

- Deputy Commissioner was on leave from 7 December 2020 to 30 March 2021 and resigned from the QFCC on 30 March 2021. The position has since been abolished.
- Executive Director Evaluation & Workforce Futures was seconded to the Department of Youth Justice from 1 July 2020 to 14 May 2021 and is currently on long term leave.
- Executive Director Corporate and Communications was seconded to the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries from 17 August 2020 to 9 December 2020.
- The position of Director to the Principal Commissioner was not responsible for planning, directing and controlling the activities of the QFCC during 2020-21.

Queensland Family and Child Commission

NOTES TO AND FORMING PART OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2020-21

17. Key Management Personnel (KMP) and Related Party Disclosures (cont'd)

KMP Remuneration Expense (cont'd)

1 July 2019 - 30 June 2020

Position	Short Term Employee Expenses		Long Term Employee Expenses	Post-Employment Expenses	Termination Benefits	Total Expenses
	Monetary Expenses \$'000	Non-Monetary Benefits \$'000	\$'000	\$'000	\$'000	\$'000
Chief Executive Officer & Principal Commissioner	287	4	7	26	-	324
Commissioner (to 25 September 2019)	47	2	1	6	-	56
Commissioner (from 1 June 2020)	18	-	1	2	-	21
Deputy Commissioner (from 13 January 2020)	99	1	3	11	-	114
Executive Director, Research and Child Death Prevention	188	5	4	20	-	217
Executive Director, Oversight and Indigenous Outcomes (from 29 July 2019)	177	4	4	19	-	204
Executive Director, Evaluation and Workforce Futures	183	5	4	19	-	211
Executive Director, Corporate and Communications	205	2	5	22	-	234
Director to the Principal Commissioner (to 8 October 2019)	47	3	1	5	-	56
Director to the Principal Commissioner (from 18 February 2020)	54	1	2	7	-	64
Total Remuneration	1,305	27	32	137	-	1,501

Queensland Family and Child Commission

NOTES TO AND FORMING PART OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2020-21

17. Key Management Personnel (KMP) and Related Party Disclosures (cont'd)

Related Party Transactions

Transactions with people/entities related to KMP

The QFCC did not enter into any transactions with people, or entities, related to Key Management Personnel during the audit period.

Transactions with other Queensland Government-controlled entities

The QFCC transacts with other Queensland Government controlled entities consistent with normal day-to-day business operations provided under normal commercial terms and conditions.

The QFCC's primary ongoing source of funding is grant funding provided in cash by Department of Justice and Attorney General (Note 3).

The QFCC received services from CAA (Note 1) totalling \$209k and has an operating lease from DEPW for commercial office accommodation (Note 5) totalling \$728k.

18. Taxation

The QFCC is a state body as defined under the *Income Tax Assessment Act 1936* and is exempt from Commonwealth taxation with the exception of Fringe Benefits Tax (FBT) and Goods and Services Tax (GST). FBT and GST are the only Commonwealth taxes accounted for by the QFCC. GST credits receivable from, and GST payable to, the ATO are recognised under Note 7 - Receivables.

19. Insurance

The QFCC's non-current physical assets and other risks are insured through the Queensland Government Insurance Fund with premiums being paid on a risk assessment basis. In addition, the QFCC pays premiums to WorkCover Queensland in respect of its obligations for employee compensation.

20. Accounting Estimates and Judgements

The preparation of financial statements necessarily requires the determination and use of certain critical accounting estimates, assumptions, and management judgements that have the potential to cause a material adjustment to the carrying amounts of assets and liabilities within the next financial year. Such estimates, judgements and underlying assumptions are reviewed on an ongoing basis. Revisions to accounting estimates are recognised in the period in which the estimate is revised and in future periods as relevant.

The QFCC has not recognised any balances that could potentially have a significant effect on these financial statements.

Queensland Family and Child Commission

NOTES TO AND FORMING PART OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2020-21

21. First Year Application of New Accounting Standards or Change in Accounting Policy

Accounting standards applied for the first time

One new accounting standard with material impact were applied for the first time in 2020-21:

- AASB 1059 *Service Concession Arrangements: Grantors*

The effect of adopting this new standard is detailed below. No other accounting standards or interpretations that apply to the QFCC for the first time in 2020-21 have any material impact on the financial statements.

Accounting Standards Early Adopted

No Australian Accounting Standards have been early adopted for 2020-21.

AASB 1059 Service Concession Arrangements: Grantors

AASB 1059 applies to grantors in service concession arrangements, which involve an operator:

- a) providing public services related to a service concession asset on behalf of a grantor; and
- b) managing at least some of those services under its own discretion, rather than at the direction of the grantor.

In addition, the grantor must control the asset, which is demonstrated by:

- a) controlling or regulating
 - what services the operator must provide with the asset,
 - to whom it must provide them, and
 - at what price; and
- b) controlling any significant residual interest in the asset at the end of the term of the arrangement.

The QFCC has considered the impact of applying AASB 1059 *Service Concession Arrangements: Grantors* and determined that as the QFCC does not provide any public services relating to a concession asset under service concession arrangements, AASB 1059 will have no material impact on the QFCC.

22. Climate Risk Disclosures

The QFCC has not identified any material climate related risks relevant to the financial report at reporting date, however constantly monitors the emergence of such risks under the Queensland Government's Climate Transition Strategy.

**Queensland Family and Child Commission
Management Certificate
for the year ended 30 June 2021**

These general purpose financial statements have been prepared pursuant to s.62(1) of the *Financial Accountability Act 2009* (the Act), s.39 of the *Financial and Performance Management Standard 2019* and other prescribed requirements. In accordance with s.62(1)(b) of the Act we certify that in our opinion:

- (i) the prescribed requirements for establishing and keeping the accounts have been complied with in all material respects; and
- (ii) the financial statements have been drawn up to present a true and fair view, in accordance with prescribed accounting standards, of the transactions of the Queensland Family and Child Commission for the financial year ended 30 June 2021 and of the financial position of the office at the end of that year.

We acknowledge responsibility under s.7 and s.11 of the *Financial and Performance Management Standard 2019* for the establishment and maintenance, in all material respects, of an appropriate and effective system of internal controls and risk management processes with respect to financial reporting throughout the reporting period.



.....
Cheryl Vardon
Chief Executive Officer & Principal
Commissioner
Queensland Family and Child Commission

Date: 18/8/2021



.....
Tony King
Acting Executive Director Corporate &
Communications
Queensland Family and Child Commission

Date: 18/8/2021

INDEPENDENT AUDITOR'S REPORT

To the Principal Commissioner of the Queensland Family and Child Commission

Report on the audit of the financial report

Opinion

I have audited the accompanying financial report of the Queensland Family and Child Commission.

In my opinion, the financial report:

- a) gives a true and fair view of the entity's financial position as at 30 June 2021, and its financial performance and cash flows for the year then ended
- b) complies with the *Financial Accountability Act 2009*, the Financial and Performance Management Standard 2019 and Australian Accounting Standards.

The financial report comprises the statement of financial position as at 30 June 2021, the statement of comprehensive income, statement of changes in equity and statement of cash flows for the year then ended, notes to the financial statements including summaries of significant accounting policies and other explanatory information, and the management certificate.

Basis for opinion

I conducted my audit in accordance with the *Auditor-General Auditing Standards*, which incorporate the Australian Auditing Standards. My responsibilities under those standards are further described in the *Auditor's Responsibilities for the Audit of the Financial Report* section of my report.

I am independent of the entity in accordance with the ethical requirements of the Accounting Professional and Ethical Standards Board's APES 110 *Code of Ethics for Professional Accountants* (the Code) that are relevant to my audit of the financial report in Australia. I have also fulfilled my other ethical responsibilities in accordance with the Code and the *Auditor-General Auditing Standards*.

I believe that the audit evidence I have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for my opinion.

Responsibilities of the entity for the financial report

The Principal Commissioner is responsible for the preparation of the financial report that gives a true and fair view in accordance with the *Financial Accountability Act 2009*, the Financial and Performance Management Standard 2019 and Australian Accounting Standards, and for such internal control as the Principal Commissioner determines is necessary to enable the preparation of the financial report that is free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

The Principal Commissioner is also responsible for assessing the entity's ability to continue as a going concern, disclosing, as applicable, matters relating to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting unless it is intended to abolish the entity or to otherwise cease operations.

Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial report

My objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial report as a whole is free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an auditor's report that includes my opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance, but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with the Australian Auditing Standards will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of this financial report.

As part of an audit in accordance with the Australian Auditing Standards, I exercise professional judgement and maintain professional scepticism throughout the audit. I also:

- Identify and assess the risks of material misstatement of the financial report, whether due to fraud or error, design and perform audit procedures responsive to those risks, and obtain audit evidence that is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for my opinion. The risk of not detecting a material misstatement resulting from fraud is higher than for one resulting from error, as fraud may involve collusion, forgery, intentional omissions, misrepresentations, or the override of internal control.
- Obtain an understanding of internal control relevant to the audit in order to design audit procedures that are appropriate in the circumstances. This is not done for the purpose of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of the entity's internal controls, but allows me to express an opinion on compliance with prescribed requirements.
- Evaluate the appropriateness of accounting policies used and the reasonableness of accounting estimates and related disclosures made by the entity.
- Conclude on the appropriateness of the entity's use of the going concern basis of accounting and, based on the audit evidence obtained, whether a material uncertainty exists related to events or conditions that may cast significant doubt on the entity's ability to continue as a going concern. If I conclude that a material uncertainty exists, I am required to draw attention in my auditor's report to the related disclosures in the financial report or, if such disclosures are inadequate, to modify my opinion. I base my conclusions on the audit evidence obtained up to the date of my auditor's report. However, future events or conditions may cause the entity to cease to continue as a going concern.
- Evaluate the overall presentation, structure and content of the financial report, including the disclosures, and whether the financial report represents the underlying transactions and events in a manner that achieves fair presentation.

I communicate with the Accountable Officer regarding, among other matters, the planned scope and timing of the audit and significant audit findings, including any significant deficiencies in internal control that I identify during my audit.


Report on other legal and regulatory requirements

In accordance with s.40 of the *Auditor-General Act 2009*, for the year ended 30 June 2021:

- a) I received all the information and explanations I required.
- b) I consider that, the prescribed requirements in relation to the establishment and keeping of accounts were complied with in all material respects.

Prescribed requirements scope

The prescribed requirements for the establishment and keeping of accounts are contained in the *Financial Accountability Act 2009*, any other Act and the Financial and Performance Management Standard 2019. The applicable requirements include those for keeping financial records that correctly record and explain the entity's transactions and account balances to enable the preparation of a true and fair financial report.



Philip Airey
as delegate of the Auditor-General

18 August 2021

Queensland Audit Office
Brisbane

Appendix D

Performance of the Queensland child protection system

In accordance with Section 40 of the *Queensland Family and Child Commission Act 2014*¹ (the Act) the Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC) includes the following information in its annual report:

- Queensland's performance in relation to achieving state and national goals relating to the child protection system [(s. 40)(1)(a)(i)]
- Queensland's performance over time in comparison to other jurisdictions [(s. 40)(1)(a)(ii)]
- Queensland's progress in reducing the number of, and improving the outcomes for, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in the child protection system [(s. 40)(1)(a)(iii)].

The Act defines the child protection system as:

... the system of services provided by relevant agencies to children and young people in need of protection or at risk of harm ... [including] preventative and support services to strengthen and support families and prevent harm to children and young people.

Using this broad definition, this report discusses system performance from the point of prevention and early intervention through to protective intervention with children who are at risk or have been subjected to significant harm.

In previous years, we have reported against **state goals** aligned to the seven strategic directions of *Supporting Families Changing Futures*² (Queensland's child protection reform program), with a focus on the status of the implementation of the 121 recommendations of the Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry (the Inquiry)³ and on describing key reform activities.

All recommendations from the Inquiry have been implemented and Queensland is now in the consolidation phase of the reform program. As a result, this year's reporting differs from previous years. Reporting against state goals aligns with the three areas of focus of the reform program. (Section D.1)

In terms of **national goals**, we have previously reported against the priority areas of the action plans of the *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–2020* (the National Framework).⁴

The successor plan for the National Framework is currently being developed, and the implementation period for the fourth action plan was extended to 30 June 2021. We have therefore reported against selected indicators of the fourth action plan's priority areas. (Section D.2)

To **compare Queensland's progress against that of other jurisdictions**, we have reported against the supporting outcomes of the National Framework, as we have in previous years. (Section D.3)

We have continued to report on **strategies to reduce the number of, and improve the outcomes for, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people** in the child protection system. (Section D.4)

For this report, we identified performance measures by scanning agencies' reports and datasets and by consulting with agencies to determine the suitability, availability and limitations of the data. The most current data available to the QFCC has been used.

While there is no shortage of data collected about the Queensland child protection system, it does not tell us how the system has affected children and young people—for example, if they were kept safe, if their basic needs were met, if their health, wellbeing and education were affected or if they were reunited with their families. It also does not tell us what children, young people and their families think about their experience in the system and the effect they think it had on them.

