

2023–2027

Oversight Framework

How the Queensland
Family and Child Commission
selects, designs and
conducts reviews, audits
and evaluations



Queensland
Family & Child
Commission



Queensland
Government



The Queensland Family and Child Commission acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Custodians across the lands, seas and skies where we walk, live and work.

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 Elders past, present and emerging.

We acknowledge the important role played by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and recognise their right to self-determination, and the need for community-led approaches to support healing and strengthen resilience.



About this framework

The Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC) is a statutory authority of the Queensland Government. Established in 2014, the QFCC provides oversight of the family and child support system, with an aim to bring children's rights to life. Through awareness, advocacy and accountability, we seek to give practical effect to the rights of all children and young people in Queensland.



The Queensland Government is committed to providing accessible services to Queenslanders from all culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. If you have difficulty understanding this document, you can contact us on 07 3900 6000 and we will arrange an interpreter to effectively explain the report to you.

Contact for enquiries

Queensland Family and Child Commission
Level 8, 63 George Street
PO Box 15217, Brisbane City East QLD 4002

Email: info@qfcc.qld.gov.au

Website: www.qfcc.qld.gov.au

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Purpose



The Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC) is charged with responsibilities to review and improve the systems that protect and safeguard Queensland children and their families.

Our vision is that *‘Every Queensland child is loved, respected and has their rights upheld’*. We pursue this vision by influencing systemic change that improves the safety and wellbeing of Queensland’s children and their families.

This *QFCC Oversight Framework 2023–2027* articulates the model, principles and methodologies that apply to how the QFCC delivers impactful reviews, audits and evaluations that influence positive change.

There are over 1.6 million children and young people in Queensland and while most grow up supported and safe at home all are impacted by universal and secondary services.

Accountability is essential within any system that impacts on vulnerable populations. The *Family and Child Commission Act 2014* (Qld) requires the QFCC to:

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

By bringing together evidence, the experiences of children and families, and the insights of stakeholders, we produce high-impact analysis and evaluations of system performance. Our oversight and engagement activities provide assurance to the community that government agencies and funded services are fulfilling their responsibilities to children and families. This is essential when decisions about the safety and wellbeing of children, young people and their families are made.

Every Queensland child is loved, respected and has their rights upheld.

To influence change that improves the safety and wellbeing of Queensland’s children and their families.

The QFCC has a range of statutory functions focused on improving outcomes for Queensland children and their families, including:

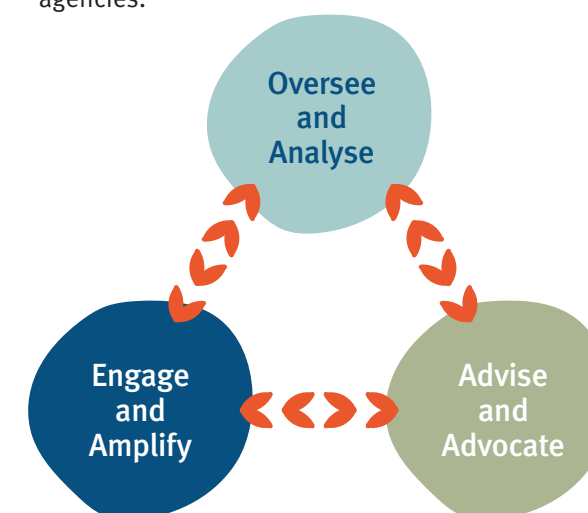
- providing oversight of the child protection system and analysing and evaluating, at a systemic level, policies and practices relevant to the child protection system and the performance of relevant agencies in delivering services
- giving expert advice to relevant agencies about laws, policies, practices and services and to promote and advocate for the safety and wellbeing of children and young people, particularly children in need of protection or in the youth justice system
- assisting relevant agencies to evaluate the efficacy of their programs and identify the most effective service models
- informing and educating the community about the way the child protection system operates, and
- developing and coordinating a multidisciplinary research program to inform policies and practices, in consultation with stakeholders and relevant agencies.¹

The QFCC raises system accountability by:

- collecting, monitoring, analysing and reporting on data
- conducting system reviews and evaluations
- making findings and recommendations
- monitoring progress against government strategies and past recommendations
- publicly reporting on issues and presenting facts to the community and the media
- reporting to the responsible Minister on our work and findings
- making submissions to decision-making bodies promoting evidence and amplifying lived experiences.

The QFCC is committed to leading a child rights agenda in Queensland and assisting others to integrate a child rights approach. We do this by raising awareness, undertaking targeted advocacy and promoting shared accountability for upholding the four core principles of the UNCRC that are:

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



¹ Refer s. 9 *Family and Child Commission Act 2014*.

