



Mick Gentleman MLA

MINISTER FOR PLANNING
MINISTER FOR ROADS AND PARKING
MINISTER FOR WORKPLACE SAFETY AND INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS
MINISTER FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE
MINISTER FOR AGEING

MEMBER FOR BRINDABELLA

Mr Brendan Smyth MLA
Chair
Standing Committee on Public Accounts
GPO Box 1020
CANBERRA ACT 2601



Dear Mr Smyth

I am writing to provide you with an annual outline on progress in relation to the Auditor-General's Report No. 1 of 2013: Care and Protection System.

Since the Minister previously responsible for this portfolio, Ms Joy Burch MLA, provided you an update in April 2014, there has again been considerable progress against the major reform agenda underway in Care and Protection Services.

Most significant amongst this reform agenda is *A Step Up for Our Kids – One Step Can make a Lifetime of Difference*, the ACT's new five year Out of Home Care Strategy that I announced on 22 January 2015. I enclose a copy of the Strategy for your information. The Strategy will strengthen existing child protection and out of home care services through the introduction of new services and reforms. In addition to existing funding for out of home care services, an additional \$16 million will be invested over three years for delivery of services provided for under the Strategy.

The funding will be used to address growth in children and young people in care and to lay the groundwork for transition to a new system designed to reduce growth in demand, deliver improved trauma informed outcomes for children and young people and better support for carers.

I am pleased to provide a full update on the Government's progress against the recommendations. Thank you for your ongoing interest in Canberra's most vulnerable children and young people.

Yours sincerely


Mick Gentleman MLA
Minister for Children and young People

26 May 2015

ACT LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Standing Committee on Public Accounts - Auditor-General's Report No 1 of 2013: Care and Protection System
Update on progress - April 2015

Recommendation	Government Response	Implementation Status
Recommendation 1 (a): Chapter 2 - best interests of the Child and Young Person The Community Services Directorate should improve its ability to give paramount consideration to the best interests of the child and young person, by: (a) modifying CHYPS to facilitate quick access to all Concern Reports for a particular child or young person so that comprehensive information is available for a risk assessment (High Priority);	Agreed The Government acknowledges the Auditor-General's findings about the inadequacy of the current data management system, Children and Young People System (CHYPS). This system was implemented in the ACT in 1999. The potential for activating further functionality within CHYPS is being explored through the Care and Protection Services and Bimberi Integrated Management Systems. Improvements will be made to facilitate quick access to Concern Reports so that comprehensive information can be used for assessment.	Completed Child Protection Services are implementing a comprehensive Integrated Management System (CPS IMS). The CPS IMS is a quality assurance system that embeds all policies, procedures and practice guidelines in a compliance and risk management framework. The CPS IMS will provide practical day to day guidance to workers in CPS. The Intake and Appraisal Module of the CPS IMS became operational on 31 January 2014. The procedure for assessing Concern Reports provides guidance to staff on accessing all previous Concern Reports. Significant training of all policies and procedures has been provided and will continue as core training. Functionality has been activated in CHYPS which provides a 'lifeview' of all critical events for a child, including concern reports. Further improvements to CHYPS continues and will be ongoing to simplify accessing relevant information for casework staff and reduce administrative burden wherever possible.
Recommendation 1 (b) The Community Services Directorate should improve its ability to give paramount consideration to the best interests of the child and young person, by: (b) monitoring children and young people who are the subject of multiple Concern Reports and/or Child Protection Reports for further consideration, when warranted (High Priority);	Agreed A monitoring process for children and young people subject to multiple Child Concern Reports has been enhanced and incorporated into a new module for the Integrated Management System.	Completed The Intake and Appraisal Module of the CPS IMS includes procedures for where children have been the subject of multiple reports on the new CPS Intake Form and includes instructions for staff in the accompanying practice guide.
Recommendation 1 (c) The Community Services Directorate should improve its ability to give paramount consideration to the best interests of the child and young person, by: (c) a Team Leader's approval being required for not completing Appraisal Outcome Reports within the 28 day target;	Agreed in Principle Consideration will be given to the most suitable method to approve/monitor the extension of time to complete Appraisal Outcome Reports. It should be noted that the Report on Government Services 2013 indicated that the ACT when compared to other jurisdictions continues to have the highest proportion of investigations which have commenced within 7 days (91.9%) and completed within 28 days (58.1%) (Tables 15A.14 and 15A.15).	Completed This requirement has been embedded within the Intake and Appraisal Module of the CPS IMS, specifically relating to the CPS Intake Form and accompanying procedures.