1 *Queensland Family and Child Commission Act 2014*, www.legislation.qld.gov.au/view/pdf/inforce/2014-07-01/act-2014-027

2 Queensland Government 2019, *Supporting Families Changing Futures 2019–2023*, www.cyjma.qld.gov.au/campaign/supporting-families/background/supporting-families-changing-futures-2019-2023

3 Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry 2013, *Taking responsibility: A roadmap for Queensland child protection*, www.childprotectioninquiry.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0017/202625/qccpi-final-report-web-version.pdf

4 Department of Social Services 2009, *Protecting Children is Everyone's Business: National Framework for Protecting Australia's children 2009–2020*, www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/child_protection_framework.pdf

This has limited our ability to report on the outcomes (rather than just outputs) of the system. More performance data is needed, including:

- measures of system performance from the perspective of children, young people and families
- measures of outcomes resulting from children, young people and families' engagement with the child protection system
- data to regularly monitor the pathways of children, young people and families through the family support (or secondary) and statutory (or tertiary)⁵ systems.

D.1 Measuring Queensland's progress towards state goals

Queensland's child protection reform program began in 2014, in response to the Inquiry's recommendations for strengthening the child protection system.

In 2019, the QFCC published an Implementation Evaluation, which assessed the first three years of implementation of the reform program at a system level. Later in 2021, we will publish the findings of our Outcomes Evaluation, which has assessed progress towards outcomes over the first five years.

Queensland is in the consolidation period of the 10-year reforms, so our reporting against state goals has shifted towards the three areas of focus of the reform program:

- reducing the number of children and young people in the child protection system (Section D.1-1)
- revitalising child protection frontline services and family support (Section D.1-2)
- refocusing oversight on learning, improving and taking responsibility (Section D.1-3).

D.1-1 Reducing the number of children and young people in the child protection system

The Inquiry found that the child protection system was experiencing unsustainable demand. In this report, we have chosen to focus on two indicators of demand:

- the number of reports to the Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs (the department) that did not reach the threshold for a statutory response (which are recorded as child concern reports)
- the number of children entering out-of-home care.

Child concern reports

A child concern report is recorded when the information received does not meet the threshold for a notification.⁶ Instead, a child safety officer may respond by:

- providing information and advice to the person reporting the concern
- making a referral to another agency
- providing any relevant information to the police if there is a possible criminal offence.⁷

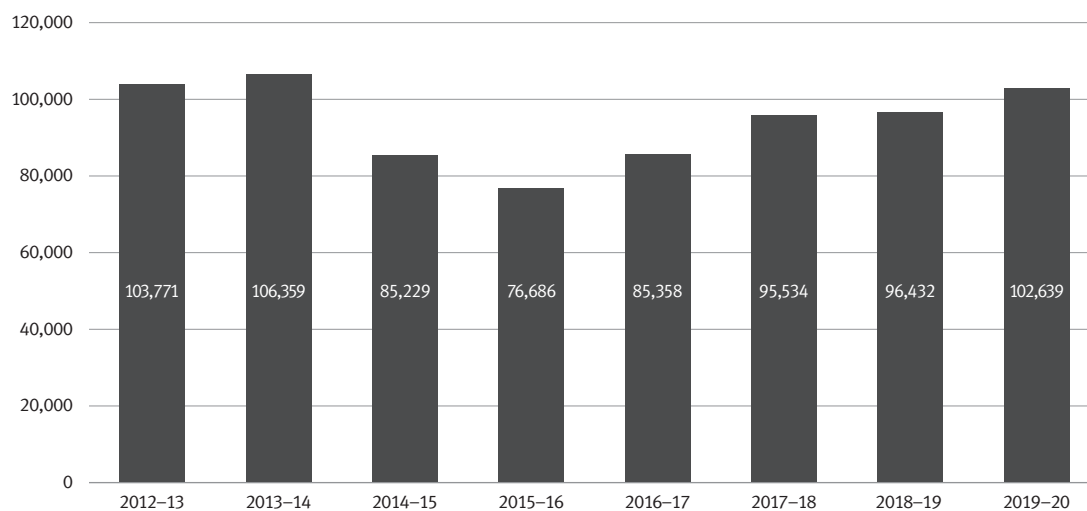
5 The statutory system refers to all services provided by the Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs for children and young people who are suspected of being abused, neglected or harmed and whose parents are unable to provide adequate care or protection. The term statutory is also used to refer to actions or decisions involving the department.

6 A notification is recorded when child protection receives information that suggests a child may be in need of protection. Children and young people in need of protection are those who have suffered significant harm, are suffering significant harm, or are at unacceptable risk of suffering significant harm and do not have a parent able and willing to protect them from the harm. When a notification is recorded, the department must investigate and assess the concerns. www.cyjma.qld.gov.au/about-us/performance-evaluations/our-performance/intake-phase/notifications

7 Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs 2021, *Child concern reports*, www.cyjma.qld.gov.au/about-us/performance-evaluations/our-performance/intake-phase/child-concern-reports

Figure D1 shows the number of child concern reports received by the department each year between 2012–13 and 2019–20. There was an initial sharp decrease between 2013–14 and 2015–16, largely driven by a reduction in reports by police (from 41,081 reports in 2012–13 to 5,905 reports in 2015–16).⁸ Since then, the number of child concern reports has been steadily increasing.

Figure D1: Number of child concern reports received by the department between 2012–13 and 2019–20



Source: Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs, 2021⁹

Family and Child Connect services are community-based. They help families to care for their children at home by connecting them to the right services at the right time.¹⁰ They are available in 17 locations across the state.

It was expected that establishing these services would provide an alternate pathway for people to report concerns about children, reducing the number of reports made to the department—particularly those assessed as being child concern reports.

The number of enquiries received by Family and Child Connect has increased each year as services have been progressively rolled out.

In 2020, Family and Child Connect received 33,775 enquiries, with about 1 in 6 of these (16 per cent) being self-referrals by parents. However, more than one third (34.1 per cent) were from the department, suggesting it continues to receive reports that do not meet the threshold for notification.

Entries to out-of-home care

The Inquiry identified that families experiencing vulnerability were not getting the assistance they needed to stop children entering the statutory system. It recommended significant investment to increase families’ access to preventative and early intervention services while decreasing pressure on the statutory child protection system.

In response, Intensive Family Support and Family Wellbeing Services were established across the state. Intensive Family Support services provide support to parents and carers of children who are experiencing vulnerability and are at risk of entering or re-entering the child protection system. Family Wellbeing Services are designed to provide culturally responsive services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. These are delivered by local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations.

⁸ In January 2015, the Queensland Police Service revoked its administrative policy that required police to make a report to the department when a child resided in a home where a domestic violence incident had occurred.

⁹ *Child concern reports—Table CCR.1*, www.cyjma.qld.gov.au/about-us/performance-evaluations/our-performance/intake-phase/child-concern-reports

¹⁰ Queensland Government 2021, *Family and Child Connect*, www.qld.gov.au/community/caring-child/family-child-connect

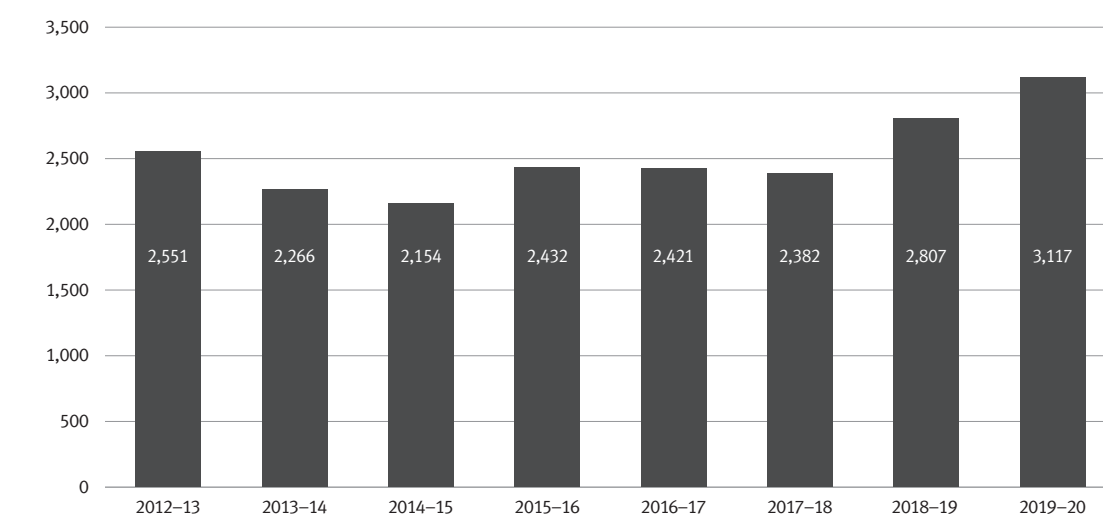
Expected benefits of these services were:

- highly vulnerable families receiving culturally safe and responsive support early and being able to safely care for and protect their children and young people at home
- fewer reports to the department
- a reduction in the number of children and young people entering out-of-home care.

A child or young person is placed in out-of-home care when it is assessed that they are unable to remain safely in the care of their family.¹¹

Figure D2 shows the number of children entering out-of-home care in Queensland each year. The number of children entering care has remained fairly steady between 2012–13 and 2017–18, with an average of 2,368 children entering per year over this period. However, the 2018–19 and 2019–20 financial years have higher numbers of children entering than in the other years, which may suggest an increasing trend.

Figure D2: Number of children entering out-of-home care between 2012–13 and 2019–20



Source: Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs, 2021¹²

Overall, the data suggests demand for the statutory system remains high and the anticipated reduction in children and young people in the system has not yet been achieved.

However, it is possible that a greater increase in child concern reports and entries to out-of-home care could have occurred if support services had not been established at the beginning of the reform period.

¹¹ Queensland Government 2021, *Child safety practice manual*, <https://cspm.csyw.qld.gov.au/procedures/support-a-child-in-care>

¹² *Child concern reports—Table CCR.1*, www.cyjma.qld.gov.au/about-us/performance-evaluations/our-performance/intake-phase/child-concern-reports

D.1-2 Revitalising child protection frontline services and family support

The Inquiry argued that the successful implementation of its recommendations would be contingent on the capacity of the frontline child protection workforce to deliver services to children, young people and their families.

This is consistent with current literature, that recognises the outcomes of children, young people and their families engaged with the child protection system are influenced by the frontline child protection workforce—the people who deal with them.¹³

To report on progress against this goal, we have examined Queensland's:

- investment in the frontline child protection and family support workforce
- actions to strengthen practice
- future workforce challenges.

Investment in the frontline workforce

The Queensland Government reports that since 2015, it has funded 450 additional frontline child protection staff for the provision of child protection statutory services.¹⁴

Despite this investment, stakeholders have told us that the workloads of frontline staff in the department have increased due to:

- increased demand on the system
- interaction with other systems, such as the National Disability Insurance Scheme
- other reform changes, such as to court processes
- the increasing complexity of the challenges faced by the families they work with
- recruitment and retention challenges, particularly in regional and remote areas. This includes the loss of experienced frontline staff to other areas of the department or sector, meaning these roles are filled by graduates and new staff with less experience.

As of 31 December 2020, the average caseload for child safety officers was 18.2 cases.¹⁵ Although this is a reduction from the average caseload of 21 prior to the reforms, it has not yet decreased to the caseload of 15 recommended by the Inquiry.

The department funds secondary services across Queensland to deliver services to those children, young people and their families who experience vulnerability. These services include the Family and Child Connect, Intensive Family Support services and Family Wellbeing Services previously discussed. The Queensland Government has funded approximately 5,400 positions within the non-government organisations that provide these secondary services.¹⁶

Kinship carers and foster carers are also important parts of the frontline child protection workforce in Queensland, providing care to children and young people who are removed from the care of their parents. Further details about carer families in Queensland are included in Section D.2-3.

13 DePanfilis, D & Zlotnik, J 2008, 'Retention of front-line staff in child welfare: A systematic review of research', *Children and Youth Services Review*, 30(9), pp. 995–1008; Strolin-Goltzman, J, Kollar, S & Trinkle, J 2010, 'Listening to the Voices of Children in Foster Care: Youths Speak Out about Child Welfare Workforce Turnover and Selection', *Social Work*, 55(1), pp. 47–53; Strolin-Goltzman, J, Auerbach, C, McGowan, B & McCarthy, M 2007, 'The relationship between organizational characteristics and workforce turnover among rural, urban and suburban public child welfare systems', *Administration in Social Work*, 31(1), pp. 77–91; Harris, T 2018, *Developing Leadership Excellence: A Practice Guide for the New Professional Supervisor*, Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

14 Minister for Child Safety, Youth and Women and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence, Di Farmer 2019, Extra child safety staff announced in State Budget—Media Statement, statements.qld.gov.au/statements/87596

15 Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs 2020, *Media handout: 31 December 2020 Child and Family performance statistics*, www.cyjma.qld.gov.au/resources/dcsyw/child-family/performance/our-perf-media-handout.pdf

16 Minister for Child Safety, Youth and Women and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence, Di Farmer 2019, Extra child safety staff announced in State Budget—Media Statement, statements.qld.gov.au/statements/87596

Strengthening practice

An objective of the Inquiry was to improve child protection practice and develop a skilled professional workforce. In response to this, Queensland developed the *Strengthening families protecting children framework for practice* (the framework).¹⁷

The framework was implemented between 2015 and 2019. During this time, a total of 3,400 government and non-government staff from across Queensland were trained. This built a shared understanding of the framework's foundational elements across the child protection sector and assisted staff to use new practice tools in their work.