In conducting oversight work, we abide by the following values:

Be objective and courageous

- We take an independent, evidence-based approach to assessing systems and are not influenced by personal opinions.
- We apply rigour and integrity to our work processes and presentation and proactively seek critique and feedback.
- We use facts to form our recommendations, positions and advocate based on the evidence we collect.
- We use our position and our voice responsibly and in the best interests of children and families.

Be collaborative and engaged

- We value the unique insights of children, young people, their families and their communities.
- We share expertise, knowledge and advice to build a common understanding.
- We work with others for holistic solutions recognising that those in the system often have the strongest insights on system performance.
- We recognise successful change will be achieved by others and that our role is to provide evidence, facts, innovative solutions and momentum for change.

Respectful and inclusive

- We value diversity, and respect each other and the public.
- We embed cultural safety in our workplace, decisions, interactions, and practices.
- We invest time to build respectful relationships.
- We uphold the dignity of the families, children and frontline workers our work relates to.

Demonstrate a commitment to excellence

- We are driven to achieve meaningful and measurable improvement.
- We embrace change and new ideas and are agile in response to emerging issues.
- We have a clear focus on what matters and how we create value.
- We invest in our workforce and encourage innovation.

Oversight framework

A guide to support the Queensland Family and Child Commission's systemic oversight 2023–2027

Our Vision

Every Queensland child is loved, respected and has their rights upheld.

We pursue this vision by ensuring systems are accountable for the impact they have on children and families.

We design our oversight work

Partnering with stakeholders

Prioritising matters for discovery and examination based on evidence

Conducting systemic reviews that will lead to positive change

Our Values

Be objective and courageous

Be collaborative and engaged

Be respectful and inclusive

Demonstrate a commitment to excellence

We focus on priority populations

Families in contact with child protection system

Families in contact with the youth justice system

Children in out-of-home care and their carers

First Nations families

We consider the socioecological factors impacting on the family and system

- Individual
- Social
- Historical
- Interpersonal
- Structural
- Cultural
- Community
- Economic

We produce oversight products that are:

Impactful

Important

Influential

What is systemic oversight?



The QFCC was established to *provide systemic oversight of the child protection system, which includes preventative and support services to strengthen families.*² We do this in a variety of ways, including data collection and analysis and through our reviews and evaluations.

The QFCC is accountable to parliament and the public for the delivery of its statutory oversight functions. We have a leadership role in supporting a coordinated, Whole-of-Government response to improve outcomes and prevent harm to children and young people.³



² Family and Child Commission Bill 2014 explanatory note (legislation.qld.gov.au), p.8.

³ Family and Child Commission Bill 2014 explanatory note (legislation.qld.gov.au), p.8.

The intent of the QFCC's oversight function is to conduct objective analysis to identify changes to laws, policies, programs and services that can improve outcomes for children, their families, and the community.

Traditional view of a system

A system is 'a group of components or subsystems that integrate and function together in order to achieve a specific goal'.⁴ Examples of systems include the health, education, housing, economic, and the child protection and youth justice systems. Examples of the systems components includes the laws, policies, programs, practices, workforces, and funding.

The traditional view of the child protection system starts when a report is made about concerns for a child to the Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs (Child Safety). This system includes the processes, policies and practices of Child Safety's investigation, how work is done with a family through ongoing intervention, the legal and court process for placing a child in out-of-home care when they are not safe and the ancillary work that is required to strengthen families, recruit and regulate care homes and carers and work with other agencies to improve outcomes for children and families. Workers in the child protection system include Government officials, magistrates, social workers, psychologists, teachers, medical professionals, community support officers, families, parents and non-government organisation workers in a range of family support, counselling and caring roles.

The traditional view of the youth justice system starts when a young person aged 10 to 17 is charged by police and includes the processes of police actions and court decision-making, leading the young person to diversion programs, warnings, court processes and sentencing relevant to the young person's offence. This includes the systems of bail, diversion, remand and detention. Workers in the youth justice system include the police, court officials, judiciary, community justice officers, detention centre staff and a myriad of non-government organisations staff that engage young people in programs designed to change their behaviour.

Approaching oversight from the traditional perspective of systems brings focus to the administrative performance of the system – that is the workloads, resourcing, timeliness, throughput and output of the system. This can bring important transparency about the system – but it cannot tell us about the root-causes that bring people into the system, or the long-term outcomes for people who went through the system. The traditional perspective strengthens system compliance, but it cannot teach us about prevention and impact.

