



# **Children's wellbeing and safety is everyone's business - parents, carers, communities, government and non-government service providers all have critical roles to play.**

National Framework for Protecting Australia Children 2012 - 2020

One third of all Australian children live in NSW. What happens for children in NSW matters and NSW needs to lead the country on investment and support for children and young people to have safe and fulfilling lives.

While children's development requires strong support, stable relationships and a safe place to call home not everyone is on an equal footing.

In NSW, we know that 14% of children under the age of 15 are experiencing poverty – a rate higher than any other mainland state. This means that almost 1 in 7 children are living in households below the poverty line.<sup>1</sup>

In 2016-17, just over 5,000 unaccompanied children and young people aged 12-18 presented to a NSW homelessness service to access support and a place to stay. More than one third of these children were under 16.<sup>2</sup>

And NSW has the highest number of children in out-of-home care, with 18,870 children living away from their families, a number that has doubled in the past 10 years.<sup>3</sup>

We cannot allow this to continue.

The *Every Child* campaign believes that NSW needs solutions that address a range of intersecting issues so that families can access universal services and supports when they need them to avoid crisis and to care for their children.



## The help you need within pram pushing distance

In NSW, we know that disadvantaged communities exist across the state, in suburbs, towns and regions. We know that these communities are grappling with a range of complex issues and that government and sector organisations can struggle to provide the full range of interconnected services that are needed.

Locational disadvantage creates areas where social cohesion is frayed, where there is a strong need for preventive investment in child and family support, accessible early childhood health care and education, and new ways for partnerships between government, business, not-for profits, and communities themselves.

The *Every Child* campaign believes NSW needs to develop place-based responses for areas of locational disadvantage, with local people and organisations resourced to design and deliver their own solutions through cross sector partnerships.

Service design and delivery must be grounded in communities with easy access to the integrated and interconnected supports that children and families need.

The *Every Child* campaign calls on the NSW government to:

- Commit to developing place based solutions in areas of locational disadvantage;
- Identify priority communities; and
- Identify suitable partners, including local government, schools, community organisations and sector partners to deliver effective solutions.



## The right support at the right time

There is ample evidence and widespread agreement that investment in early intervention and prevention services is crucial for the wellbeing and safety of children.

Despite the evidence and its own rhetoric, the NSW Government continues to spend record amounts of resources at the tertiary end of the child protection system and only a small percentage on early intervention programs to support vulnerable families and their children.

The *Every Child* campaign believes there must be increased, coordinated and sustained investment in early intervention and prevention programs to reduce the numbers of children reported at risk of harm and stem the flow of children into out-of-home care.

The *Every Child* campaign supports the recommendations of the FAMS 'Investing in Children' report and calls on the NSW Government to work with the sector to deliver a true prevention model that:

- Is flexible and able to deliver tailored responses to individual families' needs;
- Is data driven, with data shared between the Government and service deliverers to inform program design and responses;
- Funds service providers to work with families for as long as it takes to build capacity;
- Promotes access to and coordination of service and other community based supports for families; and
- Is outcomes focused and evidence informed.<sup>4</sup>





## Measure what matters, fund what works

NSW needs tailored and targeted approaches that recognise the multiple and intersecting forms of hardship and disadvantage that can affect children and families at different points of their lives. Just as no two children are the same, the needs and supports that families require at different points of their children's lives are varied and multidimensional.

The Government's current reform agenda is failing to improve outcomes for NSW children and young people. *Every Child* is campaigning for a system that is coordinated, integrated and evidence informed. We believe the system must:

- Be focussed on early intervention and true prevention;
- Provide better measurement that contributes to building the evidence base of what works; and
- Deliver more targeted intervention where it is needed.

Our system needs to tell us what is working and what is not. We need to understand how a program, service or the broader system has positively changed or contributed to better outcomes for children, families or a community. We need the right information to inform government policy so that decision makers can make the right decisions.

The *Every Child* campaign is calling for reform across the child wellbeing and safety service continuum to:

- Establish a transparent evaluation framework for the child wellbeing and safety continuum to ensure funding is targeted where it is most needed
- Set predictive indicators to inform policy, program development and delivery and direct funding to early intervention;
- Improve data collection to ensure that whole of sector and whole of government planning can occur;
- Increase and improve data sharing and sector, government and community collaboration to improve accountability for outcomes
- Invest in long term, evidence informed programs that are grounded in an Australian context and expertise.



## Child Protection

Every year in NSW 30,000 children who are assessed as being at risk of serious harm have their cases closed without the child or their families being contacted. This is frightening and unacceptable.

The 2016 Independent Review of Out-of-Home Care in NSW (The Tune Review) found the NSW Child Protection system was 'ineffective and unsustainable'. Whilst the NSW Government is undertaking its Their Futures Matter reform in response to the Review, the radical changes called for are not being implemented on the scale required.

Nowhere is the failure of the NSW child protection system more apparent than in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities where children and young people continue to be overrepresented in all child protection statistics including entry into and length of stay in out-of-home care.

Over the last 10 years the number of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care has increased by 58% and the number of Aboriginal children spending more than five years in continuous out-of-home care has increased by 129%.<sup>5</sup>

The current child protection system is clearly failing Aboriginal children and their families. Reform of the system means listening to Aboriginal people and acting on their advice. This means stopping current approaches that aren't supported by Aboriginal people, including the current push to legislate for adoption of Aboriginal children from out-of-home care.

The Family Matters campaign and AbSec have emphatically outlined not only the need, but the method for reducing the numbers of Aboriginal kids in care. There is little evidence the NSW Government is listening or acting.

The *Every Child* campaign calls on the NSW Government to:

- Provide additional funding to ensure that every child who is substantiated by FACS as being at risk of significant harm is assessed and referred to an appropriate child and family service;
- implement the building blocks from the Family Matters campaign; and
- work with AbSec and the Aboriginal community controlled sector to design an effective and accountable child and family system, which supports Aboriginal people from early intervention through to out-of-home care.



Sign up to the Every Child Campaign - **[click here](#)**

### **End notes**

<sup>1</sup> <https://platform.ncoss.org.au/family-connectedness/>

<sup>2</sup> NSW Ombudsman, June 2018

<sup>3</sup> FACS Statistics. (2018). Objective 2: Improving the lives of children and young people, Dashboard 9. Retrieved from <https://public.tableau.com/profile/facs.statistics#!/>.

<sup>4</sup> FAMS Investing in children and their families, The right support at the right time. 25 June 2018. P2

<sup>5</sup> AbSec <https://www.absec.org.au/news-what-we-want-from-the-NSW-election.html>