Future workforce challenges

In 2020–21, the QFCC published the *Child and family support sector workforce environmental scan*.¹⁸ The scan detailed the current state of the child and family workforce and identified the challenges and opportunities in building a strong and sustainable workforce into the future. The report stresses that the size and capability of the workforce is required to grow to meet increasing demand.

The environmental scan describes workforce demand projections to 2030. Demand for services will continue to increase, but at differing rates for different service types along the continuum of care.¹⁹

Demand for community services and early intervention services are estimated to grow around one per cent, child protection services two per cent, out-of-home care services three per cent, youth justice services between three and five per cent, and services for children and families with multiple and complex needs between three and six per cent.

D.1-3 Refocusing oversight on learning, improving and taking responsibility

The Inquiry identified that aspects of the culture of the child protection and family support sector were inadequate and that oversight and evaluation tended to focus on fault and punishment rather than on opportunities for learning.

The Inquiry identified that to achieve success, there must be shared leadership across both the government and non-government sector and collaboration and a positive culture must be promoted. A principle of the Inquiry was that each department providing human services must take responsibility for outcomes for children and young people.

To examine the extent to which there is shared responsibility, we have focused on reform governance arrangements, drawing on:

- findings from a Queensland Audit Office audit of how effectively Queensland public sector entities work together for the safety and wellbeing of children
- frontline workforce perceptions of reform governance arrangements.

Reform governance arrangements

Following recommendations from the Inquiry, reform governance arrangements were established in Queensland to support information sharing and sharing of responsibility. They included:

- an Interdepartmental Committee providing central governance. Initially, this committee was designed to strategically lead government policy direction on child protection reforms. Later, responsibility for youth justice and domestic and family violence reforms were added. Its core membership included chief executive-level representatives from 14 Queensland Government departments and statutory bodies with child protection responsibilities

17 Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services 2015, *Strengthening families Protecting children—Framework for practice foundational elements*, www.communities.qld.gov.au/resources/childsafety/practice-manual/framework-pr-elements.pdf; Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services 2015, *Strengthening families Protecting children—Framework for practice: Practice tools and processes*, www.communities.qld.gov.au/resources/childsafety/practice-manual/framework-pr-tools.pdf

18 Queensland Family and Child Commission 2020, *Understanding our sector*, www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/supporting-our-sector/understanding-our-workforce/understanding-our-sector

19 Continuum of care refers to the continuum of services that act to uphold the rights of children, young people and their families who experience vulnerability in Queensland. This includes a range of services delivered across several systems including the education, health, disability, domestic and family violence, youth justice, housing and community service systems. Children, young people and their families move between different parts of the continuum based on the support they require, and people may access services from different parts of the continuum at the same time.

- regional governance, which is led by 13 Regional Child, Youth and Family Committees, including representatives from government and non-government organisations. These regional governance arrangements facilitate strong collaboration and coordination of regional priorities for implementing Queensland's child protection and family support reform program, in line with state-wide directions from the Interdepartmental Committee
- Local Level Alliances, that are responsible for coordinating local support services to effectively respond to local needs and issues. Each alliance includes representatives from government and non-government organisations who work with vulnerable families and children.

In addition, the department is midway through a four-year program of work—*Unify*—which involves updating existing client management systems.²⁰ It is intended that *Unify* will improve information sharing and collaboration across government, social services and justice sectors, while engaging with young people, families, carers and services.

Queensland Audit Office findings²¹

The Queensland Audit Office found the Interdepartmental Committee could take a greater role in providing leadership to, and governance of, the child protection and family support system.

It also found that while Regional Child, Youth and Family Committees have enabled collaboration and information sharing, their meetings lacked direction, were no longer action-oriented and had a high level of attendance by proxies who lacked the authority to support decision-making.

The report concluded that the Interdepartmental Committee needed to provide greater direction to regional committees to ensure risk was collectively managed.

The Interdepartmental Committee was discontinued following a final meeting in June 2021, as all Inquiry recommendations were considered closed. It is unclear at this time how the Queensland Audit Office's recommendation will be progressed, given the ongoing need for strategic leadership.

Frontline workforce perceptions

The QFCC's annual survey of frontline child protection and family support workers found there is a system-wide commitment to working together.

Consistent with the 2020 survey results, and as shown in Table D1, the majority of our survey respondents in 2021 agreed that their workplace supports collaboration with other organisations and that where appropriate, information sharing occurs regularly between their organisation and others.

Table D1: *Frontline workers' perceptions of collaboration and information sharing—2021 (n=757)*

Statement	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Information sharing between my organisation and other organisations supports better responses for children, young people and families	84%	11%	5%
My workplace has a culture that supports collaboration with other organisations to achieve client outcomes	85%	9%	6%
Where appropriate, information sharing occurs regularly between my organisation and other organisations	70%	16%	15%

n=number of respondents

Source: Queensland Family and Child Commission, 2021²²

20 Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs 2021, *Unify*, www.cyjma.qld.gov.au/resources/campaign/supporting-families/unify-fact-sheet.pdf

21 Queensland Audit Office 2021, *Family support and child protection system (Report 1 2020–21)*, www.qao.qld.gov.au/reports-resources/reports-parliament/family-support-child-protection-system

22 *Workforce survey 2021: Research report*. Not yet published.

The survey also sought perspectives on system performance. Table D2 shows that, after significant increases in agreement with system performance statements in the 2020 survey, agreement with these statements in 2021 significantly decreased to below 2019 levels.

Across all survey years, we have found that respondents' perceptions of system performance are more negative than the perceptions of the performance of their organisations.

Table D2: *Frontline workers' perceptions of system performance—2019–2021*

Statement	2019 (n=268)	2020 (n=755)	2021 (n=760)
The system is built on shared connections and commitment	33%	42% ↑	29% ↓
The system efficiently and effectively uses its resources to achieve outcomes	23%	30% ↑	14% ↓
The system meets the needs of children, young people and families	19%	26% ↑	12% ↓
The system achieves return on investment	13%	21% ↑	4% ↓

↑ ↓ indicates a significant increase or decrease from the previous year
Source: Queensland Family and Child Commission, 2021²³

D.1-4 Measuring what matters

Assessment of the performance of the Queensland child protection system must be informed by the perspectives and experiences of children and young people.

Through our *Strategic Plan 2021–25 Bringing children's rights to life*,²⁴ the QFCC will lead the development of a comprehensive children's rights agenda to give practical effect to the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child*²⁵ for all children and young people growing up in Queensland.

Article 12 of the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* establishes the rights of children to be involved in decisions that affect them.²⁶

Our position is that the right of a child to participate in decisions that affect them is not limited to decisions about their individual circumstances. It includes empowering them to influence decisions at the system level and outcomes for other children and young people, so they can shape the system that has been built to promote their safety and wellbeing.

In 2021, the QFCC started working with young people with experience and/or understanding of the Queensland child protection system on the *Rights, Voices, Stories* project. The aim of the project is that children and young people are listened to, particularly in terms of their rights not being upheld and the stories that are important to them. We intend to use these insights to advocate for system change.

Young people will collect data from children and young people about their perspectives and experiences of the Queensland child protection system. In future, we will report on these perspectives to provide a better understanding of the performance of the system.

²³ *Workforce survey 2021: Research report*. Not yet published.

²⁴ Queensland Family and Child Commission 2021, *Bringing children's rights to life—strategic plan 2021–25*, www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-06/QFCC%20Strategic%20Plan%202021-25.pdf

²⁵ UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, 20 November 1989, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 1577, p. 3, www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx

²⁶ United Nations 1990, *Convention on the rights of the child*, www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx

D.2 Queensland's performance towards achieving national goals

The *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–2020* (National Framework) outlines goals for Australia's child protection systems. The overarching goal is that Australia's children and young people are safe and well.

The National Framework has had four action plans outlining goals for Australia's child protection systems and a set of child protection indicators,²⁷ which have been reported on annually.²⁸ The fourth action plan (2018–2020)²⁹ was endorsed by federal, state and territory ministers in December 2018.

A successor plan to the National Framework is currently in development and due to be released later in 2021, subject to approval by community services ministers around Australia. As an interim arrangement, the period for implementing the fourth action plan was extended to 30 June 2021.

To report on Queensland's performance towards achieving national goals, we have selected indicators relevant to assessing progress in the fourth action plan's priority areas. We have selected indicators of progress towards action plan objectives rather than individual actions, as outlined in Table D3.

It is acknowledged that some of these indicators have limitations—for example, none report on outcomes from the perspective of the child or young person. They do, however, represent the most relevant and recent data available.

Table D3: Indicators of progress towards fourth action plan priority areas selected for this report

Priority area	Indicator/s
1. Improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children at risk of entering, or in contact with, child protection systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over-representation rates for child concern reports • Over-representation rates for entries to care
2. Improving prevention and early intervention through joint service planning and investment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investment in services • Number of referrals to family support services • Frontline workforce perceptions of the impact of services
3. Improving outcomes for children in out-of-home care by enhancing placement stability through reunification and other permanent care options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of children and young people subject to a child protection order³⁰ granting long-term guardianship to a relative or other suitable person • Number of carer families commencing and ceasing • Learning and development for carer families
4. Improving organisations' and governments' ability to keep children and young people safe from abuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frontline workforce perceptions of child safe organisations • Examples of child safe organisation principles in practice

27 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2020, *National framework for protecting Australia's children indicators*, www.aihw.gov.au/reports/child-protection/nfpac/contents/national-framework-indicators

28 Section D.3 examines Queensland's performance over time compared with other jurisdictions on some of these indicators.

29 Department of Social Services 2018, *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children—Fourth Action Plan 2018–2020*, www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/01_2019/dss-fourth-action-plan-v6-web-final.pdf

30 A child protection order is an order made by the Childrens Court under the *Child Protection Act 1999*, when a child is assessed to be in need of protection.

D.2-1 Priority area 1: Improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children at risk of entering, or in contact with, child protection systems

The majority of Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are safe and well and cared for by their parents and family. However, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children continue to be over-represented in the Queensland child protection system.

This action plan priority area has two objectives:

- Uphold the five elements of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (prevention, partnership, placement, participation and connection) to recognise the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to be raised in their own culture and the importance and value of their family, extended family, kinship networks, culture and community.
- Acknowledge and support the important role Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander managed services have in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families at risk of entering, or in, child protection systems.

Queensland's *Our Way* generational strategy (2017–2037) was launched in 2017 to respond to the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families within the child protection and family support systems.³¹ Its vision is that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in Queensland grow up safe and cared for in family, community and culture.

The strategy aims to improve life opportunities for Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families by addressing factors of inequity and access that contribute to over-representation. These include individual and collective experiences of trauma, racism, socioeconomic disadvantage, family violence, drugs and alcohol, mental health issues and lack of access to housing.³²

In this section, we present data on the level of over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in child concern reports and entries to out-of-home care over time. Data examining other important outcomes will be presented in later sections of this report, including:

- placement with Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander relatives or extended family members, and consideration of other elements of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (Section D.3-5)
- over-representation in out-of-home care (Section D.4-1)
- entries to and exits from out-of-home care (Section D.4-2).

There is evidence of continued over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples throughout the Queensland child protection and family support system. The data shows that over-representation increases the further children and young people travel through the system.³³

This means that it is lowest at the level of child concern reports (Table D4) and highest at the point of entry to out-of-home care (Table D5).

Child concern reports

Table D4 (*see page 90*) compares the rate of child concern reports per 1,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to the rate for non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. It shows that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are about three times more likely than non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to be the subject of a child concern report. This level of over-representation has remained steady over time.

³¹ Queensland Government 2017, *Our Way: A generational strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families 2017–2037*, www.dsdsatsip.qld.gov.au/resources/campaign/supporting-families/our-way.pdf

³² Family Matters 2020, *The Family Matters report 2020*, www.familymatters.org.au/the-family-matters-report-2020/

³³ Over-representation ratios have been calculated by first calculating the rate of child concern reports (and entry to out-of-home care) per the number of children in the population (the estimated resident population as of 30 June the previous year). These were multiplied by 1,000 to report the rate of the event per thousand children. The rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were divided by the rates for non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to calculate over-representation ratios.

Table D4: *The rate of child concern reports per 1,000 children and over-representation ratios between 2012–13 and 2019–20*

Year	Child concern report rate per 1,000 children		Over-representation ratio
	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	Non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	
2012–13	158.0	51.7	3.1
2013–14	161.2	52.5	3.1
2014–15	138.0	42.9	3.2
2015–16	116.8	38.9	3.0
2016–17	133.0	41.2	3.2
2017–18	145.2	44.3	3.3
2018–19	137.7	45.1	3.1
2019–20	152.0	46.1	3.3

Source: Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs, 2021³⁴

Entries to out-of-home care

Table D5 compares the rate of children entering out-of-home care per 1,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to the rate for non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. It shows that the level of over-representation is increasing over time.