⁴ Blackmore, C. (2010) *Social learning systems and communities of practice* (1st ed.), Springer. Accessed 1 November 2022. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-84996-133-2>

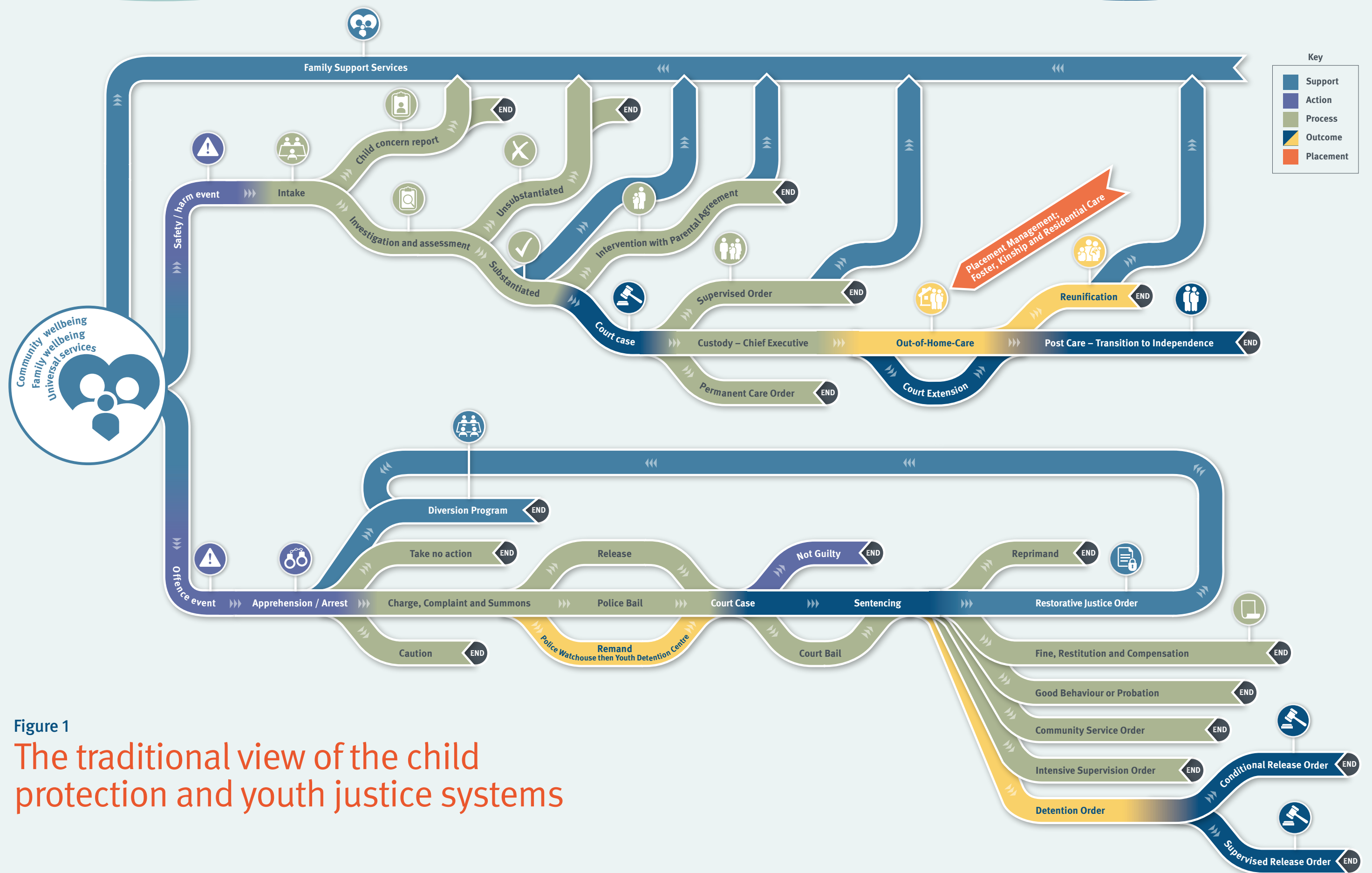


Figure 1
The traditional view of the child protection and youth justice systems

Understanding the humans within the system

The QFCC takes an expanded approach to systemic oversight. We apply a social-ecological model to all systems that have responsibilities to contribute to the social wellbeing and safety of Queensland’s children and families. This recognises that almost all Queensland children and families will be involved in multiple systems at any one time. Health, education, housing and employment all define our lives. Children and families often move between and across systems depending on the complexity and severity of the adversity they experience.

Understanding how different systems interact and influence one another assists in determining the overall impact on children and families – and how legislation, policies and programs need to be improved for better outcomes.



