



Australian Government

Key national frameworks and Commonwealth initiatives

July 2023

Prepared by the Attorney-General's Department for the National Children's Commissioner's project on youth justice and child wellbeing reform in Australia.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge the First Peoples of this country and recognise their continued connection to the land and seas that make up Australia. Collectively, we pay our respects to Elders, past and present.

It is vital to acknowledge that First Nations cultures differ vastly across Australia, and the reciprocity that exists between First Nations people and physical country of origin, which transforms the ecological landscape to a socio-cultural one; this includes honouring the unique beliefs, identities, histories, values and experiences. With this is the fundamental importance to recognise and respect the unique cultures of First Nations peoples.

CONTENT WARNING AND SUPPORT SERVICES

This document discusses confronting issues and might bring up strong feelings for readers.

Free advice and support is available online and via telephone 24/7 through the following services:

- [13YARN](#) (13 92 76) Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Crisis Support
 - [Beyond Blue](#) (1300 22 4636)
 - [Lifeline crisis support line](#) (13 11 14)
 - [Kids Helpline](#) (1800 55 1800)
 - [Mensline Australia](#) (1300 78 99 78)
 - [Blue Knot Foundation](#) (1300 657 380)
 - [Suicide Call Back Service](#) (1300 659 467)
 - [1800RESPECT](#) (1800 737 732) National Sexual Assault, Domestic and Family Violence Counselling Service
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1. Background

This document was prepared by the Attorney-General's Department (AGD) with input from the following agencies: Department of Social Services (DSS), Department of Health and Aged Care, Department of Education, National Indigenous Australian's Agency (NIAA), the Department of Home Affairs and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW).

Note on terminology

The terms 'First Nations peoples', 'Indigenous peoples' and 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' are used interchangeably throughout this document due to differing past naming conventions across Government policy and programs.

This document also uses binary language such as 'women' and 'men' in many places. We recognise that gender is socially constructed and does not exist simply in binary categories. However, these categories have been used in data collection and continue to have real effects on the lives of Australians and thus can be useful to frame discussions about gendered violence. We acknowledge that there are people whose experiences are not captured by the use of binary language, including in LGBTIQ+ communities. This document also uses a range of language to describe the experiences, risk-factors, barriers and challenges faced by children and young people. We recognise that much of this language is deficit-based and has been used in recognition of the fact that these are commonly used, known and understood terms. Efforts are ongoing to move towards more strength-based language that acknowledges the strengths and resilience of children and young people.

2. Key national frameworks

There are a range of frameworks in place across the Australian Government which are supported and facilitated through established committees, partnerships and governance mechanisms. These frameworks are listed below and provide insight into how the Australian Government is committed to working together to overcome the challenges that are faced by children and young people across Australia.

[Australia's commitment to children's rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#)

Australia is a party to the seven-core international human rights treaties including the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (the Convention). Australia is also a party to the *Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict* and the *Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography* (the optional protocols). Australia is committed to ensuring children realise the rights set out in the convention and the optional protocols.

Australia's next report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child is due in 2024.

[Safe and Supported: National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021-2031](#)

[Safe and Supported](#) is Australia's 10-year strategy to reduce the rates of child abuse and neglect and its intergenerational impacts. It will be delivered by two sets of action plans, including an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan focusing on disadvantaged and/or vulnerable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. The Action Plans have been developed in partnership between Australian, state and territory governments and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership Group, in consultation with the non-government sector through the National Coalition on Child Safety and Wellbeing.

National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032

The [National Plan](#) sets out the overarching national policy framework that will guide actions towards ending violence against women and children over the next 10 years. It highlights how all parts of society must work together to achieve the shared vision of ending gender-based violence in one generation. The National Plan commits to 10 years of sustained action, effort and partnership across all levels of government. This will be implemented through two 5-year Action Plans. Specific Australian, state and territory government actions and investment to implement the objectives across each of the four domains: prevention, early intervention, response and recovery and healing ensures that all children in Australia can access age-appropriate consent and respectful relationships education and supported recovery from childhood trauma.