In 2019–20, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were 9.1 times more likely to enter out-of-home care than non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Table D5: *The rate of children entering out-of-home care per 1,000 children and over-representation ratios between 2012–13 and 2019–20*

Year	Entry to out-of-home care as a rate per 1,000 children		Over-representation ratio
	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	Non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	
2012–13	11.5	1.5	7.7
2013–14	10.1	1.3	7.8
2014–15	9.5	1.2	7.9
2015–16	10.6	1.4	7.6
2016–17	10.9	1.3	8.4
2017–18	10.0	1.4	7.1
2018–19	12.7	1.5	8.5
2019–20	14.6	1.6	9.1

Source: Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs, 2021³⁵

The data suggests that Queensland is yet to see the desired reduction in over-representation. It is important to note, however, that many contributing factors to over-representation need to be addressed by long-term, generational strategies, such as *Our Way*, and that long-term strategies need time to effect meaningful change.

³⁴ *Child concern reports*. Unpublished data.

³⁵ *Entries to out-of-home care*. Unpublished data.

D.2-2 Priority area 2: Improving prevention and early intervention through joint service planning and investment

Reducing the number of children and young people in the child protection system through increased investment in the early intervention (secondary) service system is a priority area of the fourth action plan, and it has also been a key reform priority for Queensland.

This action plan priority area has three objectives:

- Children grow up in thriving families and communities and develop into healthy, connected, nurturing and productive adults and parents.
- Young people are supported in making the transition from out-of-home care into adulthood.
- Best practice knowledge is developed on addressing the drivers of entry into child protection systems.

Significant investment has been made in Queensland in recent years to provide families with access to a range of services when they need support.

Given this focus, our reporting addresses progress against the first objective of this priority area: Children grow up in thriving families and communities. Starting in January 2015, a suite of 94 support services were established, including:

- 17 Family and Child Connect services
- 44 Intensive Family Support services
- 33 Family Wellbeing services.

Only limited data is available and reported on to demonstrate Queensland's performance in relation to this priority area. For the purposes of our reporting, our measures are:

- investment in services
- number of referrals to family support services
- frontline workforce perceptions of the impact of services.

Investment in child protection and family support services

The Australian Government Productivity Commission reports annually on government expenditure and provides a comparison of state spending on care services³⁶ and intensive family support services.³⁷ In Queensland (and in other Australian jurisdictions) most of the expenditure has consistently been on protective intervention³⁸ and care services, as opposed to preventive, early intervention services.

As shown in Table D6 (*see page 92*), in 2019–20, Queensland spent over \$751 million on care services and \$118 million on intensive family support services.³⁹

However, since the secondary services have been rolled out, the amount of funding for intensive family support services has increased at a greater rate than the amount of funding for care services. Between 2015–16 and 2019–20, there was a 69.5 per cent increase in funding for intensive family support services versus a 42.4 per cent increase for care services.

36 Care services include activities associated with providing out-of-home care and other supported placements—such as finding a suitable placement, assessing suitability of kinship carers and helping a child to maintain contact with their family.

37 Intensive family support services provide a range of services to families to improve family functioning and a range of skills to help parents care for their children rather than have them be brought into the child protection system. For Productivity Commission reporting on 'intensive family support' funding, Queensland includes expenditure on its intensive family support services, Assessment and Service Connect (a short-term support service for families involved in a child safety investigation and assessment process), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Wellbeing Services and Tertiary Family Support services (statutory ongoing interventions for children who are assessed as needing protection).

38 Services provided by protective intervention services include receiving and assessing allegations of abuse, neglect and harm and intervening to protect children.

39 Productivity Commission 2021, *Report on Government Services 2021: Child protection services—Table 16A.33 and Table 16A.36*, www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2021/community-services/child-protection

Table D6: Expenditure on care services and intensive family support services in Queensland between 2015–16 and 2019–20

Year	Expenditure on care services (\$'000)	Expenditure on intensive family support services (\$'000)
2015–16	527,474	69,640
2016–17	553,771	78,481
2017–18	631,872	101,316
2018–19	692,419	110,882
2019–20	751,125	118,007

Source: Productivity Commission, 2021⁴⁰

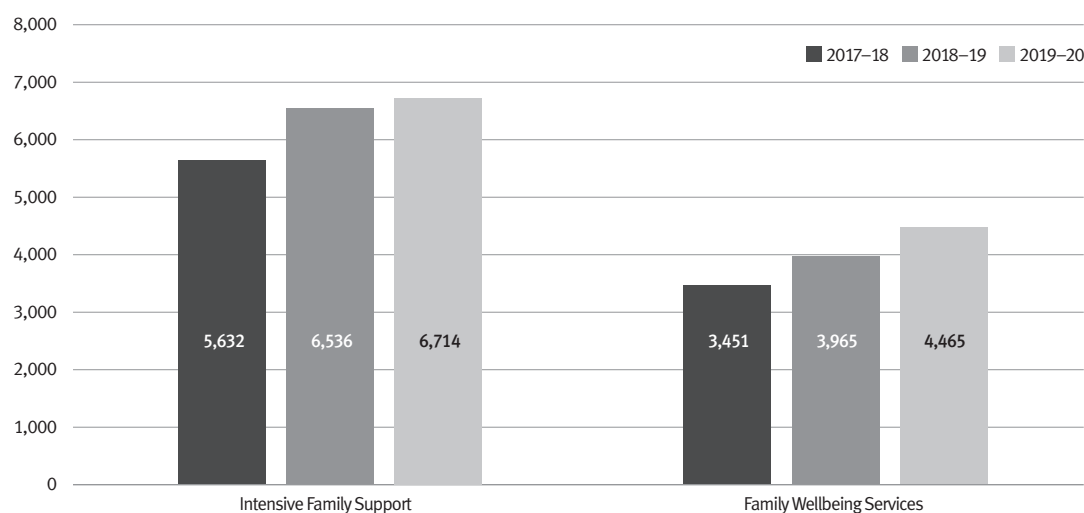
Number of enquiries/referrals to family support services

The number of enquiries/referrals to Family and Child Connect services continues to steadily increase. Since 2017–18 (when all the Family and Child Connect services were fully rolled out), there has been an increase from 30,303 enquiries to 33,745 enquiries in 2019–20 (an increase of 11.4 per cent).

As shown in Figure D3, Intensive Family Support services and Family Wellbeing Services also experienced increasing levels of demand between 2017–18 and 2019–20 as they were fully rolled out. There was a 19.2 per cent increase in referrals to Intensive Family Support services and a 29.4 per cent increase in referrals to Family Wellbeing Services.

It is good to see that early intervention service capacity is expanding. However, it will be important to ensure that service capacity is sufficient in future to meet the needs of all families seeking support.

Figure D3: Number of families referred to Intensive Family Support services and Family Wellbeing Services between 2017–18 and 2019–20



Source: Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs, 2020⁴¹

40 Report on Government Services 2021: Child protection services—Table 16A.33 and Table 16A.36, www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2021/community-services/child-protection

41 Families referred to an Intensive Family Support Service and families referred to a Family Wellbeing Service. Unpublished data.

Frontline workforce assessment of the impact of services

In 2020, the QFCC's annual survey of frontline child protection and family support workers measured perceptions of the impact of secondary support services.

Almost two-thirds of respondents (63 per cent) agreed that the introduction of Intensive Family Support services and Family Wellbeing Services had improved access to early intervention services. Around half agreed that these services had improved outcomes for children, young people and families (51 per cent) and improved families' ability to care for their children (49 per cent).

However, only about one-quarter of respondents (27 per cent) agreed that the introduction of these services had led to a reduction in demand on the statutory system.⁴²

Data challenges

The child protection and family support system is good at measuring inputs and outputs, but it finds it much harder to measure outcomes. As a result, limited data is available, which makes assessment of Queensland's performance challenging for this priority area.

This is particularly so when seeking to determine whether the introduction of family support services has improved outcomes for vulnerable families and reduced the demand on the statutory system, which were two of the main reasons for the government's investment in them.

There would be value in Queensland developing additional performance measures that:

- examine service performance from the perspective of children, young people and families
- include more data to monitor the pathways of children, young people and families through the family support service and child protection systems.

D.2-3 Priority area 3: Improving outcomes for children in out-of-home care by enhancing placement stability through reunification and other permanent care options

This priority acknowledges that when children and young people have stable, safe and secure placements, there is a higher likelihood of improved outcomes after they leave care.

This action plan priority area has three objectives:

- Permanency outcomes are publicly reported on with reliable data to support improved policy and decision-making.
- Children and young people in out-of-home care achieve safe and stable care, in a timely manner, that supports lifelong relationships, belonging, identity and connection that takes into account the views of the child.
- Enough skilled and supported carers are available to provide safe and stable placements for children and young people in out-of-home care.

Only limited data is available and reported on to demonstrate Queensland's performance in relation to this priority area. For the purposes of our reporting, we have selected measures relating to the second and third objectives, including:

- percentage of children and young people subject to a child protection order granting long-term guardianship to a relative or other suitable person
- number of carer families commencing and ceasing
- learning and development for carer families.

⁴² Queensland Family and Child Commission 2020, *Workforce Survey 2020*, www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-08/2020%20Workforce%20Survey%20report.PDF

Percentage of children and young people subject to a child protection order granting long-term guardianship to a relative or other suitable person

Long-term child protection orders continue until children turn 18. During this time, they may be under the guardianship of a relative or other suitable person, or the chief executive in an approved placement.⁴³

The number of children and young people subject to long-term child protection orders has increased by 40.3 per cent from 5,065 in 2012–13 to 7,104 in the 2020 calendar year. Over the same time period, the number of children and young people under the guardianship of a relative or other suitable person has similarly increased by 40.9 per cent from 1,184 in 2012–13 to 1,668 in the 2020 calendar year.

In the 2020 calendar year, 23.5 per cent of children and young people subject to long-term child protection orders were under the guardianship of a relative or other suitable person.⁴⁴

It is important that children and young people are supported in maintaining connections and relationships with family and other significant people in their lives. Stability of placement through guardianship by a relative or other suitable person can provide this.⁴⁵

Table D7 notes the number of children and young people subject to a child protection order granting long-term guardianship to a relative or other suitable person. It also shows this as a percentage of children and young people subject to long-term child protection orders in the same period.

It shows an increase in the percentage of children under the guardianship of a relative or other suitable person until 2016–17, then a steadily decreasing trend. It also shows that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are less likely to have this type of guardianship arrangement.

Table D7: Number (and percentage) of children and young people subject to a child protection order granting long-term guardianship to a relative or other suitable person by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status—2012–20

Year	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	Non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
2012–13	376 (19.9%)	808 (25.5%)
2013–14	466 (22.3%)	914 (27.8%)
2014–15	529 (23.3%)	997 (29.4%)
2015–16	574 (23.5%)	1,059 (30.4%)
2016–17	587 (23.2%)	1,047 (29.8%)
2017–18	578 (22.0%)	1,042 (29.6%)
2018–19	583 (20.9%)	1,013 (28.0%)
2019–20	617 (20.7%)	1,040 (27.2%)
12 months to 31 Dec 2020	612 (19.3%)	1,056 (26.8%)

Source: Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs, 2021⁴⁶

43 Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs 2021, *Legal permanency—long-term child protection orders*, www.cyjma.qld.gov.au/about-us/performance-evaluations/our-performance/ongoing-intervention-phase-permanency-planning/legal-permanency-long-term-child-protection-orders

44 Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs 2021, *Legal permanency—long-term child protection orders—Table LT.1 and Table LT.3*, www.cyjma.qld.gov.au/about-us/performance-evaluations/our-performance/ongoing-intervention-phase-permanency-planning/legal-permanency-long-term-child-protection-orders

45 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2016, *Permanency planning in child protection: A review of current concepts and available data 2016*, *Child welfare series* no. 64. Cat. no. CWS 58, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/child-protection/permanency-planning-in-child-protection-a-review-of-current-concepts-and-available-data-2016/contents/table-of-contents>; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2021, *Child protection Australia 2019–20*, *Child welfare series* no. 74. Cat. no. CWS 78, DOI <https://doi.org/10.25816/g208-rp81>

46 *Legal permanency—long-term child protection orders—Table LT.1 and Table LT.3*, www.cyjma.qld.gov.au/about-us/performance-evaluations/our-performance/ongoing-intervention-phase-permanency-planning/legal-permanency-long-term-child-protection-orders

Number of carer families commencing and ceasing

Children, young people and families are known to have better outcomes when their placements in out-of-home care remain stable—that is, when they have a consistent case manager and fewer placements across the period they are in the child protection system.⁴⁷

Having an ample pool of foster carer families and conducting early family mapping to source kinship carer families is important, as it ensures children and young people are matched with the most suitable carer families—which increases the likelihood of stable and safe placements.

The total number of carer families in the child protection system has slowly increased since 2012–13, as can be seen in Table D8. However, the percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carer families (between 15 and 17.5 per cent) is much lower than the percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care (43.3 per cent of all children in out-of-home care as of 31 December 2020).⁴⁸

Table D8: *Number of carer families—2012–2020*

Year	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carer families	Total number of carer families
2012–13	731 (15.5%)	4,728
2013–14	727 (15.0%)	4,833
2014–15	779 (15.5%)	5,012
2015–16	802 (15.5%)	5,186
2016–17	822 (15.8%)	5,192
2017–18	862 (16.4%)	5,241
2018–19	930 (17.4%)	5,345
2019–20	984 (17.5%)	5,611
12 months to 31 Dec 2020	1,014 (17.5%)	5,792

Source: Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs, 2021⁴⁹

Table D9 shows the number of carer families commencing for the first time and the number of carer family exits each year. As the number of children living in out-of-home care increases each year, it is important that the number of new carer families exceeds the number exiting.

