

MEDIA RELEASE

\$3.9 Billion Budget Surplus Provides Little to Fix a Broken Child Protection System

Issued: 20 June 2018 – The NSW Government has announced a \$3.9 billion surplus in this year's budget but according to The Benevolent Society – Australia's oldest charity – the Government has failed to allocate any serious funding to a child protection system described in the recently released [Tune Report](#) as ineffective, crisis-driven and unsustainable.

The Benevolent Society's Executive Director, Strategic Engagement, Research & Advocacy, Dr Kirsty Nowlan, says: "The 2018-19 Budget does not deliver the major shift in funding that the system needs to prevent harm and that numerous inquiries and reports have recommended.

"Whilst 100 new case workers and managers are always welcome, they will be thrown into a system that is overwhelmed and under resourced, with only one in three significant risk of harm reports receiving a face to face assessment from the Department of Family and Community Services (FACS).

"This budget will not bring about the 'disruptive change to the system' recommended by the *Tune Report* nor fix 'the clear and urgent problems' described by NSW Coroner Harriet Grahame, in her recent scathing report into two infant deaths," adds Dr Nowlan.

The Benevolent Society is adamant that the Government has not committed to funding that will front load the system to prevention and early intervention of child abuse and neglect. Instead, funding for statutory intervention and removal of children into out-of-home care and permanency placement has increased from \$960 million in 2015-16 to \$1.2 billion in 2018-19. The Government's signature child protection reform, *Their Futures Matter*, provides only \$188 million over four years, a fraction of the funding needed to turn the situation around.

"The 2018-19 Budget's additional focus on increasing open adoption is ideological and should not be used as a way to drive down the numbers of children in out-of-home care. Setting targets and timeframes for adoption reflects Government priorities, with funding again directed at the wrong end of the system and not at the issues that are failing children," says Dr Nowlan.

There are nearly 18,000 children in out-of-home care in NSW; that is, 18,000 children who are not with their families. Despite knowing that outcomes for these children are poorer, there is seemingly nothing in this budget that will change these outcomes or prevent more children entering the system.

"With the announcement of a significant budget surplus and a commitment from the Government to focus on NSW families, it is deeply disappointing to see the most vulnerable children in NSW again ignored. It is not good enough for the Government to tell us how much it is spending on the child protection system. Instead, it needs to tell the people of NSW what it is achieving for the children and young people who most need their help.

"The Benevolent Society wants to see system-wide reform that shifts the focus from removal of children to prevention and early intervention that helps families provide safe care for their children. This budget offers very little evidence that the NSW Government is committed to the 'disruptive change' that is needed to reform a broken system," concludes Dr Nowlan.

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About The Benevolent Society

The Benevolent Society is Australia's first charity, working as a catalyst for social justice and change for over 200 years. Founded in 1813, The Benevolent Society advocates for a better life for all Australians, and provides in-home services for older Australians, and people with disability, as well as providing programs in Family support and early intervention. We help people age well and live their best lives, staying in their homes wherever possible.

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