National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021-2030

The [National Strategy](#) is a 10-year, whole-of-nation policy framework for preventing and responding to child sexual abuse in all settings. Under the Strategy, the Australian Government is delivering a range of important measures aimed at building child safe cultures and environments, preventing and responding to child sexual abuse offending, and supporting and empowering victims and survivors.

Work under Theme 3, *Enhancing National Approaches to Children with Harmful Sexual Behaviours*, includes the development of national standards for responding to, supporting and safeguarding children with harmful sexual behaviours and development of a clinical framework, each of which take into consideration intersections with the youth justice system.

National Agreement on Closing the Gap

The [National Agreement](#) commits all Australian governments to change how they work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and improve life outcomes, equal to all Australians.

The National Agreement acknowledges that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have always held the solutions and recognises when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have a genuine say in the design and delivery of policies, programs and services that affect them, better life outcomes are achieved.

A number of the 17 socio-economic outcome areas under the National Agreement directly relate to youth justice and the wellbeing of children, including:

- Outcome 2: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are born healthy and strong
- Outcome 3: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are engaged in high quality, culturally appropriate early childhood education in their early years
- Outcome 4: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children thrive in their early years
- Outcome 5: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students achieve their full learning potential
- Outcome 7: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth are engaged in employment or education
- Outcome 11: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are not overrepresented in the criminal justice system
- Outcome 12: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are not overrepresented in the child protection system

Action towards outcome areas under the National Agreement will complement efforts that address the drivers of young people's interactions with the justice system as well as support the broader wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. This includes actions that ensure families are safe, communities have access to economic development, and that

connections to cultures, languages, lands and waters are strong. The National Agreement also includes four Priority Reforms, which outline how governments must change the way they work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities. Embedding these priority reforms in the way all Australian governments operate is central to improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including children and young people.

[National Action Plan for the health of children and young people 2020-2030](#)

This [National Action Plan](#) provides national approach to improving the health outcomes of all children and young people. It aims to ensure that children and young people, from all backgrounds, have the same opportunities to fulfil their potential, and are healthy, safe and thriving.

[National Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy](#)

The [National Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy](#) focuses on children from birth through to 12 years of age and outlines the requirements for an effective system of care for children, and seeks to create a new, shared understanding of the roles of families, communities, services, and educators in promoting and supporting child mental health and wellbeing.

[National Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder \(FASD\) Strategic Action Plan 2018-2028](#)

This [Strategic Action Plan](#) aims to reduce the prevalence and impact of FASD in Australia. It acknowledges that those with FASD are overrepresented in youth justice settings due to the associated intellectual, behavioural and social challenges. The plan highlights the need for criminal justice systems to identify early and better respond to the needs of those with FASD, including by:

- providing FASD education and training to staff in juvenile justice systems, and community policing, including identification processes and referral pathways for further assessment and support.
- ensuring individuals suspected of developmental or cognitive impairment have access to appropriate case management, including through the appointment of specialist court-based clinicians and access to diversionary programs in Indigenous communities. This will involve community-controlled processes 'on-country' and will provide a culturally secure and appropriate environment for stabilising children with FASD.
- expanding non-custodial therapeutic options to ensure that courts can divert offenders identified with neurodevelopmental or cognitive impairments, including FASD, away from prisons and into programs and services.

[National Drug Strategy 2017-2026](#)

Justice-involved young people have higher rates of substance use compared with the general population. The [National Drug Strategy](#), and its related sub-strategies, provides a national framework of national priorities relating to alcohol, tobacco and other drugs, guides action by governments in partnership with service providers and the community, and outlines a national commitment to harm minimisation through the balanced adoption of effective demand, supply and harm reduction strategies.

[Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031](#)

[Australia's Disability Strategy](#) recognises that all levels of government are responsible for supporting people with disability, and provides national leadership towards their greater inclusion of people with disability. The Safety, Rights and Justice Outcome Area aims to promote, uphold and protect the rights of people with disability and ensure they feel safe and enjoy equality before the law. Under this Outcome Area, there is a Policy Priority focused on ensuring the criminal justice system responds effectively to the complex needs and vulnerabilities of people with disability.