Our emerging understanding of social outcomes is that the real risk to achieving child and family safety and wellbeing is the gaps between systems – and the failure of systems to communicate with each other.

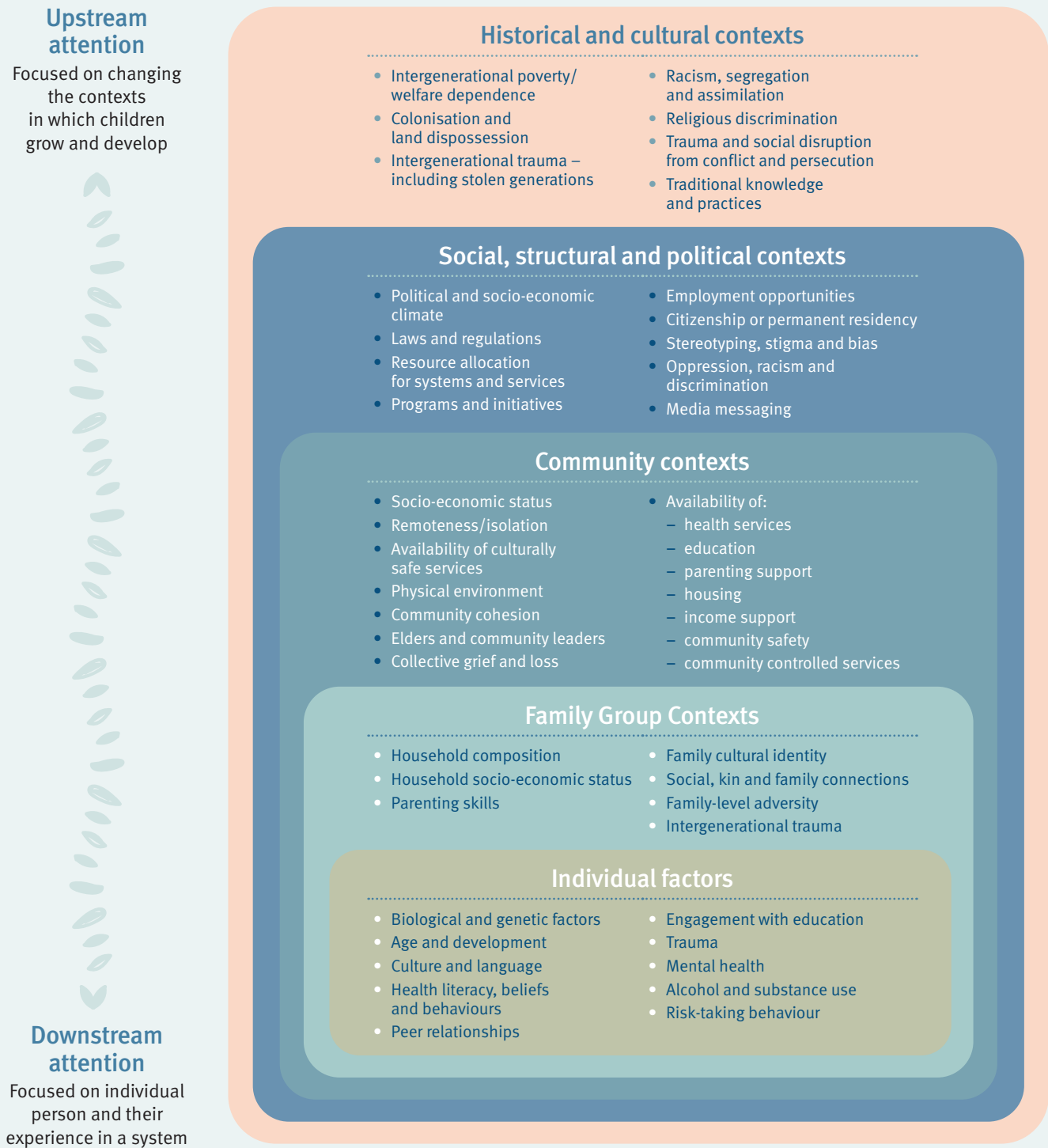
When reviewing a system, we look at more than what it is designed to do. Publicly funded systems are often designed to service individuals – not families. Consequently, the interrelationship between individual service delivery in the context of broader interpersonal, community, social, structural, political, historical and cultural contexts can be easily lost. A social-ecological lens that positions the child and family at the centre of any system under review is required for systemic oversight to be impactful.

Engaging children, families and stakeholders to understand their experiences of the system helps us to understand whether there is a gap between how a system is designed to benefit children and families and how it is actually experienced.

Adopting this approach helps to collect evidence on how a system impacts on child and family wellbeing and ultimately how to prevent the acceleration of children and families into statutory systems.