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Recommendation 1 (d) The Community Services Directorate should improve its ability to give paramount consideration to the best interests of the child and young person, by: (d) including sections for recording the views and wishes of a child or young person in templates for Child Protection Reports and Appraisal Outcome Reports (High Priority);	Agreed The recording of the views and wishes of a child or young person in templates for Children Protection Reports and Appraisal Outcome Reports has been incorporated into the new Intake and Appraisal module for the Integrated Management System.	Completed The recording of the views and wishes of a child or young person in templates for Child Protection Reports and Appraisal Outcome Reports has been incorporated into the Intake and Appraisal Module of the CPS IMS.
Recommendation 1 (e) The Community Services Directorate should improve its ability to give paramount consideration to the best interests of the child and young person, by: (e) providing detailed information in statements for removal, in addition to using wording from the Children and Young People Act 2008, when parental responsibility is transferred from a parent or carer to the Director General, under emergency action (High Priority);	Agreed	Completed This requirement has been embedded within the Intake and Appraisal Module of the CPS IMS, specifically the Intake Form and accompanying practice guide.
Recommendation 1 (f) The Community Services Directorate should improve its ability to give paramount consideration to the best interests of the child and young person, by: (f) requiring caseworkers to succinctly document on the 'consultation with operations manager' form alternatives they considered before recommending emergency action;	Agreed Recording consultations between operations managers and caseworkers where significant decisions about children and young people are made including Emergency Action processes will be clearly recorded.	Completed This requirement is outlined in the Intake and Appraisal Module of CPS IMS. There is a further requirement that the 'consultation with operations manager' form is being taken to the Application Review Committee as a quality checking process.
Recommendation 1 (g) The Community Services Directorate should improve its ability to give paramount consideration to the best interests of the child and young person, by: (g) placing all 'consultation with operations manager' documents in CHYPS;	Agreed	Completed Intake policy and procedures provide guidance to staff regarding recording requirements, when consultation with Managers and team leaders are required and when decisions require endorsement. In addition, the importance of clear decision making and recording is provided throughout the CPS IMS policies and procedures and there is specific practice guidance on this topic.

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Recommendation 1 (h) The Community Services Directorate should improve its ability to give paramount consideration to the best interests of the child and young person, by: (h) making information about the care and protection processes available online/electronically for children and young people, parents and carers;	Agreed	Completed 'Working Together For Kids' - A guide for parents and families to working with Care and Protection Services in the ACT, has been developed in partnership with the Family Inclusion Network. Broad consultation was held with a range of services including the Aboriginal Legal Services (NSW / ACT), Advocacy for Inclusion, Women's Legal Centre, Companion house, Domestic Violence Crisis Service, Relationships Australia and Streetlaw to name a few. The Working Together For Kids booklet became available on the CSD and Family Inclusion Network websites on 30 June 2014. Copies of the booklet was provided to the Family Inclusion Network who agreed to distribute it to a range of services who support parents in the ACT. The CPS IMS provides a broad range of Information Sheets for parents, children, and carers on various topics. CPS staff are able to print these down and distribute them as required. An independent carer advocacy service and an independent family advocacy and support service will be established under the auspice of "A Step Up For Our Kids" out of home care strategy. The Carer Handbook is already available and is undergoing revision.
Recommendation 1 (i) The Community Services Directorate should improve its ability to give paramount consideration to the best interests of the child and young person, by: (i) advising parents and carers that they can make a complaint to the Human Rights Commission (Children and Young People Commissioner) regarding the activities of Care and Protection Services Branch;	Agreed This will be implemented in consultation with the Children and Young People Commissioner.	Completed Complaint policies and procedures have been finalised. Consultation has occurred with the Human Rights Commission (HRC) about processes. The complaints unit advises complainants about functions of the HRC and other avenues of complaint processes. Ongoing training will continue with staff.