Table D9: *Number of carer families commencing for the first time, and the number of carer family exits—2016–2020*

Year	Number of carer families commencing for the first time	Number of carer family exits
2015–16	1,427	1,300
2016–17	1,363	1,509
2017–18	1,241	1,353
2018–19	1,373	1,394
2019–20	1,645	1,567
12 months to 31 Dec 2020	1,655	1,615

Source: Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs, 2021⁵⁰

47 DePanfilis, D. & Zlotnik, J. 2008, 'Retention of front-line staff in child welfare: A systematic review of research', *Children and Youth Services Review*, 30(9), pp. 995–1008; Strolin-Goltzman, J., Kollar, S. & Trinkle, J. 2010, 'Listening to the Voices of Children in Foster Care: Youths Speak Out about Child Welfare Workforce Turnover and Selection', *Social Work*, 55(1), pp. 47–53.

48 Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs 2021, *Living away from home—Table OHC.1*, www.cyjma.qld.gov.au/about-us/performance-evaluations/our-performance/ongoing-intervention-phase/living-away-home

49 *Carer families—Table CF.1*, www.cyjma.qld.gov.au/about-us/performance-evaluations/our-performance/ongoing-intervention-phase/carer-families

50 *Carer families—Table CF.3 and Table CF.4*, www.cyjma.qld.gov.au/about-us/performance-evaluations/our-performance/ongoing-intervention-phase/carer-families

While this was the case in 2015–16, 2019–20 and the 2020 calendar year, it is an ongoing challenge. To address it, the department regularly partners with non-government organisations to promote the opportunity to make a positive difference in a child's life by becoming a foster carer family.

Stakeholders have told us that kinship carers typically do not stay in the system as carer families once they are no longer caring for their relative/s.

The QFCC has discussed these challenges with stakeholders.

Some stakeholders have expressed concern about the detrimental effects of unstable placements on children and young people, including on their success at school. They also noted that these effects become more pronounced for children and young people living in residential care⁵¹ settings.

There is consensus that more needs to be done to stabilise placements for children and young people who enter out-of-home care. Our stakeholders have also emphasised the importance of listening to and acting on the perspectives and views of children and young people when making placement decisions.

Learning and development for carer families

Queensland Foster and Kinship Care conducts a survey of kinship carers and foster carers in Queensland every two years, seeking their perspectives on their experience as carers. Table D10 shows their satisfaction with the relevance and amount of training provided to carers.

It shows that the percentage of survey respondents who are satisfied with the relevance of training and amount of training provided has decreased since 2016.⁵²

Table D10: Percentage of respondents satisfied with each aspect in relation to their experience of training, 2016–20

Statement	2016	2018	2020
Relevance of training	63%	61%	59%
Amount of training offered	72%	66%	62%

Source: Queensland Foster and Kinship Care, 2016, 2018 and 2020⁵³

Our stakeholders have told us that the professional development of kinship carers and foster carers should include awareness of the effects of trauma, as this would offer more opportunity to maintain placements. They recommend psychological supports for children and young people in out-of-home care and for carer families. Many felt that these supports would also be useful for children and young people and workers in residential care settings.

Data challenges

As noted earlier, the child protection and family support system provides many measures regarding inputs and outputs, but finds it challenging to measure outcomes. As a result, there is limited available data regarding this priority area.

There would be value in Queensland developing additional measures of:

- permanency outcomes for children and young people in out-of-home care
- timeliness and consistency of permanency decision-making
- the rate of reunification of children and young people with their families
- the perspectives of children and young people regarding their experience of out-of-home care, including having their views heard and acted on
- the impact of training and development on practice and on outcomes for children and young people.

51 Residential care is non-family-based accommodation and support services funded by the department to provide placement and support for children. These residential services provide daily care and support for children from a house parent or rostered residential care workers model.

52 We also examined survey responses from 2012 and 2014, but the questions were different in these earlier surveys. In 2012, 60 per cent of respondents were satisfied with the amount and type of ongoing training offered, compared with 2014, when 74 per cent of respondents were satisfied with the amount and type of ongoing training offered.

53 2016 Carer Survey Report; 2018 Carer Survey Report, www.qfkc.com.au/images/Reports/Foster_Kinship_Carers_Survey_2018_Executive_Summary.pdf; 2020 Carer Survey Report, www.qfkc.com.au/images/Reports/2021-01-12_Carer_Survey_2020_Report_Executive_Summary_FINAL_web.pdf

D.2-4 Priority area 4: Improving organisations' and governments' ability to keep children and young people safe from abuse

National Principles for Child Safe Organisations were developed under the third action plan of the National Framework. The fourth action plan considered promotion of these principles to be a priority, as well as being '... an integral component of the response to the *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse*.'⁵⁴

This action plan priority area has two objectives:

- Organisational cultures that foster child safety and wellbeing are embedded across organisations that engage with children and young people.
- Child protection agencies have adequate information to identify potential risks to children and better support children.

In this report, we have chosen to focus on the first objective by presenting the perspectives of frontline child protection and family support workers on child safe organisations.

The QFCC's annual survey of frontline child protection and family support workers asked a series of questions about child safe organisations in the 2021 survey. We found:

- about 8 in 10 survey respondents agreed (41 per cent agreed, 39 per cent strongly agreed) that their organisation is a child safe organisation (that is, it creates a culture, adopts strategies and takes action to promote child wellbeing and prevent harm to children and young people).
- respondents from non-government organisations (87 per cent) were more likely to agree than those working for government agencies (73 per cent).⁵⁵

The most common responses to an open question about examples of how their organisation demonstrates child safe principles were:

- having formal policies, strategies or models in place that reflect the principles (14 per cent), for example:
 - 'Child safety and wellbeing is part of our organisational policies and procedures, as well as part of our everyday culture.'
 - 'In policies and procedures, reflected in our values, we put children first.'
 - 'The company has a specific child safe organisation policy.'
- participating in child safety training (12 per cent), for example:
 - 'All staff have completed child safe training, and this is regularly spoken about in meetings.'
 - 'Staff have received training in child safe organisation principles and adhere to the guidelines.'
 - 'All staff receive annual training in relation to our Child Safe Child Friendly practice framework to ensure that all staff have a clear understanding of the workplace expectations and mandatory reporting mechanisms.'
- focusing on or caring about child safety (9 per cent), for example:
 - 'Embracing the notion that we all hold a responsibility to keep children safe from harm and abuse.'
 - 'There is a general culture where workers genuinely care about children and young people—all decisions are made with their best interest in mind.'
 - 'By ensuring that the safety and wellbeing of a child is paramount to everything we do'.

54 Department of Social Services 2018, *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children—Fourth Action Plan 2018–2020*, p. 24, www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/01_2019/dss-fourth-action-plan-v6-web-final.pdf

55 Queensland Family and Child Commission 2021, *Workforce survey 2021: Research report*. Not yet published.

D.3 Queensland's performance over time compared with other jurisdictions

The overarching goal of the National Framework is that Australia's children and young people are safe and well. A set of indicators was developed to show progress towards achieving the supporting outcomes (referred to in this section as 'outcomes').⁵⁶

In this report, the QFCC has selected the most relevant of these indicators to assess progress against each outcome, comparing Queensland's performance with that of other Australian jurisdictions. Where recent data comparing Australian jurisdictions was not available for the established indicators, we have reported on alternative, comparable measures.

The outcomes and indicators against which we have reported are shown in Table D11. Some of these indicators have limitations, for example, none report on outcomes from the perspective of the child or young person. They do, however, represent the most relevant and recent data available across Australian jurisdictions.

Table D11: Indicators of progress towards National Framework outcomes selected for this report

Outcome	Indicator/s
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proportion of people reporting they are able to get support in a time of crisis from people living outside the household
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> State and territory government spending per child allocated to intensive family support services Children aged 0–17 years commencing with intensive family support services
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children and young people subject to a care and protection order accessing specialist homelessness services
4. Children who have been abused or neglected receive the support and care they need for their safety and wellbeing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Substantiation rate⁵⁷ within 12 months of a prior substantiation
5. Indigenous children are supported and safe in their families and communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children placed with Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander relatives or extended family members, or other relatives or extended family members
6. Child sexual abuse and exploitation is prevented and survivors receive adequate support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rate of children who were subjects of a sexual abuse notification that was substantiated Children in care who were the subject of a substantiation of sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse or neglect

⁵⁶ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2020, *National framework for protecting Australia's children indicators*, www.aihw.gov.au/reports/child-protection/nfpac/contents/national-framework-indicators-data-visualisations

⁵⁷ 'Substantiation' refers to when an investigation concludes that a child or young person has been, was being, or is likely to be abused, neglected or harmed.

The assessment ratings used to compare Queensland's performance with other Australian jurisdictions are as follows:

- **strong** means Queensland data indicated performance was better than the national totals or the majority of states and territories
- **satisfactory** means Queensland data indicated performance was on par with national totals or the majority of states and territories
- **needs improvement** means Queensland data indicated performance was below par compared to national totals or the majority of states and territories.

D.3-1 National framework outcome 1: Children live in safe and supportive families and communities

The National Framework states that 'Informing communities about parenting and about children's development can ... promote understanding about the ways in which community members can better support families.'⁵⁸ If communities are child-friendly, families will be supported in their caring role.

How supportive a community is can be measured by assessing whether people feel they are able to access support in times of crisis from people living outside of their household.⁵⁹ Data on this measure is collected by the Australian Bureau of Statistics' General Social Survey, which provides data on the social characteristics, wellbeing and social experiences of people in Australia.⁶⁰

The survey has been conducted six times since 2002. Results from the three most recent surveys (2014, 2019 and 2020) are presented here.

Indicator: Proportion of people reporting they are able to get support in a time of crisis from people living outside the household

QFCC Assessment: *Satisfactory*

As Figure D4 (*see page 100*) shows, in both 2014 and 2019 almost 95 per cent of Queensland respondents reported they were able to access support outside their household. Overall, respondents from all states and territories reported high levels of agreement with this statement (more than 92 per cent of respondents in all jurisdictions at both time points). However, at both time points, Queensland's results on this measure were comparable with those of South Australia and the Australian Capital Territory but were lower than Victoria and Tasmania.

A slightly different pattern was observed with the 2020 data, which was collected over a four-month period (June to September 2020) during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁶¹ The percentage of Queensland respondents reporting they could access support dropped, in line with the Australian average.

Queensland rates for 2020 were comparable with the majority of other states, with the exception of Victoria (which was markedly lower) and the Australian Capital Territory (which was markedly higher).

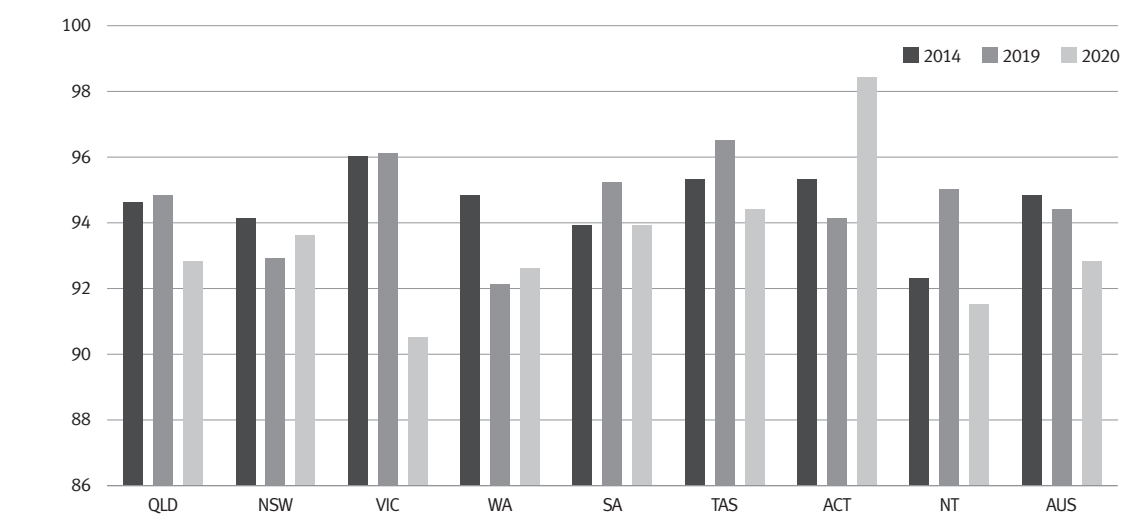
58 Department of Social Services 2009, *Protecting Children is Everyone's Business: National Framework for Protecting Australia's children 2009–2020*, p. 15, www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/child_protection_framework.pdf

59 Butel, J & Braun, KL 2019, *The role of collective efficacy in reducing health disparities: A systemic review*, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7012267/

60 Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021, *General Social Survey: Summary results, Australian methodology*, www.abs.gov.au/methodologies/general-social-survey-summary-results-australia-methodology/2020#overview

61 Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by a virus (SARS-CoV-2) discovered in 2019. On 11 March 2020, the World Health Organisation declared COVID-19 a pandemic; Australian borders were closed to all non-residents on 20 March 2020, and a month-long nation-wide lockdown started on 23 March 2020. www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019

Figure D4: Percentage of people aged 15 years and over reporting they are able to get support in times of crisis from people living outside the household in 2014, 2019 and 2020, by Australian jurisdiction



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021⁶²

D.3-2 National framework outcome 2: Children and families access adequate support to promote safety and intervene early

The basic assumption of a public health approach to protecting children is that by providing the right services at the right time, vulnerable families can be supported, child abuse and neglect can be prevented, and the effects of trauma and harm can be reduced. As stated in the National Framework:

Providing the right supports at the right time will also ultimately reduce demand on State and Territory child protection systems, allowing them to improve their capacity to perform specific statutory functions and better support children at-risk.⁶³

We have selected two indicators for this outcome:

1. state and territory government expenditure per child aged 0–17 years in the population on intensive family support services
2. number of children commencing with intensive family support services.