This approach acknowledges the complex interplay of factors that influence child and family safety, and wellbeing.

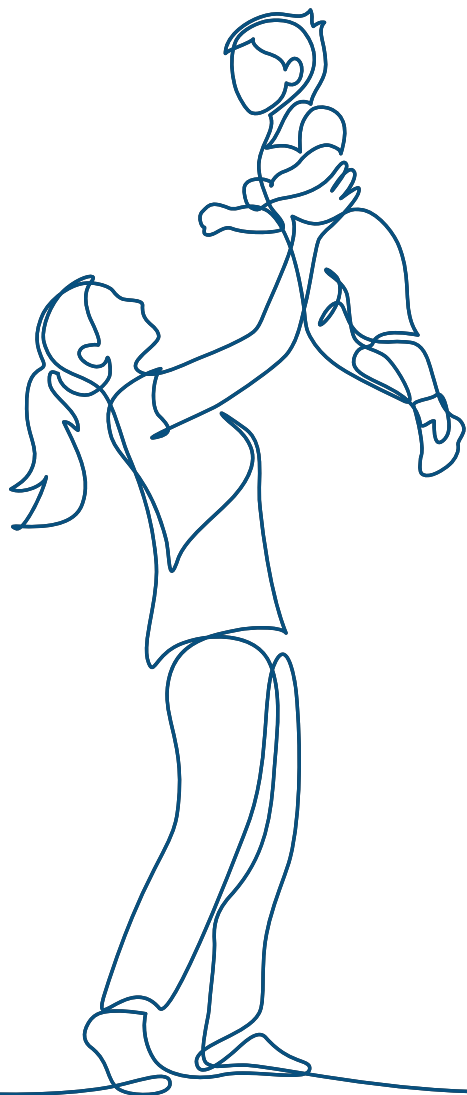
Figure 3 The social-ecological perspective applied to our oversight work.



Priority populations

Whilst we bring a broad lens to our oversight work, we know we will have the greatest impact and influence occurs by focussing on those families and children who are most in need, and most greatly impacted by government service delivery.

The experiences of four groups will be prioritised in all work conducted under this framework and in line with the *Queensland Family and Child Commission Strategic Plan 2022–2026*.



Families exposed to the child protection system

In Queensland, the child protection and family support system responds to concerns about the care and protection of children who have been, or are at risk of, being abused, neglected or exploited by their family. The child protection and family support system consists of both secondary and statutory approaches, which are provided based on the level of need, risk and harm. Children and their families may receive support services to keep children safe, or be subject to investigations.

Children in out-of-home care and their carers

Some children are unable to live safely at home as they may be at risk of being abused or neglected and the State will seek a court order that removes the child from their parents and gives the child protection department responsibility for a child's care and welfare. In this case, children become subject to a formalised government system designed to meet their safety, wellbeing and development needs.

Foster and kinship carers are the backbone of the out-of-home care system and have an integral role in providing safe and caring homes for children. Ensuring the capacity, capability and retention of carers is a critical part of the system and we include foster care families as a priority cohort within the definition of families exposed to the children protection system.

Families exposed to the youth justice system

The youth justice system is designed to uphold and protect community safety by responding to the behaviours in young people that are anti-social and criminal. The youth justice system spans from early intervention to detention. The *Youth Justice Act 1992* recognises the importance of the provision of services designed to rehabilitate and reintegrate children and young people who commit offences. Young people exposed to the youth justice system are too often treated as individuals, yet we know that unaddressed, significant family adversity remains a precursor to youth justice exposure. Consequently in our work we consider the families that are exposed to the youth justice system.

First Nations families

The QFCC recognises the rich and resilient cultures that continue to sustain and strengthen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We respect the right to self-determination and the critical importance of continuing connection to kin, Country and culture in the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We also recognise the significant disparities and challenges experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. First Nations children and families continue to be disproportionately represented in statutory child protection and youth justice systems in Queensland and across Australia. The QFCC is committed to identifying and highlighting the dynamics and drivers of this over-representation to help communicate and address the causes and situational influences. In 2021, 144,016 or around 9 per cent of young Queenslanders were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.⁵

Other families and children experiencing specific vulnerabilities

The selection of the four priority populations does not mean the QFCC does not consider and bring focus to other groups in our community.

Other families and children that are likely to be considered in the performance of our oversight work includes:

- Parents or children with a disability
- Parents or children experiencing poor mental health
- Parents or children experience housing instability or homelessness
- Parents or children with reduced access to services (including those living in rural and remote areas)
- Parents or children with substance addiction.



⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2021). Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples/estimates-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-australians/latest-release#data-downloads>

Our oversight methodology



The QFCC possesses legislative powers to request information about systems and child deaths to perform its oversight functions.

The QFCC becomes aware of matters in many ways. Issues may be identified through data monitoring and review activities, youth advocates, strategic partners or the general public. We work closely with our advisory councils and strategic partners, agencies, and young people and families, to strengthen systems and improve the lives of children and families in Queensland. Feedback from a range of stakeholders including government, non-government, peak bodies, the community and young people, guides the design and conduct of our review work. This ensures that oversight decisions are informed, evidenced, objective and in the best interests of children and families.

The QFCC's oversight prioritisation methodology guides decisions about what issues should be prioritised asking three key questions and considering the answers holistically. They are:

1. What is the **impact** of the matter on children and families?
2. Is addressing the matter **important** to achieving the QFCC's legislative objectives, strategic priorities, and explicit commitments?
3. Can the QFCC **influence** the matter and is it the right agency to deliver impact and drive change?

The QFCC develops and publishes a Forward Oversight Workplan to set systemic oversight priorities for future years and ensure transparency.

Once topic areas are selected, the QFCC invests in high-value examinations of the system that result in impactful outcomes. The most intensive reviews, discovery and examination reviews, are included in the Forward Oversight Workplan for transparency and accountability.

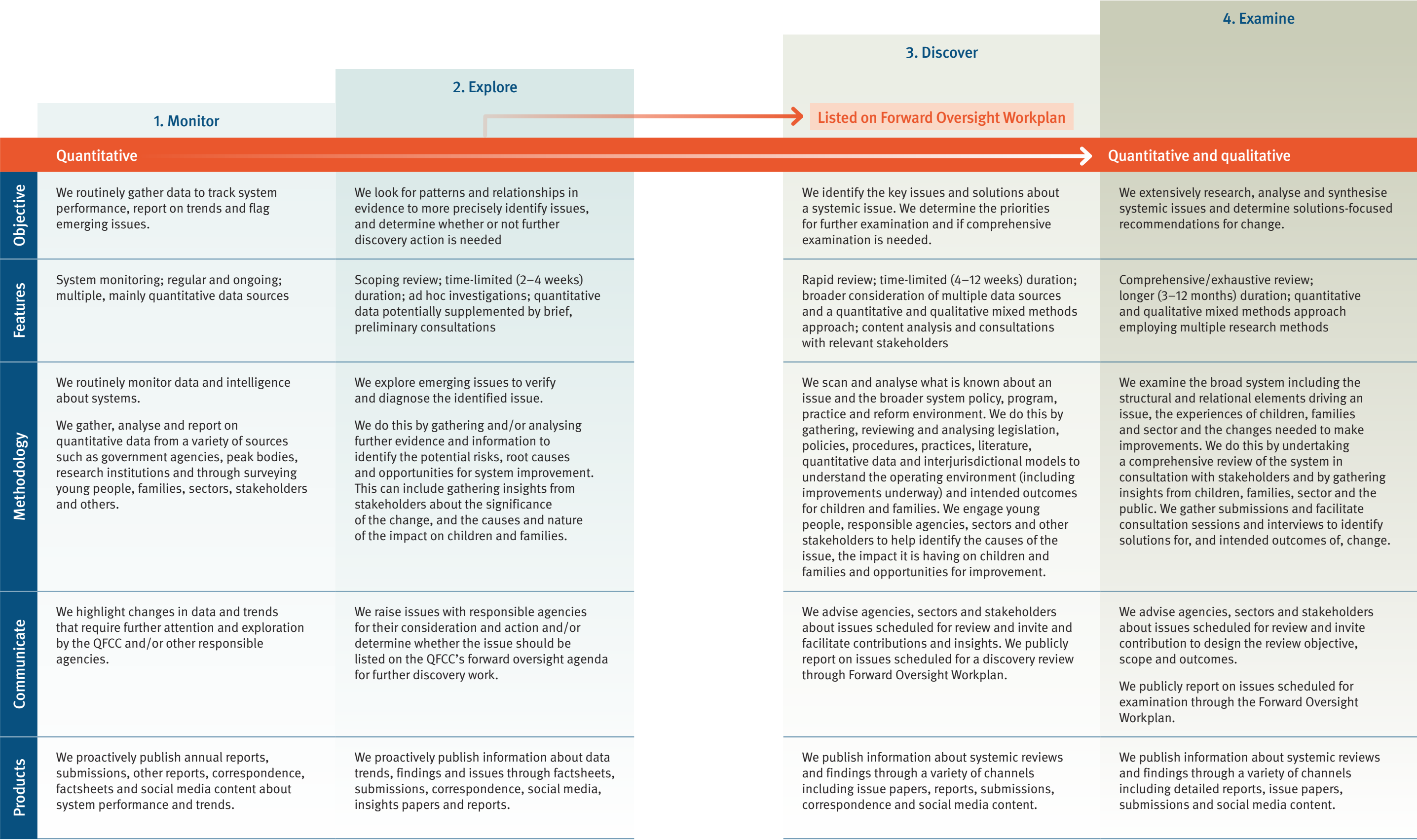
The QFCC uses a four-stage approach to scope and design its oversight work – applying an escalating approach based on the evidence and facts obtained in the earlier stage. The requirement for further review is determined at each stage, moving evidence forward if a decision is made to continue.