Recommendation	Government Response	Implementation Status
Recommendation 1 (j) The Community Services Directorate should improve its ability to give paramount consideration to the best interests of the child and young person, by: (j) monitoring the stability of placements for each child and young person including the number of placements and the length of time at each placement;	Agreed	Completed A range of policy, procedures, practice guides and information sheets have been developed in the CPS IMS, specifically the "Managing Placements" module to support improved monitoring and stability of placements. An improved annual review process for all children and young people in out of home care has been implemented and has the active participation of the agencies involved in the lives of those children and young people. In addition, there is a quality assurance process panel which provides feedback to staff completing reviews. In December 2014 CPS introduced the Viewpoint Interactive Tool, for use with all children and young people who are aged 5 years and above and who have been in out of home care for 3 months or more. Viewpoint is a tool for exploring with the child or young person on an annual basis, how they feel about their current care arrangements and what (if anything) they would like to change about their care plan. Seeking the views of children and young people assists in providing information as to the stability of the placement. This tracking of placement stability has been scoped within the new management and operational reporting capability, which is currently in testing.
Recommendation 1 (k) The Community Services Directorate should improve its ability to give paramount consideration to the best interests of the child and young person, by: (k) reducing the level of placement instability for children and young people in the care of the Director General in out-of-home care;	Agreed Care and Protection Services is always focused on reducing the level of placement instability for children in Out-of-Home Care, however decisions about stability do not override decisions about a child or young persons' safety and well being.	Completed Reducing the level of placement instability for children and young people in the care of the Director General in OOHC will be addressed by the development of the continuum of care domain within <i>A Step Up for Our Kids</i>. Providing a Continuum of Care will result in one agency taking the lead and supporting children and young people in long term care. The case management of children and young people on long-term orders will be outsourced to non-government agencies, strengthening the opportunities for community based agencies to tailor services to the child or young person and the people that care for them. <i>A Step Up for Our Kids</i> provides stronger support for permanency. It is built on a foundation of trauma informed practice and therapeutic assessment for each child and young person in care. Therapeutic plans will assist in ensuring the child and young person receives access to individualised support, and will provide more detailed information to carers about how to support and parent them.