National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing 2017-2023

The Framework is a guide to inform Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health and wellbeing reform and aims to respond to the high incidence of social and emotional wellbeing problems and mental ill-health by providing a framework for action. The Closing the Gap Social and Emotional Wellbeing Policy Partnership will oversee the refresh of the Framework in 2023-24.

The Australian Government Plan to Improve Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People with Disability

Is the first of its kind that aims to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability to achieve improved outcomes and overall social, emotional, cultural and economic wellbeing.

The National Housing and Homelessness Agreement

Provides \$1.6 billion each year to states and territories to improve Australians', including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young peoples, to access secure and affordable housing. This further includes \$129 million set aside for homelessness services in 2020-21.

3. Key Australian Government initiatives

Many of the key drivers which increase the likelihood of children and young people experiencing contact with the criminal justice system fall within the responsibilities of states and territory governments, including tertiary services and systems such as youth justice and child protection.

Notwithstanding this, Australian Government agencies are collaboratively working on a range of issues that affect children and young people, and the government is taking a leadership role where a national approach or national consistency is key to achieving better outcomes. Consistent with the government's obligations under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, many Australian Government initiatives include a focus on the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. There are also a number of national data set projects being progressed to improve the evidence base for national and local initiatives.

The key initiatives below highlight how we are working at the Australian Government level and with states and territories to improve children and young people's wellbeing and reduce their engagement with justice systems.

3.1 Youth justice initiatives

Minimum age of criminal responsibility

The Commonwealth Attorney-General is working with state and territory Attorneys-General on a proposal to raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility (MACR). The [Standing Council of Attorneys-General](#) (SCAG) reconvened the Age of Criminal Responsibility Working Group in August 2022 to continue to develop the proposal, paying particular attention to eliminating the overrepresentation of First Nations children in the criminal justice system, building on earlier work by the Working Group that concluded in 2020. The Working Group includes membership from the Justice Policy Partnership to ensure First Nations' expert knowledge and lived experience is incorporated into this work. The Working Group is expected to produce a report for the next SCAG meeting in the second half of 2023.

The Working Group is considering how to ensure alternative pathways are available outside the criminal justice system to support at risk children, and the broader concepts and principles that should underly the MACR, including:

- underlying issues and risk factors that lead children into the criminal justice system

- individualised and diverse needs of children who engage with the criminal justice system
- first responses to children under a raised MACR, including the involvement of police
- secondary response to children under a raised MACR, including case management and supporting families,
- victim participation and restorative justice.

The working group will be considering case studies that include the experiences of children within the criminal justice system, experiences of victims and communities and examples of successful or promising programs within Australia at this time. Noting that Attorneys-General tasked the Working Group to focus on eliminating the overrepresentation of First Nations children in the criminal justice system, this will include case studies that have a First Nations focus.

Justice Policy Partnership

The [Justice Policy Partnership \(JPP\)](#), co-led by AGD and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS), is the first of five Policy Partnerships established under the National Agreement. The JPP brings together all levels of government, the Coalition of Peaks, and independent First Nations representatives to take a joined-up approach to address Outcomes 10 and 11 of the National Agreement.

The JPP's Strategic Framework includes initiatives to drive transformed justice models, co-design principles, anti-racism strategies, cultural capabilities, accountability mechanisms, and sector strengthening plans; all of which are to be delivered through partnerships across governments and First Nations communities.

Indigenous Advancement Strategy

Through the Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS), administered by NIAA, the Australian Government also supports youth wellbeing and positive behaviour. This includes:

- The delivery of youth diversion and support activities to complement efforts by states and territories to improve justice and community safety outcomes by reducing the underlying drivers of youth crime and antisocial behaviour.
- The delivery of Youth Through Care programs in Queensland, the Northern Territory and Victoria which provides intensive case management to First Nations young people transitioning from detention back into their communities.
- Community Safety Patrols aim to improve community safety by employing over 400 local community members to patrol high risk areas, offering community members culturally sensitive assistance and providing transportation to a safe place.
- Custody Notification Services to provide culturally appropriate health and wellbeing checks and basic legal information to all First Nations people brought in to police custody, and help address the risk of First Nations deaths in custody.
- The Indigenous Youth Connection to Culture (IYCC) program which supports First Nations young people to build stronger connections to their culture, families and Elders, and in doing so, aims to contribute to improved mental health, suicide prevention and reduce risk taking behaviour by strengthening resilience through positive identity and self-esteem.