The Forward Oversight Workplan ensures transparency. A consultative approach is used to develop the workplan, undertake regular priority review and publish progress updates annually. The Forward Oversight Workplan is published on our website.

Figure 5 Rolling process of engaging stakeholders in the Forward Oversight Workplan

July 2023	Publish first 3-year workplan.
January 2024	- Brief stakeholders on progress and revisit relevance of listed reviews. - Seek input and consider emerging issues for addition. - Update workplan.
July 2024	- Annual update by adding forward year to 3-year plan. - Publish terms of reference for 2024–25 reviews. - Publish progress update and outcomes.
January 2025	- Brief stakeholders on progress and revisit relevance of listed reviews. - Seek input and consider emerging issues for addition. - Update workplan.
July 2025	- Annual update by adding forward year to 3-year plan. - Publish terms of reference for 2025–26 reviews.
January 2026	- Brief stakeholders on progress and revisit relevance of listed reviews. - Seek input and consider emerging issues for addition. - Update workplan.
July 2026	- Annual update by adding forward year to 3-year plan. - Publish terms of reference for 2026–27 reviews.
January 2027	- Brief stakeholders on progress and revisit relevance of listed reviews. - Seek input and consider emerging issues for addition. - Update workplan.

Figure 4 Four stages of oversight



Collaborative partnerships approach



The ability to achieve positive change relies on the input, attention and action of our stakeholders.

Our oversight work is supported by collaborative stakeholder relationships. The systems we provide oversight of are complex and multifaceted and there are many experts across Queensland working to reduce risks to children. The QFCC values the expertise of others and proactively seeks to work with stakeholders undertaking related initiatives.

We recognise the benefit of partnering with the agencies and services involved in system and draw on their expertise to help inform activities, as they are often best placed to enact change for children and families.

Stakeholders have an important role to play in informing the work undertaken by the QFCC, expanding influence and guiding systemic oversight approaches.

We work with stakeholders by sharing data, providing support, undertaking joint projects, and consulting on planned and future oversight activities. Stakeholders will be engaged, from planning to examination, in the oversight process.

Stakeholders will be explicitly involved in the establishment and review of the Forward Oversight Workplan and in the design and conduct of discovery and examination reviews.

Figure 5 Stakeholder participation in the design and conduct of reviews

Scoping of Issue Definition / Problem Statement / Research Question	Consult and Engage		Design of Methodology	Consult and Engage		Delivery of work – Discovery		Consult and Engage		Production of Products	Consult and Engage		Promotion and Dissemination	Consult and Engage		Monitor and Review	
- What is the worry/risk? - Who has already looked at this? - What is known about this issue? - What impact would we like to have?			- What evidence is needed? - Who is the audience? - What product is needed? - Who should be involved? - Are we best placed to lead this work?			- Data and evidence collected is sufficient? - Tangible findings emerge from the evidence? - Views and case studies align with data? - Past work and work of others is included or used to validate outcomes?				- Communication is focussed on outcome? - Multiple products are considered? - Product is right for the audience? - Product is easily consumable?			- Product release commences change-journey? - Campaign has strategic intent? - Stakeholders have engagement fit for them? - Partners are enabled to draw on our products?			- Have we had an impact? - Have our recommendations been actioned? - What audience did we reach? - What quantifiable measures have changed?	
		Sector Partners: - assist to define issue - contribute own evidence and work to issue definition - validate worry/risk				Sector Partners: - are aware of review plan and its impact on them - assist with the approach to be taken - agree to contribute or assist				Sector Partners: - are informed of analysis and findings - guide and contribute to the findings and recommendations - identify solutions to the issues in the evidence				Sector Partners: - are aware of the product prior to release - are able to contribute to the final products content		Sector Partners: - are engaged in the release and post-release campaign - are empowered to make change - are aware of the monitoring and review process - are able to provide feedback on the product and process	