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Recommendation 1 (l) The Community Services Directorate should improve its ability to give paramount consideration to the best interests of the child and young person, by: (l) the Director General and delegates, at all times, having ready access to accurate information on each child or young people in out of home care, that answers the questions of: (i) How many children and young people are in care? (ii) Who are they? (iii) Where are they (during non-school and school hours)? (iv) How are they?	Agreed CSD is already able to identify the number of children and young people in the care of the Director-General on any given day. CSD is already able to give the names and dates of birth for every child or young person in the care of the Director-General. The Government acknowledges that it is important that it has accurate, up to date information on the location of children, their carers' details and the school which they are attending. It should be noted that in most of the ten instances where information was not accurate, it was phone numbers of carers that were incorrect. The Government notes that where contact details for a carer were out of date the child was in the care of a community agency that was able to provide accurate information about the child or young person's whereabouts. The Directorate is able to contact an agency to obtain up to date information on a 24/7 basis. The Government outsources out of home care to non-government agencies in the belief that community organisations are better equipped to recruit and support foster carers in the community. However, these partnering arrangements add complexity to the administration of our of home care and create opportunities for data problems, of the kind identified, to arise. This is especially the case where some form of manual transfer of information is required. In relation to schooling, discussions are underway between the Education and Training and Community Services Directorates to ensure that information is exchanged appropriately between the school system and Care and Protection Services to maximise education and wellbeing outcomes for children and young people in out of home care and other vulnerable children and young people. Care and Protection Services undertake a number of review mechanisms including Annual Review and Review of Arrangements to consider the individual circumstances of every child and young person in the care of the Director-General who are in out of home care. Consideration of how best to strengthen the current system is underway.	Completed Care and Protection Services undertake a number of review mechanisms including Annual Reviews and Review of Arrangements to consider the individual circumstances of every child and young person in the care of the Director-General who is in out of home care. New procedures have been established by Care and Protection Services to improve the quality, timeliness and compliance of Annual Reviews and ensuring the Annual Review Report provides a history of the past 12 months in a way that builds a 'life story' for the child or young person. Monitoring of the impact of the new procedures will occur on a monthly basis. The Community Services and Education and Training Directorates have established the "Improving Educational Outcomes Committee" (for children and young people on child protection and youth justice orders). The committee had its first meeting on 10 November 2014 and will meet regularly over the course of 2015. All current out of home care agencies are represented on the committee. The Committee seeks to monitor educational outcomes for children and young people, support appropriate communications between sectors involved, facilitate flexible learning options for those students not engaged in mainstream education and establish subgroups to consider specific requests for assistance for flexible learning options by caseworkers.
Recommendation 1 (m) The Community Services Directorate should improve its ability to give paramount consideration to the best interests of the child and young person, by: (m) developing a quality control process to check that qualitative information for each child and young person is available and annually considered so that the question in Recommendation 1 (l) can be readily answered. (High Priority);	Agreed The Community Services Directorate is developing a substantial quality assurance process to ensure that the case management of each child and young person in care is subject to scrutiny on an annual basis independent of the caseworker, team leader and operations manager. This will complement the preparation of Annual Review reports and monitoring of Annual Reviews by the Public Advocate.	Completed New procedures have been established by Care and Protection Services to improve the quality, timeliness and compliance of Annual Reviews. 1) All Annual Review Reports are quality assured by a compliance officer prior to lodgement, and 2) Fifty percent of call Annual Review Reports are referred to a panel that meets fortnightly. This panel, chaired by a Senior Manager, focuses on the quality of the Annual Review Reports, in particular the voice of the child and quality of Care Plans.
Recommendation 1 (n) The Community Services Directorate should improve its ability to give paramount consideration to the best interests of the child and young person, by: (n) developing and implementing a policy for visitations for monitoring the welfare of children and young people in out-of-home care (High Priority);	Agreed A policy for visitations for monitoring the wellbeing of children and young people in out of home care at least once every twelve months will be incorporated into the Placement module of the Integrated Management System. This will include those children in long term placements case managed by our contracted non government service providers.	Completed This requirement is outlined in the Managing Placements module of the Care and Protection Services IMS. A specific Practice Guideline has been developed which provides guidance to staff on issues such as the frequency of visits, preparing annual review reports, and planning for visits. The annual review process is used to monitor compliance with this policy.