Countering violent extremism (CVE) initiatives to address youth radicalisation

The prevalence of minors within Counter-Terrorism caseloads across our national security agencies and intervention programs is increasing. The Australian Government, working with states and territories, is committed to addressing the increase of youth radicalisation through a number of national initiatives.

Living Safe Together Intervention Program

Established in 2015, the Australian Government's *Living Safe Together* Intervention Program is a voluntary program run in every state and territory that provides support to people who are at risk of radicalising, or have already radicalised to violent extremism. *Living Safe Together* provides tailored services to support individuals to reconnect with family, friends and local community in a more positive way. Additional funding of \$24.5 million over four years, commencing in 2022–23, is supporting the expansion of the existing program, with a particular focus on youth and individuals that may be at risk in rural and regional communities.

CVE Youth and Mental Health Advisory Group

The Department of Home Affairs has established a CVE Youth and Mental Health Advisory Group under the Australia New Zealand Counter-Terrorism Committee (ANZCTC) architecture following a National Summit on Youth Radicalisation in August 2022. The advisory group will explore and consolidate evidence and best practice, and make recommendations to uplift CVE capabilities in relation to youth and those with complex mental health needs.

First Nations Justice Reinvestment Initiatives

In addition to existing initiatives funded through the IAS, as part of the Australian Government's broader First Nations reform agenda the 2022-23 Budget included a landmark investment of \$99 million over four years to implement a package of complementary measures to address the overrepresentation of First Nations people in the criminal justice system. This includes funding for justice reinvestment, national real-time reporting of deaths in custody and additional funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (ATSILS) and Family Violence and Prevention Legal Services. The 2023-24 Budget committed an additional \$10 million for justice reinvestment in Central Australia as part of a \$250 million commitment to implement a plan for *A Better, Safer Future for Central Australia*.

Justice reinvestment allows First Nations communities to identify the best ways to prevent and reduce contact with the criminal justice system, and empowers those communities to make decisions about the policies, programs and decisions that affect their lives. The National Justice Reinvestment Program will support up to 30 place-based, community-led justice reinvestment initiatives across Australia to address the drivers of incarceration, including early investments in Halls Creek, Western Australia and Alice Springs, Northern Territory. Existing initiatives, such as the Maranguka Justice Reinvestment project in Bourke, have a proven record of reducing rates of family and domestic violence by ensuring communities are resourced to provide prevention and early intervention activities, delivered in a culturally appropriate manner that take into consideration family connections and sensitivities.

The funding also includes \$12.5 million to establish an independent National Justice Reinvestment Unit to coordinate and support justice reinvestment initiatives at a national level. Subject to design, the National Justice Reinvestment Unit may perform functions such as coordinating and supporting justice reinvestment initiatives, conducting research, data analysis and evaluation of trial programs, and providing technical expertise and best practice advice.

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) assessment services in youth justice settings

Since 2018 the Australian Government has invested over \$62 million in FASD prevention, diagnosis and support activities aligned to the *National Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) Strategic Action Plan 2018-2028*. This includes funding to pilot a number of models of care for FASD screening and assessment, including in youth justice settings in the Northern Territory, Western Australia, South Australia, Victoria, Tasmania and New South Wales.

3.2 Child and youth wellbeing initiatives

Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership

The Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership (ECP) is the second of five Policy Partnerships that brings together governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives to develop recommendations to improve early childhood outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. The Partnership will drive coordinated efforts to support policy reform in early childhood education and care, maternal and child health and child safety sectors and support reforms across early childhood systems.

The ECP has been co-developed with:

- [SNAICC– National Voice for our Children](#) (SNAICC), the national peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families
- Australian Government departments with responsibility across:
 - early childhood education and care
 - maternal and child health
 - child protection and families.