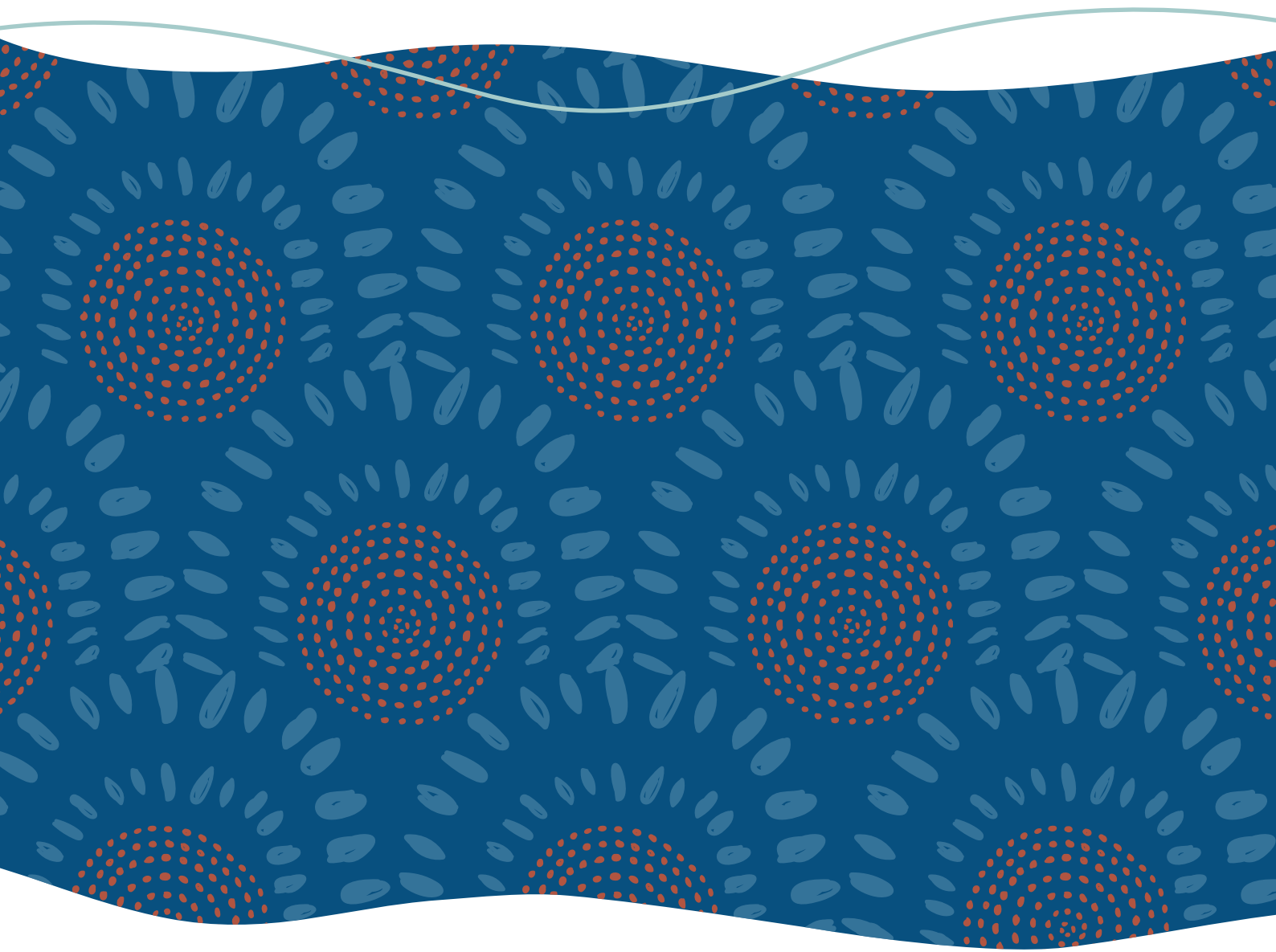
Conclusion



Accountability is essential within any system that impacts on vulnerable populations. It provides assurance to the community that government agencies and funded services are fulfilling their responsibilities to children and families. This is particularly true when decisions about the safety and wellbeing of children, young people and their families are made.

There are over 1.6 million children and young people in Queensland and while most grow up supported and safe at home almost all are impacted by governments universal and secondary services. By bringing together evidence, the experiences of children and families, and the insights of stakeholders, we produce high-impact analysis and evaluations of system performance. Our oversight work assures the community that the safety and wellbeing of Queensland's children and their families is being upheld.

We are committed to ensuring systems are accountable for the impact they have on children and their families and this Oversight Framework provides clarity and transparency for how we do our work.



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