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Recommendation	Government Response	Implementation Status
Recommendation 1 (o) The Community Services Directorate should improve its ability to give paramount consideration to the best interests of the child and young person, by: (o) monitoring the implementation of its 'single caseworker' model;	Agreed	Completed Care and Protection Services have combined the Intake teams and Appraisal teams geographically focused to achieve single case management. Single case management and its implications will be determined during the transformational project currently underway to integrate the child protection and youth justice systems.
Recommendation 1 (p) The Community Services Directorate should improve its ability to give paramount consideration to the best interests of the child and young person, by: (p) modifying CHYPS to allow the number of caseworkers working with a child or young person to be extracted;	Agreed Improvements will be made to allow the extraction of the number of caseworkers working with a child or young person.	Completed The number of caseworkers working with a child or young person is currently available through CHYPS. A reporting tool has been developed and is currently in the testing phase to improve access to this information. It is expected that the new reporting tool will be fully implemented by July 2015.
Recommendation 1 (q) The Community Services Directorate should improve its ability to give paramount consideration to the best interests of the child and young person, by: (q) developing guidelines on what decisions should be recorded, and where these decisions should be recorded in CHYPS (High Priority);	Agreed Enhancing quality decision making is a project under the Refreshing the Service Culture program of change projects. Rollout of decision making training for 400 staff of Office for Children, Youth and Family Support and out of home care agencies has commenced and will be completed by the end of June 2013. A Decision Review Panel was established in 2012 to provide a decision review mechanism to advise the Executive Director, Office for Children, Youth and Family Support in relation to contentious decisions.	Completed Decision Making Training has been provided to OCYFS staff and is continuing as core training. Recording and communicating key decisions has been reinforced throughout the CPS IMS procedures, practice guides and information sheets.
Recommendation 1 (r) The Community Services Directorate should improve its ability to give paramount consideration to the best interests of the child and young person, by: (r) securing the support of the Strengthening Families Committee for it to identify ACT specific strategies for reducing the over representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, particularly males, in the care of the Director General, and advise the Minister for Community Services on how best to progress actions to implement strategies;	Agreed The ACT Government is deeply concerned about the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in the child protection system. It is acknowledged this is a national problem and cannot be solved in the absence of significant progress on "Closing the Gap" for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The Government is aware that improving opportunities and outcomes for Indigenous Australians requires intensive and sustained effort from all levels of government, as well as the private and not-for-profit sectors, communities and individuals. The Government agrees it will continue to identify ACT specific strategies for reducing the over representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and will refer any specific strategies to the Cabinet Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander subcommittee. The Community Services Directorate has had a project in place for over 12 months exploring how best to strengthen our engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients and community stakeholders in order to deliver improved outcomes for vulnerable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families. A new whole of Community Services Directorate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander office will be created over the coming months to focus on strategic direction, relationship management and building capability.	Completed The Strengthening Families Committee governance structure no longer exists. It has been replaced with the Better Services Taskforce as the overarching whole of government strategic framework guiding community engagement, community building and service delivery. <i>A Step Up for Our Kids</i> , Strengthening High-Risk Families domain will support the Government in its commitment to identifying ACT specific strategies for reducing the over representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in the care of the Director-General. The Whole of Government Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Justice Agreement further secures the governments support to address this issue.

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Recommendation	Government Response	Implementation Status
Recommendation 1 (s) The Community Services Directorate should improve its ability to give paramount consideration to the best interests of the child and young person, by: (s) securing the support of the Strengthening Families Committee, to develop and foster the implementation of strategies to increase access to information for people from non-English speaking and culturally diverse backgrounds (High Priority).	Agreed The Community Services Directorate agrees it will continue to develop and foster the implementation of strategies to increase access to information for people from non-English speaking and culturally diverse backgrounds and will refer any specific strategies to the ACT Government Policy Council for review.	In Progress The Strengthening Families Committee governance structure no longer exists. It has been replaced with the Human Services Blueprint as the overarching whole of government strategic framework guiding community engagement, community building and service delivery. The <i>Working Together for Kids Booklet</i> was developed in 2014 by Care and Protection Services in partnership with the Family Inclusion Network (FIN) and is being distributed to multicultural services across the ACT. The Office for Children, Youth and Family Support and the CSD Community Participation Group are working together to develop a communications strategy that supports multicultural services in the delivery of child safety dialogues with migrant and refugee communities. An independent carer advocacy service and an independent family advocacy and support service will be established under the auspice of "A Step Up For Our Kids" out of home care strategy.
Recommendation 2 (a): Chapter 3 - Knowledge Management and Governance The Community Services Directorate should improve its knowledge management and decision making, by: (a) the CHYPS 'client information sheet' template being modified to facilitate the collection of comprehensive information;	Agreed	Completed Changes implemented within the CPS IMS Intake form facilitates the collection of more comprehensive information within CHYPS to inform the client information sheet.
Recommendation 2 (b) The Community Services Directorate should improve its knowledge management and decision making, by: (b) defining terms used in CHYPS;	Agreed	Completed A glossary and new CHYPS guide has been developed in parallel with the CPS IMS and has been available since September 2014.
Recommendation 2 (c) The Community Services Directorate should improve its knowledge management and decision making, by: (c) optimising the use of CHYPS functions so that its use extends beyond being a document storage system;	Agreed The Community Services Directorate has a project underway to maximise the full functionality of CHYPS and scope further enhancements. Any identified additional improvements to CHYPS will be subject to budget funding.	In Progress A project has identified the priority improvements for CHYPS and these have been submitted to the vendor. These will be available in the April 2015 vendor release. Functionality on CHYPS has been reviewed. Life chart has been added to improve access to information, communication events have been made simpler and the ability to record annual report compliance issues has been added. Expected End Date: June 2015