The Partnership will focus on the Priority Reforms and Outcomes 2, 3, 4, 12 and 13 of Closing the Gap, with key objectives of the Partnership including:

- identifying reforms to support First Nations children to achieve their potential in the early years, to set them up for long-term success
- actioning priority reforms in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, particularly First Nations community-led initiatives
- identifying opportunities to work more effectively across governments, Coalition of Peaks and community organisations
- enabling First Nations representatives, communities and organisations to negotiate and implement agreements with governments to support Closing the Gap

The Australian Government has committed \$10.2 million over three years to establish the Partnership with the Partnership being part of the commitment of Australian governments to the National Agreement on [Closing the Gap](#) (National Agreement). In line with the National Agreement, the Partnership will be reviewed after three years.

National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement

In March 2022, the Australian Government and all states and territories entered into a new National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement (National Agreement). An important first step to reforming Australia's mental health and suicide prevention system, the National Agreement aims to achieve systemic, whole-of-government reform to deliver a comprehensive, coordinated, consumer-focused mental health and suicide prevention system with joint accountability across all governments.

The National Agreement includes a number of child and youth focused initiatives including growing the national network of headspace services, addressing gaps in child mental health and providing better integration across federal and state-funded services. For example:

- Headspace is the Australian Government's primary youth mental health program, providing holistic support for young people aged 12-25 experiencing, or at risk of, mild to moderate mental ill health. The government has committed \$155.2 million

over the four years of the National Agreement to enhance the national headspace network.

- Delivering on a key action within the *National Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy* to create a national network of Head to Health Kids Hubs (mental health and wellbeing centres) for children aged 0 – 12 years and their families. The Kids Hubs will complement and integrate with existing state funded maternal and child health services, targeting mild to moderate emerging complexity. An integrated, multidisciplinary team will deliver a range of specialist medical and allied health services, strengthening early intervention and prevention outcomes for children's mental health and wellbeing.

First Nations child health programs that intersect with the justice system

Waminda Dead or Deadly and Young Women's Program

- The Department of Health and Aged Care (Health) funds the Young Women's Program delivered by Waminda South Coast Women's Health and Wellbeing Aboriginal Corporation (Waminda) to improve the health and wellbeing of young First Nations women in the Shoalhaven Region, NSW.
- A component of the program includes supporting First Nations Women aged 12-24 who are involved with or at risk of becoming involved with the justice system.
- This is achieved through the provision of strengths-based case management and advocacy to young women, who are entering or re-entering the juvenile justice system.
- Waminda also forms working relationships with relevant youth justice organisations and other youth, health, and welfare organisations to further support and improve outcomes for First Nations women who are involved with the justice system.

Australian Nurse-Family Partnership Program (ANFPP)

- The Australian Nurse-Family Partnership Program (ANFPP) is an Australian Government funded comprehensive nurse home visitor program for women pregnant with a First Nations baby and provides support across the perinatal period until their child is two years old.
- The ANFPP, delivered by the Greater Western Aboriginal Health Service (GWAHS) – a Wellington Aboriginal Corporation Health Service entity, is currently undertaking work that intersects with the justice system, namely, 'Supporting Our Sistas Inside: Working with women in custody'.
- GWAHS accepts referrals from their GWAHS Clinic, the Department of Communities and Justice, Safe Start Meetings (Blacktown and Nepean Local Health Districts), Justice Health, local high schools, community programs and self-referrals.
- While there is no specific data for the ANFPP being delivered to women in the justice system, GWAHS does receive referrals from Justice Health for mothers that are incarcerated while pregnant or found out they are pregnant when screened on entering incarceration.
- The Australian Government has funded Wellington Aboriginal Corporation Health Service (inclusive of GWAHS) to deliver the ANFPP since 2009, with an agreement in place until 2024-25.

Child and Youth Assessment and Treatment Services (CYATS)

- The Australian Government has committed \$18.42 million over four financial years (2022-23 to 2025-26) to the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress Aboriginal Corporation (Congress) to expand their existing CYATS program.
- CYATS provides early detection and intervention for neurodevelopmental conditions (including FASD).