Indicator 1: State and territory government spending per child allocated to intensive family support services

QFCC Assessment: **Satisfactory**

The Productivity Commission reports annually on government expenditure and provides a comparison of state spending on intensive family support services per child aged 0–17 years in the population. Increased expenditure on intensive family support services increases service availability and, subsequently, families' ability to access the services they need when they are struggling to cope.

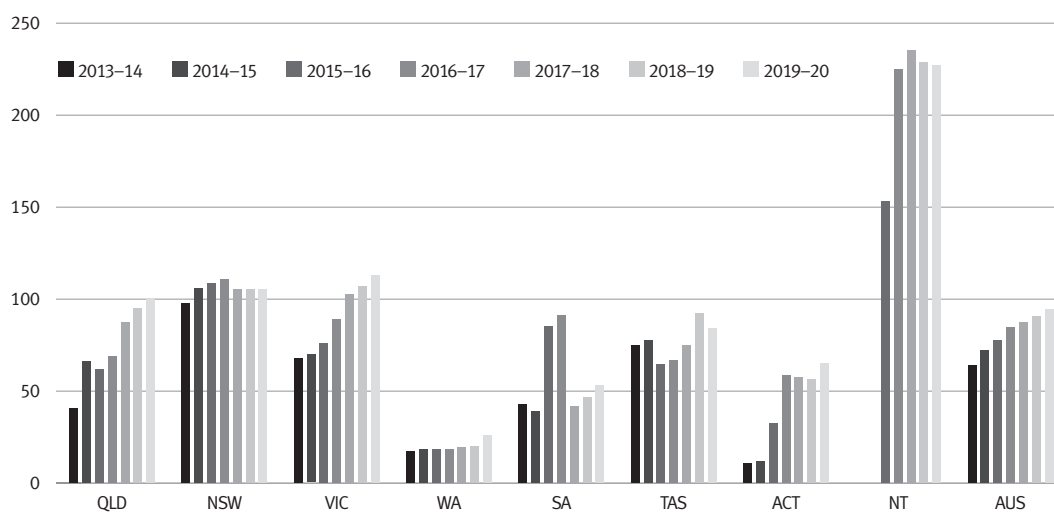
62 General Social Survey: Summary results 2020, 2019 and 2014, www.abs.gov.au/methodologies/general-social-survey-summary-results-australia-methodology

63 Department of Social Services 2009, *Protecting Children is Everyone's Business: National Framework for Protecting Australia's children 2009–2020*, p. 17, www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/child_protection_framework.pdf

Figure D5 provides a comparison of each jurisdiction's spending on intensive family support services per child. In 2019–20, Western Australia had the lowest amount of spending—around \$26 per child—while the Northern Territory had the highest amount of spending—around \$227 per child.

In 2019–20, Queensland's spending was in line with the Australian average—around \$100 per child—and it has been steadily increasing since the beginning of the state's reform period. This data suggests that Queensland is expanding the intensive family support system, which is one of the central aims of its child protection reform program.

Figure D5: Expenditure (in 2019–2020 dollars) per child aged 0–17 years in the population on intensive family support services—2013–14 to 2019–20



* Northern Territory data was not available for either 2013–14 or 2014–15

Source: Productivity Commission, 2021⁶⁴

Indicator 2: Number of children aged 0–17 years commencing with intensive family support services

QFCC Assessment: **Strong**

Intensive family support services provide support to parents and carers who are experiencing vulnerability and whose children are at risk of entering or re-entering the child protection system. The services they offer include practical in-home support, access to specialist support (including domestic and family violence responses) and cultural support.

In Queensland, anyone can refer a family to an intensive family support service, provided the family meets the referral criteria. Between 2015 and 2018, Queensland made a significant investment in establishing these services across the state as part of its child protection reforms.

Table D12 (see page 102) examines changes in the number of children and young people aged 0–17 years starting with intensive family support services. It also shows the proportion of the children and young people who were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.

Three time points are presented: immediately prior to the Queensland reforms (2013–14); a midpoint, part way through the secondary services rollout (2016–17); and the most recently reported year (2019–20).⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Report on Government Services 2021: Child protection services—Table 16A.8, www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2021/community-services/child-protection

⁶⁵ Data regarding the number of children commencing/receiving intensive family support services from 2016–17 onwards is not directly comparable to earlier years. This is because the scope of Queensland's intensive family support services changed from tertiary family support services to secondary family support services. Tertiary family support services may have included other family support services. Nevertheless, within the Productivity Commission's annual Report on Government Services, they are provided as an approximation of the number of children accessing comparable services prior to the reforms.

Table D12: Number of children aged 0–17 years (and percentage of total population) who commenced with an intensive family support service, and proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, by Australian jurisdiction—2013–14, 2016–17 and 2019–20

	2013–14			2016–17			2019–20		
	Number of children	% Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	As % of total population aged 0–17	Number of children	% Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	As % of total population aged 0–17	Number of children	% Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	As % of total population aged 0–17
QLD	4,063	31.0%	0.4%	7,115	29.9%	0.6%	11,643	45.1%	1.0%
NSW	8,771	31.4%	0.5%	10,181	32.2%	0.6%	10,860	31.7%	0.6%
VIC	5,318	5.8%	0.4%	10,890	5.7%	0.8%	12,990	13.2%	0.9%
WA	934	33.1%	0.2%	769	31.3%	0.1%	1,057	51.5%	0.2%
SA	703	unknown	0.2%	906	44.8%	0.2%	776	30.2%	0.2%
TAS	1,661	unknown	1.5%	1,751	unknown	1.6%	1,804	unknown	1.6%
ACT	303	29.4%	0.4%	387	26.1%	0.4%	393	40.5%	0.4%
NT	150	70.7%	0.2%	411	80.3%	0.7%	636	87.7%	1.0%

Source: Productivity Commission, 2021⁶⁶

This table shows there has been a sharp increase in the number of children aged 0–17 years accessing intensive family support services in Queensland since 2013–14. The number has almost tripled (187 per cent increase) between 2013–14 and 2019–20. This corresponds with the expansion of intensive family support services across the state.

Queensland is one of three jurisdictions with an increase of more than 100 per cent during this time. The others were the Northern Territory (324 per cent increase) and Victoria (144 per cent increase).

Smaller increases in the number of children entering intensive family support services were observed for the Australian Capital Territory (30 per cent), New South Wales (24 per cent), Western Australia (13 per cent), South Australia (10 per cent) and Tasmania (9 per cent).

Queensland also had a sharp increase in the number of the children and young people commencing with services who identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (from 31 per cent in 2013–14 to 45 per cent in 2019–20). This percentage was lower than in the Northern Territory (88 per cent) and Western Australia (52 per cent) but higher than all other states.

An important contributor to this increase is Queensland's introduction of 33 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Wellbeing Services between December 2016 and April 2018.

⁶⁶ Report on Government Services 2021: Child protection services—Table 16A.34 and Table 16A.41, www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2021/community-services/child-protection

D.3-3 National framework outcome 3: Risk factors for child abuse and neglect are addressed

Many of the factors that contribute to abuse and neglect are related to inequality and disadvantage. These can be dealt with through specific interventions and population-based strategies.

As stated in the National Framework:

The problems most commonly associated with the occurrence of child abuse and neglect and identified in families involved with child protection services are:

- domestic violence
- parental alcohol and drug abuse
- parental mental health problems.

Other known risk factors for abuse and neglect include:

- poverty and social isolation
- unstable family accommodation and homelessness
- poor child and maternal health
- childhood disability, mental health and/or behavioural problems
- young people disconnected from their families, schools and communities
- past experiences of trauma.⁶⁷

For this outcome, we have chosen to focus on the homelessness risk factor, as comparable data is available for all jurisdictions.

Indicator: *Children and young people subject to a care and protection order accessing specialist homelessness services*

QFCC Assessment: ***Satisfactory***

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare compiles an annual report on access to specialist homelessness services. These services provide support to people experiencing homelessness as well as those at risk of homelessness.⁶⁸ The annual report describes the characteristics of clients, the services requested, outcomes achieved, and unmet requests for services.

Since 2015–16, it has included a report on children accessing homelessness services who are the subject of a care and protection order.

The links between child protection involvement and homelessness are complex. Both are driven by experiences of abuse and neglect or being a witness to domestic and family violence in the home. In some circumstances, children with these experiences may not be removed from home but may no longer be prepared to live in these households, leading them to come into contact with specialist homelessness services.

⁶⁷ Department of Social Services 2009, *Protecting Children is Everyone's Business: National Framework for Protecting Australia's children 2009–2020*, p. 21, www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/child_protection_framework.pdf

⁶⁸ While this is a useful indicator, high rates of access to specialist homelessness services could indicate either high rates of homelessness among children or a good availability of specialist homelessness services.

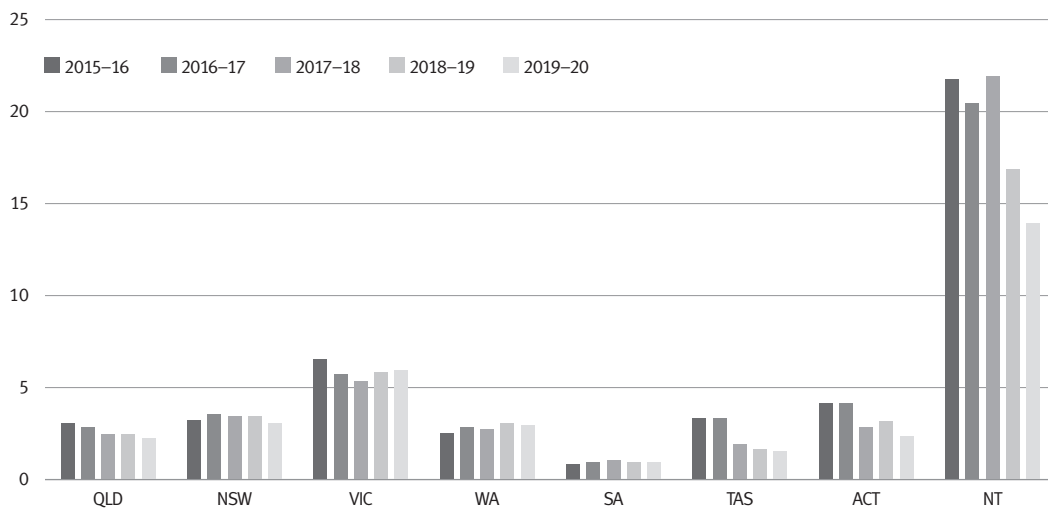
Children and young people subject to child protection orders and living in unsatisfactory foster or residential care placements who feel unable to remain in their placement are also likely to come into contact with these services.⁶⁹

Further, young people transitioning from care are often at greater risk of entering into homelessness. The CREATE Foundation, in its research on transitioning to adulthood from out-of-home care, found that 30 per cent of participants experienced homelessness during their first year after leaving care.⁷⁰

Figure D6 shows the rate of children per 10,000 estimated resident population accessing specialist homelessness services, by Australian jurisdiction. In 2019–20, rates were highest for children in the Northern Territory (14/10,000 estimated resident population) and lowest for children in South Australia (0.9/10,000 estimated resident population).

Rates for Queensland were comparable to those for New South Wales, Western Australia, Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory and lower than for Victoria. Between 2015–16 and 2019–20, accessing of specialist homelessness services in Queensland dropped by 7 per cent.

Figure D6: Rate of children per 10,000 of estimated resident population accessing specialist homelessness services between 2015–16 and 2019–20, by Australian jurisdiction



Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2020⁷¹

69 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2020, *Specialist homelessness services annual report*, www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/specialist-homelessness-services-annual-report/contents/summary

70 CREATE Foundation 2021, *Transitioning to adulthood from out-of-home care: Independence or interdependence?* create.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/CREATE-Post-Care-Report-2021-LR.pdf

71 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2020, *Specialist homelessness services annual report*, www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/specialist-homelessness-services-annual-report/contents/summary

D.3-4 National framework outcome 4: Children who have been abused or neglected receive the support and care they need for their safety and wellbeing

The National Framework states that:

Efforts to reduce the occurrence of child abuse and neglect are important. It is equally important that those children who have experienced abuse and neglect are provided high-quality services and interventions, as they are among the most vulnerable in our community.⁷²

For this outcome, we have selected one indicator: substantiation rate within 12 months of a prior substantiation.