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Recommendation 2 (d) The Community Services Directorate should improve its knowledge management and decision making, by: (d) monitoring attendance of Care and Protection Services Branch staff at mandatory training to optimise their use of CHYPS and taking action to enforce attendance when necessary;	Agreed	Completed The Community Services Directorate has implemented its learning management software, Capabiliti. This software records attendance at all training that Care and Protection Services staff attend. In addition, all staff are receiving additional training in CHYPS alongside the CPS IMS training.
Recommendation 2 (e) The Community Services Directorate should improve its knowledge management and decision making, by: (e) evaluating if CHYPS can be modified to better support the Care and Protection Services Branch or whether it should be replaced (High Priority); and	Agreed The Community Services Directorate has a project underway to maximise the full functionality of CHYPS and scope further enhancements. Two projects will be commenced in 2013-14 to support this recommendation. In the first instance all technically feasible fixes to CHYPS will be outlined, and based on prioritisation, will be implemented. Concurrently a scoping for whole system replacement will be undertaken. The latter scoping project will not be done in isolation drawing on ACT Government expertise, such as the Government Information Office and Shared Services ICT. It will also look to system level questions such as interoperability with other systems and scalability.	Completed Funding was received in the 2013-14 Budget for a feasibility study. A Request for Expression of Interest (REOI) was provided to the market to investigate new system options for integrated statutory services in April 2014. The panel has met and provided a final report. A new system will be progressed subject to budget funding.
Recommendation 2 (f) The Community Services Directorate should improve its knowledge management and decision making, by: (f) CHYPS, or its replacement, being compliant with record keeping standards so that it is the main file record system thereby significantly reducing the use of paper files.	Agreed This will form part of the organisation's ongoing review of the CHYPS system, noting that the current paper based system is a failsafe tool during any change process.	Completed Funding was received in the 2013-14 Budget for a CHYPS Feasibility study. Electronic record keeping compliance was a key component of the REOI scope document.
Recommendation 3 (a) The Community Services Directorate should improve its governance, by: (a) continuing to update care and protection policies and procedures by December 2013;	Agreed Care and Protection Services are in the process of updating policies and procedures through a rigorous, sequenced, comprehensive and standardised approach through the development of the Integrated Management System. Policies and procedures will be progressively implemented as they are developed. The Integrated Management System aims to support Care and Protection Service staff in best practice service delivery for their clients and to ensure compliance with legislative and policy requirements. The Integrated Management System project schedule provides for all policies and procedures to have been reviewed and refreshed and incorporated into IMS formats by December 2013, with the electronic version of the system implemented during 2014. The program and schedule of policy and procedure development is monitored by the Community Services Directorate Project Management Office.	Completed All policies, procedures, practice guides and information sheets are updated and implemented. Significant training of all policies and procedures has been underway since August 2014, and will continue as core training.
Recommendation 3 (b) The Community Services Directorate should improve its governance, by: (b) having all electronic links to key reference materials functioning;	Agreed The Integrated Management System will include electronic linking facilities. Practical questions about the maintenance of links and functioning of this system will form part of the business rules development and embedding of the procedures for the IMS.	Completed Electronic links are embedded within documents on the CPS IMS Knowledge Portal and are functioning. A CPS IMS team are established who monitor and maintain the Knowledge Portal.