- The expansion will further extend the reach of services into remote communities in Central Australia, acting as a regional hub, and increase the CYATS teams' capacity to work with schools, other service providers and the youth justice system.

Primary Health Networks (PHN) Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence (including child sexual abuse) Pilot

Under the 'Improving Health System Responses to Family and Domestic Violence' measure, announced as part of the 2019-20 federal Budget, the government invested a total of \$9.5 million over four years. A small cohort of PHNs have been funded from 2022/23 to 2025/26 to pilot increased support to primary care providers to assist in the early identification and intervention of family, domestic, sexual violence and child sexual abuse (FDSV). The PHN FDSV pilot will provide support for families across the life course, with the specific engagement with children and young people in the context of family violence and child sexual abuse. Further, this measure incorporated the development of 'Nationally Consistent Sexual Violence Resources', inclusive of child sexual abuse resources, to further strengthen the understanding of and support for primary care providers. The increased identification, response and referral activity from primary care providers will positively impact a child and young person's wellbeing.

Connected Beginnings

Connected Beginnings was established in 2016 and aims to help First Nations children aged zero to five to become school ready. The program works closely with First Nations communities, drawing on their strengths and knowledge to identify early childhood priorities, and to lift participation in quality and culturally appropriate early childhood services and programs to improve school readiness and developmental outcomes for children.

In August 2021, the Australian Government committed an additional \$81.8 million to the Department of Education (Education) and the Department of Health and Aged Care (Health) to support the expansion of the program to 50 sites nationally by 2025. As of June, Education funds 39 sites across Australia and Health funds 34 sites, collectively supporting around 15,400 First Nations children.

Both Education and Health have peak-body Community Partners supporting the program, SNAICC and NACCHO, respectively. Connected Beginnings contributes to the Priority Reforms under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap at both the site and program level.

3.3 Cross-sector initiatives addressing drivers which support wellbeing or youth justice system contact

Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031: Targeted Action Plans

Under Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031, Targeted Action Plans (TAPs) will be developed to apply an intensive focus over one to three years to improve outcomes for people with disability. By using TAPs, extra work will be done in priority areas identified by people with disability. Each TAP is agreed to by disability ministers. The first five TAPs include a TAP focusing on early childhood, as well as TAPs focusing on community attitudes, employment, safety and emergency management.

Disability Sector Strengthening Plan

The Disability Sector Strengthening Plan, co-designed in genuine partnership with the First Peoples Disability Network (FPDN), the national peak for First Nations people with disability, and all Australian Governments, aims to improve understanding, support for, and representation of First Nations peoples with disability to ensure that all policy, programs and services are culturally safe, inclusive and accessible. These efforts are relevant to ensuring that First Nations people with disability receive equitable treatment throughout the justice and child protection systems and in their interactions with mainstream and community-controlled service providers.

National Drug Strategy

Under the National Drug Strategy, the Australian Government supports peer-based programs for reducing and preventing drug related harms, including:

SMART Recovery

Aims to ensure all Australians are supported to manage problematic behaviours related to addiction.

SMART Recovery's Facilitator Training has a module designed specifically to help people currently in the criminal justice system. The program is aimed at upskilling professionals who work with people that find themselves within the Judicial System and are struggling with alcohol and other drug issues.

Alcohol and Drug Foundation- Good Sports Program.

Provides alcohol and other drug primary prevention activities in community sports clubs across Australia by encouraging cultural change in behaviours and attitudes to alcohol and other drug use in sporting clubs at the grass roots level. The Good Sports program includes processes and policies targeting junior players; to reduce risks that young people are exposed to risky alcohol use in the club setting. Resources targeting these groups includes safe celebrations guide to promote inclusive memberships, alcohol free environments for junior participants, risks of alcohol use for juniors and alcohol management for parents and families.

Alcohol and Drug Foundation – Reducing harm from illicit drugs through support for families

The Path2Help directory has over 10,000 national service providers of alcohol and other drug management and support and identifies those who specialise in providing youth services.