A substantiation occurs when, through investigation, it has been concluded that a child has been, was being, or is likely to be, abused, neglected or otherwise harmed. It is an indication that the system is dealing with an issue of significant harm to the child.

This indicator shows the proportion of children who were the subject of a substantiation in the previous financial year and who were then the subject of a further substantiation within the following 12 months.

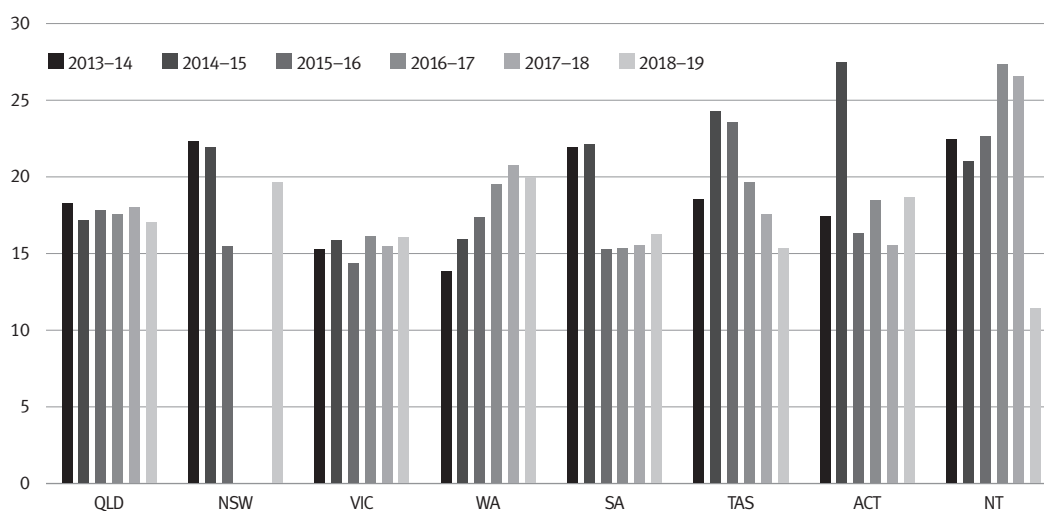
Indicator: *Substantiation rate within 12 months of a prior substantiation*

QFCC Assessment: *Satisfactory*

Re-substantiation rates can be affected by many factors outside the control of the child protection system, such as changes in family situations (for example, illness, pregnancy or unemployment), which may increase vulnerability factors within a child's home environment.

Figure D7 shows that rates of re-substantiation in Queensland are comparable to those of other jurisdictions and have remained relatively steady over time.

Figure D7: Substantiation rate within 12 months of a prior substantiation between 2013–14 and 2018–19, by Australian jurisdiction



* NSW data was not available for 2016–17 and 2017–18

Source: Productivity Commission, 2021⁷³

72 Department of Social Services 2009, *Protecting Children is Everyone's Business: National Framework for Protecting Australia's children 2009–2020*, p. 25, www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/child_protection_framework.pdf

73 *Report on Government Services 2021: Child protection services—Table 16A.38*, www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2021/community-services/child-protection

D.3-5 National framework outcome 5: Indigenous children are supported and safe in their families and communities

The National Framework states:

Where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children cannot remain safely in the care of their parents or community, timely and culturally appropriate responses for their care, protection and nurture are needed.⁷⁴

The *Child Protection Reform Amendment Act 2017*⁷⁵ amended the paramount principle—which is that the safety, wellbeing and best interests of children must always come first—to ensure that the child’s best interests are considered not only for their childhood but also for their future life.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (the Principle) was developed in recognition of the devastating effects of forced separation of Indigenous children from their families, communities and culture. It exists in legislation and policy to varying degrees in all Australian jurisdictions.

The Principle is intended to protect key human rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, particularly those recognised in the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. It is expressly described in Queensland child protection legislation as having the aim of improving the rights, safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

It has five inter-related elements: prevention, partnership, placement, participation and connection. While acknowledging the importance of the other four elements, for this outcome, we have chosen to focus on the Principle’s ‘placement’ element.

This measure is not indicative of compliance across the five elements. However, in looking at where children are placed, we are also considering the impact on the other elements of the Principle.

Placement of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child in out-of-home care according to the Principle’s placement hierarchy is prioritised in the following way:⁷⁶

1. with Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander relatives or extended family members, or other relatives or extended family members
2. with Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander members of the child’s community
3. with Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander family-based carers.

If the above preferred options are not available, as a last resort the child may be placed:

4. with a non-Indigenous carer or in a residential setting.

Indicator: Proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children placed with Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander relatives or extended family members, or other relatives or extended family members

QFCC Assessment: *Needs improvement*

As of 30 June 2020, there were 3,951 Aboriginal and Torres Strait children and young people in out-of-home care in Queensland.

Figure D8 (see page 107) shows the relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in out-of-home care and their caregivers across Australian jurisdictions.⁷⁷

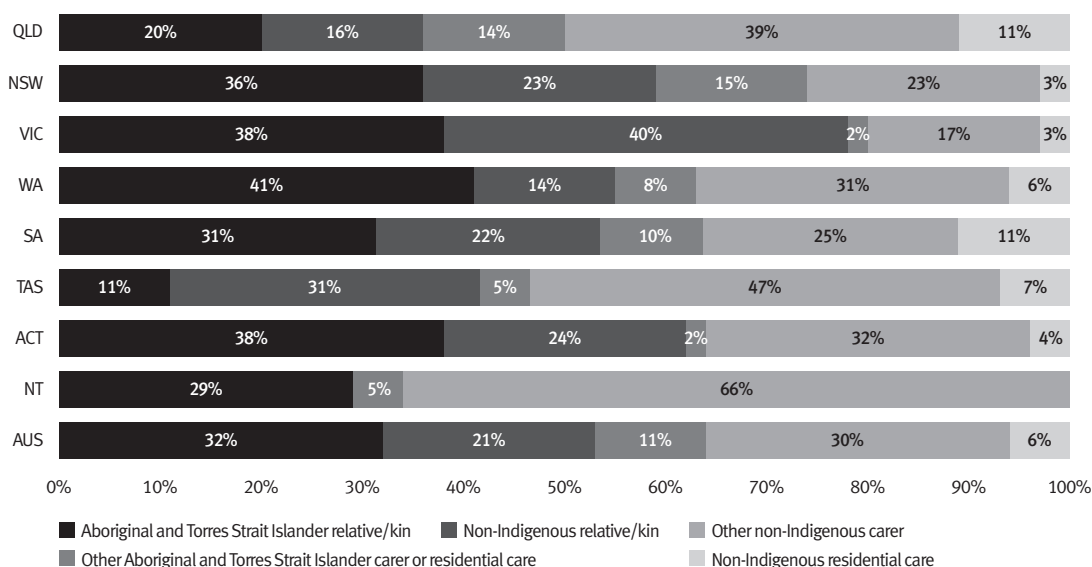
74 Department of Social Services 2009, *Protecting Children is Everyone’s Business: National Framework for Protecting Australia’s children 2009–2020*, p. 28, www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/child_protection_framework.pdf

75 *Queensland Child Protection Reform Amendment Act 2017*, www.legislation.qld.gov.au/view/pdf/asmade/act-2017-044

76 SNAICC (the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care) 2017, *Understanding and Applying the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle—A Resource for Legislation, Policy, and Program Development*, www.snaicc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Understanding_applying_ATSICCP.pdf

77 Productivity Commission reporting does not exactly match the placement hierarchy outlined by SNAICC. Figure D8 presents a continuum of placements from those that would be high on the placement hierarchy (left) to those low on the placement hierarchy (right).

Figure D8: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care relationship with caregiver, by Australian jurisdiction—as of 30 June 2020



Source: Productivity Commission, 2021⁷⁸

In Queensland, only 20 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people were placed at the highest level of the placement hierarchy—with Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander kin. A further 16 per cent were placed with non-Indigenous relatives or kin, adding up to around one-third placed high on the placement hierarchy.⁷⁹ Queensland's performance on this measure fell far below nearly every jurisdiction, with the exception of Tasmania and the Northern Territory.

More than half of Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people were placed in the care of non-Indigenous carers or in non-Indigenous residential care—the lowest level of the placement hierarchy. This means that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people were more likely to be placed with carers who had no family connection to them. Again, only Tasmania and the Northern Territory had higher levels of placement with non-Indigenous carers than Queensland.

When system interventions result in the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people from their kinship and cultural connections, there are dire consequences for their cultural rights.

A recent review of Queensland's implementation of the Principle suggested factors that could be contributing to the placement of high numbers of children on the lowest level of the placement hierarchy.⁸⁰ This review also made suggestions for achieving the prevention, partnership and participation elements of the Principle.

These included providing targeted investment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations, as well as ensuring that families are able to access family-led decision-making⁸¹ at all points of the child protection continuum, especially at their first engagement with it, to prevent them from progressing further into the system.

78 Report on Government Services 2021: Child protection services—Table 16A.22, www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2021/community-services/child-protection

79 Some caution should be taken when interpreting kinship placement data given the *Child Protection Act 1999* continues to include 'anyone else who is a person of significance to the child' in the definition of kin.

80 SNAICC 2020, *Reviewing implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle—Queensland 2020*, www.snaicc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Reviewing-Implementation-of-the-ATSICPP_2020_QLD.pdf

81 This approach involves helping a family to take the lead in making decisions about the safety, belonging and wellbeing needs of their child.

D.3-6 National framework outcome 6: Child sexual abuse and exploitation is prevented, and survivors receive adequate support

Research on the impact of sexual abuse indicates that being a victim of child sexual abuse or exploitation can be associated with a range of negative long-term consequences including poor physical and mental health outcomes and issues with social, sexual and interpersonal functioning.⁸²

While preventing sexual abuse is a priority, responding effectively to disclosures of abuse is also critical.

We have selected two indicators for this outcome:

1. rates of children who were subjects of a sexual abuse notification that was substantiated
2. proportion of children in care who were subjects of a substantiation of sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse or neglect.

Indicator 1: Rates of children who were subjects of a sexual abuse notification that was substantiated

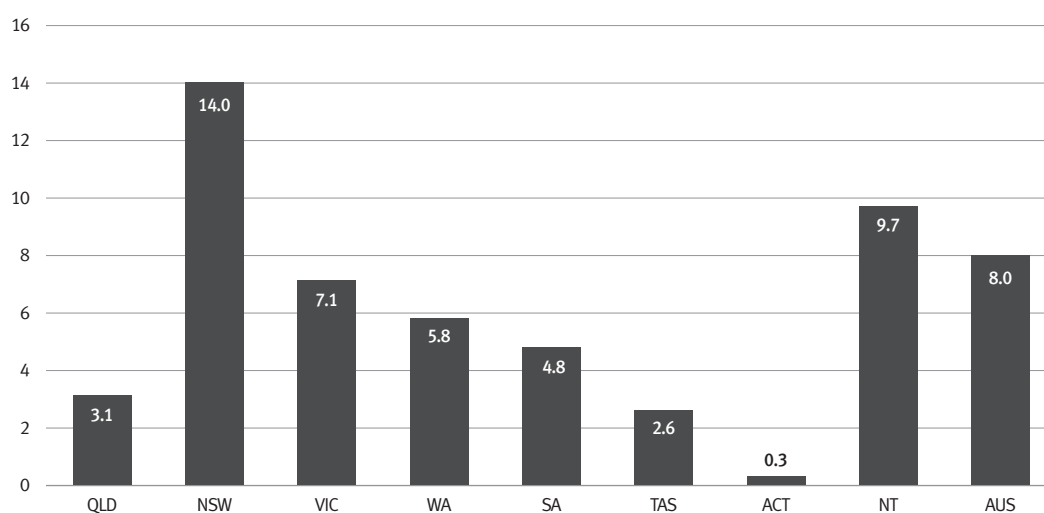
QFCC Assessment: *Satisfactory*

Figure D9 compares the rates of sexual abuse substantiations per 10,000 children aged 0–17 years during 2019–20 across Australian jurisdictions.

The data in the figure only represents cases of sexual abuse reported to child protection departments. Also, if a child was the subject of more than one type of abuse or neglect as part of the same notification, the abuse and/or neglect reported is the one considered by the child protection workers to cause the most harm to the child.

Queensland had the third lowest rate of substantiated notifications, lower than that of South Australia, Western Australia, Victoria, the Northern Territory and New South Wales.⁸³ Over this time period, 369 Queensland children were subject to substantiated sexual abuse notifications.

Figure D9: Rate of sexual abuse substantiations per 10,000 children during 2019–20



Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2021⁸⁴

82 Cashmore, J & Shackel, R 2013, *The long-term effects of child sexual abuse*, Child and Family Community Australia paper, aifs.gov.au/cfca/sites/default/files/cfca/pubs/papers/a143161/cfca11.pdf

83 A low rate of substantiated notifications does not necessarily mean there are low rates of sexual abuse in the community. It can indicate that victims may not disclose their abuse experiences or that there wasn't enough evidence to substantiate the child concern report.