The directory tags each service provider entry to help people identify those that specialise in providing services specifically for priority populations such as Indigenous clients, women, maternal and child health.

Local Drug Action Teams (LDATs)

Supports communities to work together to prevent and minimise the harm caused by alcohol and other drugs. The Alcohol and Drug Foundation delivers the Program on behalf of the Australian Government, recruiting local community organisations into the program and supporting them to develop locally-focused and responsible community Action Plans and implement evidence-based prevention activities.

Counselling Online

Counselling Online is available 24/7 to allow access to specialised drug and alcohol counselling and support by a qualified counsellor. The Counselling Online service now offers support in the form of self-assessment tools, an online support community, self-help, information articles, chat-based counselling, questions by email, and telephone support. Online delivery has enabled increased access for young people as compared to traditional support services.

Positive Choices

Provides evidence-based information, tools, and resources on the harms of alcohol and other drugs for young people, teachers/school staff and parents. Positive Choices also provides parents with information and guidance about how to have important conversations with their kids about drugs and equips teachers, school counsellors, and parents with accurate information and evidence-based harm prevention strategies.

Youth Engagement Model

The Australian Government has established the new Youth Engagement Model including the Office for Youth to hear directly from young people about the policies and programs that matter to them.

As part of the model a youth engagement strategy will be developed to improve how the Australian Government works with young people now and into the future.

Family law and family safety reforms

The Australian Government is progressing reforms to ensure that the family law system is accessible, simple to use, safe and delivers justice and fairness for all Australian families, including children.

Two Bills were introduced to Parliament on 29 March 2023 to amend the Family Law Act. The Family Law Amendment Bill 2023 prioritises the best interests of children in family law proceedings by introducing a simpler and clearer parenting framework, and repealing the widely misunderstood presumption of equal shared parental responsibility to promote safer parenting arrangements. The Family Law Amendment (Information Sharing) Bill 2023 establishes an enhanced, court-led information sharing framework, empowering the courts to seek critical child abuse, neglect and family violence information earlier, more efficiently and throughout proceedings. The Bill implements key aspects of the National Strategic Framework for Information Sharing between the Family Law and Family Violence and Child Protection Systems (National Framework). The National Framework provides a framework for nationally consistent two-way information sharing between these intersecting federal, and state and territory systems, ensuring those making decisions will be better informed to make decisions prioritising the best interests of the child, and protecting the safety of children, families and individuals.

The enhanced information sharing framework to be introduced by the Information Sharing Bill builds on existing mechanisms for information sharing through the successful co-location of state and territory police and child protection officials in registries around Australia. These officers have proved invaluable in supporting the court to obtain critical information to inform risk assessment, interim orders and final decisions.

The co-location program varies between jurisdictions, allowing it to meet the needs of each location and continue to innovate the way in which the federal courts, and state and territory agencies work together. South Australia is one example of where the base co-location model has been expanded upon to foster greater connection between agencies. Information shared with co-located officials in this jurisdiction has informed coordinated actions between police and child protection to remove children from dangerous, and often criminal, circumstances.

In addition to enhanced information sharing, the family law courts have also implemented the Lighthouse Project, which has seen a fundamental shift in the way the court identifies and manages family safety risk. This project has supported a significant number of high-risk families to resolve their family law matters in a manner which is safe. The Australian Government has provided additional funding to ensure the Lighthouse Project is available to families through all 15 primary family law registries.

3.4 Data initiatives

Government policy and programs are informed by evidence and best practice. The below initiatives provide an insight into how the collection of data is being used to support and improve outcomes for Australia's children and young people. Many of these initiatives collate national data or share data across the government to enable appropriate, holistic analysis that can be used to guide the development of pathways and frameworks to aide in the reduction of children and young people's involvement in youth justice and child protection systems.

National youth justice and child wellbeing data

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) holds a number of national data collections and is actively building enduring linked data assets, which can be used to explore service use patterns and pathways for young people. AIHW's data holdings cover fields as diverse as housing assistance, homelessness, perinatal health, disability, cancer, hospitals and hospital activity, alcohol

and other drugs, and mortality. This data is used to support a wide range of health and wellbeing reporting, including on [children and young people, family, domestic and sexual violence](#) and on communities, such as [Region Insights for Indigenous Communities](#).

National data collections and data assets are important to inform development of policy and practice. Investment needs to be made in data collections as part of the development of monitoring and evaluation strategies.

Youth Justice National Minimum Data Set and Child Protection National Minimum Data Set

The **Youth Justice National Minimum Data Set (YJ NMDS)** is an annual collection of information on young people aged 10 and over under youth justice supervision in Australia.

The **Child Protection National Minimum Data Set (CP NMDS)** is an annual collection of data on children aged under 18 who come into contact with state and territory departments responsible for child protection.

Data from these collections are used for multiple national reporting purposes, including:

- Reporting on Closing the Gap outcomes 11 (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are not overrepresented in the criminal justice system) and 12 (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are not overrepresented in the child protection system)
- Regular AIHW national reporting exploring key aspects of [youth justice](#) supervision and [child protection](#) systems, including recent trends.

Data linkage

Through data linkage, YJ NMDS and CP NMDS data are used to support a holistic understanding of the wellbeing of young people under youth justice supervision or in contact with child protection systems, including:

- Child Protection-Youth Justice linkages – AIHW link YJ NMDS data and CP NMDS every two years to better understand how young people flow between the child protection and youth justice systems.
- Youth Justice-Health linkage project – Led by researchers at University of Melbourne, this project involves linking YJ NMDS, state and territory hospitals admissions and emergency department data, and national Medicare, Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS), and deaths data.
- Child Protection-Centrelink linkages – AIHW have linked state and territory out-of-home care data with Commonwealth (Centrelink) income support payment data to build the evidence-base on young people's transitions from out-of-home care to independent living.
- Child Protection-National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) linkage project – AIHW is beginning work on a project that will link selected data from the CP NMDS with data from the NDIS. This linkage aims to provide further information on children who have come into contact with both the child protection system and NDIS.
- National Crime and Justice Data Linkage Project – In partnership with the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), AIHW are progressing a national linkage of YJ NMDS data with police, courts and adult corrections data in the ABS' Criminal Justice Data Asset (in development). This linkage aims to provide a better understand the flows of young people from the youth to adult justice systems.

Current major AIHW data asset initiatives

- National Child Wellbeing Data Asset (CWDA) – AIHW are developing the CWDA, which is a measure under the National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse. The

CWDA will be an enduring, child-centred, linked data asset that enables holistic analysis of children's service pathways and outcomes. The YJ NMDS and CP NMDS have been identified as key collections to be included in the CWDA.

- National Disability Data Asset (NDDA) –The Department of Social Services, in partnership with the Australian Bureau of Statistics and AIHW are leading the initial phase of the National Disability Data Asset. Once established, the NDDA will bring together de-identified information from different government agencies about Australians with disability and without disability. This will help us to better understand the experiences of people with disability. The asset will give us more information about programs and services. This will help us to better support people with disability, their carers and the community.

Related AIHW publications:

- [Youth detention population in Australia 2022](#)
- [Young people under youth justice supervision and their interaction with the child protection system 2020–21](#)
- [Child protection Australia 2021–22](#)
- [Income support receipt for young people transitioning from out-of-home care 2022](#)
- [Vulnerable young people: interactions across homelessness, youth justice and child protection: 1 July 2011 to 30 June 2015](#)
- [Overlap between youth justice supervision and alcohol and other drug treatment services: 1 July 2012 to 30 June 2016](#)

The Australian Child Maltreatment Study

The Australian Child Maltreatment Study (ACMS) is the first national study of all five forms of child maltreatment. It found that prevalence is far higher than previously known, with significant life-long impacts. A scoping study for Wave 2 of the ACMS is anticipated to be completed in early 2024. Wave 2 will enhance the existing ACMS in a number of ways, including:

- producing national representative prevalence estimates for National Strategy priority groups, including First Nations people, people with a disability and culturally and linguistically diverse people
- building upon data gaps
- collecting data to measure National Strategy implementation progress, and
- detecting and measuring changes in prevalence over time.