84 *Child protection Australia 2019–20—Table P4 and Table S3.5*, www.aihw.gov.au/reports-data/health-welfare-services/child-protection/data

Indicator 2: Children in care who were the subject of a substantiation of sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse or neglect

QFCC Assessment: *Satisfactory*

Children in out-of-home care should be safe and protected, regardless of their placement type (for example, home-based or residential care). As they are in the care and protection of the relevant state or territory authorities, it is the state or territory that is responsible for keeping them safe from harm and/or abuse.

However, as is evident in Table D13, a small proportion of children in out-of-home care across Australian jurisdictions suffer further harm and/or abuse. To humanise these statistics, the actual numbers relating to these percentages have been provided. The Productivity Commission notes that data may not be comparable across jurisdictions or over time due to different policies or changes in data collection practices.

In Queensland in 2019–20, 197 children in the care of the state were subject to a substantiated notification of harm and/or abuse.

Table D13: Number and proportion of children in care who were the subject of a substantiated notification of sexual, physical or emotional abuse or neglect (2013–14 to 2019–20)

	2013–14		2015–16		2017–18		2019–20	
	% children in care	# children in care	% children in care	# children in care	% children in care	# children in care	% children in care	# children in care
QLD	1.6%	137	1.5%	163	1.4%	158	1.6%	197
NSW	unknown		unknown		2.4%	478	3.5%	788
VIC	unknown		unknown		unknown		unknown	
WA	1.3%	59	1.7%	82	1.7%	89	1.7%	98
SA	0.7%	21	3.8%	139	5.5%	227	4.0%	198
TAS	0.4%	5	0.5%	7	1.0%	14	0.5%	8
ACT	3.7%	29	2.6%	23	0.6%	6	2.3%	21
NT	1.7%	19	5.5%	72	5.9%	78	0.9%	11

Data reflects reports made in the period in which the harm was reported, not necessarily when the harm occurred. NSW and Victoria did not have this data available for some or all of these reporting periods, respectively.

Source: Productivity Commission, 2021⁸⁵

Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs data⁸⁶ provides a breakdown of the types of harm suffered by children in out-of-home care by the most serious abuse type that has been substantiated.

For the year ending 30 June 2020, of the 197 Queensland children who were the subject of a substantiated report of abuse and neglect while in care, the following percentage breakdowns applied:

- 13.2 per cent related to physical harm
- 9.1 per cent related to sexual harm
- 69 per cent related to emotional harm
- 8.6 per cent related to neglect.

These figures are consistent with those from previous years.

⁸⁵ Report on Government Services 2021: Child protection services—Table 16A.13, www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2021/community-services/child-protection

⁸⁶ Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs 2021, *Standard care reviews and harm reports—Table HR.1*, www.cyjma.qld.gov.au/about-us/performance-evaluations/our-performance/improved-safety/standard-care-reviews-harm-reports

D.4 Reducing the number of, and improving the outcomes for, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in the child protection system

Despite 50 years of legislative and policy reform at both the state and national levels, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are still over-represented in the Queensland child protection system.

In this section, we examine:

- the increasing over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children living in out-of-home care
- challenges in reducing over-representation, given the number of long-term child protection orders and the relative number of children entering and exiting out-of-home care
- lack of data about improved outcomes
- our future oversight priorities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people involved with the child protection system.

D.4-1 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are increasingly over-represented in out-of-home care

As of 30 June 2020, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children made up 8.2 per cent of the Queensland population aged 0–17 years⁸⁷ but 44.3 per cent of all children in out-of-home care.⁸⁸

Earlier in this report, we presented evidence of the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in child concern reports (Table D4) and entries to out-of-home care (Table D5). Here, we present evidence of over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children living in out-of-home care.

Figure D10 (*see page 111*) shows that the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children living in out-of-home care has increased over time. The greatest increase was between 2019 and 2020, when the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children living in out-of-home care increased from 37 to 40.4 per 1,000 children.⁸⁹

Compared to non-Indigenous children, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were 8 times more likely to be living in out-of-home care in 2015 and 2016. By 2019 and 2020, this had increased to 8.8 times more likely.⁹⁰

87 Productivity Commission 2021, *Report on Government Services 2021: Child protection services—Table 16A.4.1*, www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2021/community-services/child-protection

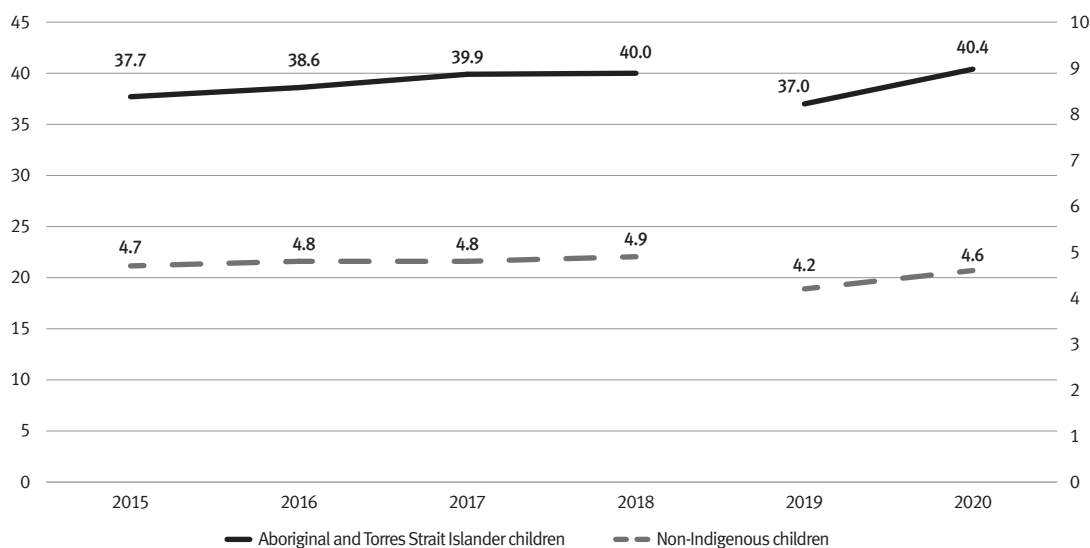
88 Productivity Commission 2021, *Report on Government Services 2021: Child protection services—Table 16A.2*, www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2021/community-services/child-protection

89 Productivity Commission 2021, *Report on Government Services 2021: Child protection services—Table 16A.2*, www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2021/community-services/child-protection

90 Increased likelihood was calculated by dividing the rate per 1,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children by the rate for non-Indigenous children.

The lines in this figure are broken to reflect a change in the counting rule from 2018–19, which means data is not directly comparable to previous years.

Figure D10: Children living in out-of-home care (rate per 1,000 children) as of 30 June each year, by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status—2015–2020



Source: Productivity Commission, 2021⁹¹

D.4-2 Challenges in reducing over-representation: Entries of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children into out-of-home care exceed exits

As of 31 December 2020, three in four (3,164) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children living in out-of-home care were subject to long-term child protection orders and therefore not expected to leave the system until they turn 18.⁹²

This is a significant challenge, as reducing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children living in out-of-home care can only be achieved if the number of children being discharged from out-of-home care significantly exceeds the number of children entering care.

Figure D11 (see page 112) compares the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who entered out-of-home care with the number discharged each year.

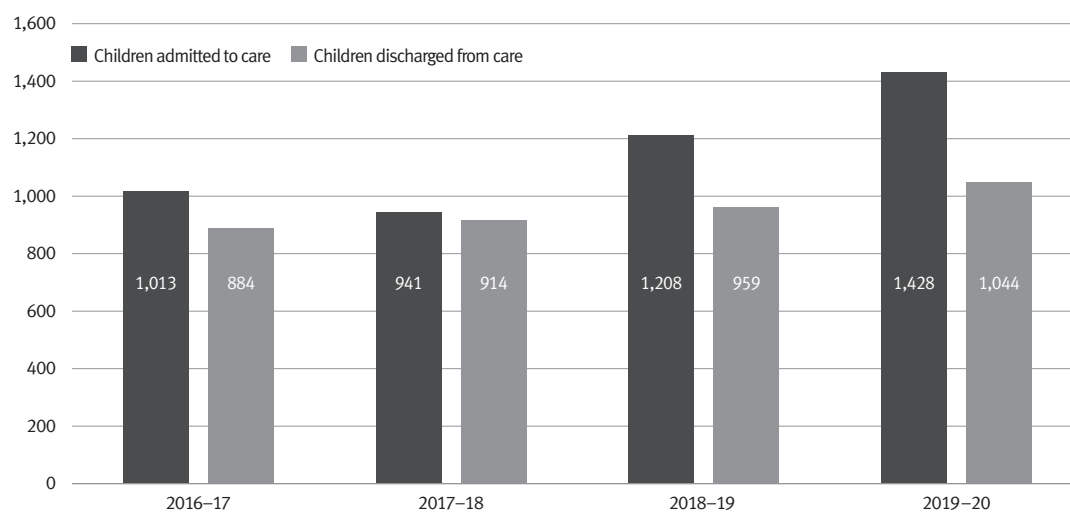
It shows that the number of children entering care consistently exceed the number exiting. It also shows that the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children entering care each year has increased over time.

Reducing the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care cannot be achieved unless this trend is reversed.

⁹¹ Report on Government Services 2021: Child protection services—Table 16A.2, www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2021/community-services/child-protection

⁹² Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs 2021, *Legal permanency—long-term child protection orders*—Table LT.1, www.cyjma.qld.gov.au/about-us/performance-evaluations/our-performance/ongoing-intervention-phase-permanency-planning/legal-permanency-long-term-child-protection-orders

Figure D11: Number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children admitted to and discharged from out-of-home care—2016–17 to 2019–20



Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2021⁹³

D.4-3 Lack of evidence of improved outcomes

While several measures of the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the child protection system are available, there is far less data about the outcomes of their involvement with the child protection system.

The QFCC’s position is that implementation of the five elements of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (the Principle) can lead to reduced numbers of, and improved outcomes for, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the Queensland child protection system.

The enduring intention of the Principle has been to preserve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander human rights across all elements of the child protection system through an explicit recognition of the vital role that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, communities and their cultures play in decisions about the safety, wellbeing and best interests of their children.

In its most recent review of Queensland’s implementation of the Principle, the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) notes that significant steps have been taken to better align legislation, policy, programs, processes and practice with the Principle, including:

- implementing the *Our Way* strategy
- enshrining the five elements of the Principle in legislation
- recognising the right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to self-determination
- having flexibility around culturally appropriate support for participation in decision-making
- continued funding and implementation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Wellbeing Services and the Family Participation Program⁹⁴
- making legislative amendments to enable the Chief Executive of the department to delegate some or all of their functions and powers, in relation to an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child in need of protection or who is likely to become in need of protection, to an appropriate Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander entity.⁹⁵

⁹³ *Child protection Australia 2019–20—Table S5.17 and Table S5.19*, www.aihw.gov.au/reports/child-protection/child-protection-australia-2019-20/data

⁹⁴ This external program, run by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations, facilitates Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family-led decision-making processes.

⁹⁵ SNAICC 2020, *Reviewing Implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle—Queensland 2020*, www.snaicc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Reviewing-Implementation-of-the-ATSI CPP_2020_QLD.pdf

Unfortunately, despite this progress with implementation, there is limited evidence of improvement in the Principle indicators reported on by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare,⁹⁶ which acknowledges that there are few indicators (with more in development), and there are limitations associated with the indicators that are available for reporting.

For example, the percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children with current cultural support plans⁹⁷ does not tell us about the quality of the plan, whether the plan covers all elements of the Principle, the extent of the involvement of the child/young person in its development or their satisfaction with the process.

Lack of outcomes measures from the perspective of children and young people has been a consistent theme raised throughout this report.

D.4-4 Future oversight priorities

Through our systemic oversight function, the QFCC will monitor the ongoing implementation of the Principle. We will continue to analyse publicly available data and collect our own data to:

- understand what helps and hinders progress in implementing all elements of the Principle
- raise awareness of these issues
- advocate for changes to the system
- hold responsible parties to account for ensuring the Principle is consistently implemented to the standard of active efforts.⁹⁸

Our ongoing program of work will include in-depth reviews of the implementation of the Principle within child protection decision-making. Consistent with our current strategic plan,⁹⁹ our approach will focus on the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

96 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2020, *The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle Indicators 2018–19—Measuring progress*, www.aihw.gov.au/reports/child-protection/atsicppi-2018-19/data

97 A cultural support plan is completed when an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child or a child from another cultural community is in need of protection, to ensure they remain connected with their culture, families and communities.

98 Active efforts are purposeful, thorough and timely efforts that are supported by legislation and policy to enable the safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. They are the standard required of the state and the broader child and family support services to safeguard the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. SNAICC 2019, *The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle: A guide to support implementation*, www.snaicc.org.au/product/the-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-child-placement-principle-a-guide-to-support-implementation/

99 Queensland Family and Child Commission 2021, *Bringing children's rights to life—strategic plan 2021–25*, www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-06/QFCC%20Strategic%20Plan%202021-25.pdf

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