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Recommendation 3 (c) The Community Services Directorate should improve its governance, by: (c) continuing to develop supporting tools for implementing policies and procedures;	Agreed The Integrated Management System is developing support tools to assist with implementing policies and procedures.	Completed All policies, procedures, practice guides and information sheets are updated and implemented. Significant training of all policies and procedures has been underway since August 2014 and will continue as core training.
Recommendation 3 (d) The Community Services Directorate should improve its governance, by: (d) the Quality Practice and Compliance Unit developing a forward review program and commence reviews, including on Care and Protection Services Branch practice management;	Agreed The Community Services Directorate has sought to strengthen quality assurance activities over the course of 2012 onwards including establishing a Quality Practice and Compliance team in Care and Protection Services. One of the projects under the Refreshing the Service Culture program is focused on case audit. The project commenced in mid 2012 and has delivered a tool for Care and Protection Services operations managers to conduct audits of cases to assess compliance with policy, legislation and practice.	Completed A case audit tool has been developed for Care and Protection Services Operations Managers to assess compliance with policy, legislation and practice. This tool will continue to be refined to assist managers to audit files. Finding from audits inform changes to procedures and practice guides. An audit and review plan has been established. Audits will be a combination of process and practice audits and will inform the review of all modules on the CPS IMS.
Recommendation 3 (e) The Community Services Directorate should improve its governance, by: (e) the Project Management Office closely monitoring the delivery of the Integrated Management System to assist achieving the identified milestones within specified target dates and routinely advising the Community Services Directorate's Audit and Review Committee on progress (High Priority);	Agreed The report from the Project Management Office will also become a standing item on the Audit and Review Committee agenda	Completed The governance of OCYFS has been refreshed to include Executive oversight of all current projects. This is titled the Business Improvement Executive. This Executive governance monitors progress of all external and internal audit and reviews. This committee reports to the CSD Project Management Office and Board of Management. An IMS Governance and Control group is established to control and monitor changes to policies and procedures on the IMS.
Recommendation 3 (f) The Community Services Directorate should improve its governance, by: (f) routinely monitoring the Care and Protection Services Branch Risk Register and Treatment Plan and updating these documents accordingly, with a review occurring annually;	Agreed	Completed The Care and Protection Services Risk Register and Treatment Plan is reviewed and updated on a monthly basis by the Office for Children, Youth and Family Support Executive.
Recommendation 3 (g) The Community Services Directorate should improve its governance, by: (g) the Directorate's Audit and Review Committee independently and routinely monitoring Care and Protection Services Branch's implementation of controls and additional treatments for its high and very high risks;	Agreed While the Audit and Review Committee already monitors risk, in future it will standardise this process by routinely monitoring the two highest risks in each unit of the Community Services Directorate.	Completed The Audit and Review Committee is briefed monthly on Care and Protection Services Risk Register and Treatment Plan, focusing on extreme and high risks.

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Recommendation 3 (h) The Community Services Directorate should improve its governance, by: (h) formally reviewing the Demand Management Report on a regular basis;	Agreed An internal review of the Demand Management Report has commenced for 2013. The review of Demand Management will be governed through the OCYFS Executive team.	In Progress A reporting tool has been developed and is currently in the testing phase. The new tool will be fully implemented by 1 July 2015. Expected Completion: July 2015
Recommendation 3 (i) The Community Services Directorate should improve its governance, by: (i) major Care and Protection Services Branch programs being included in its forward Internal Audit Programs; and	Agreed The audit priorities will be determined by the Director-General, Community Services Directorate on advice from the Audit and Review Committee.	Completed The Audit and Review Committee determines priorities across all Community Services Directorate business units, including Care and Protection Services.
Recommendation 3 (j) The Community Services Directorate should improve its governance, by: (j) the Project Management Office continuing to monitor the implementation of recommendations from internal and external reviews on care and protection services and internal continuous improvement initiatives, and routinely advising the Community Service Directorates' Audit and Review Committee on progress.	Agreed in Principle The Project Management Office will monitor in-scope strategic project based responses, reporting to a Strategic Projects meeting of the CSD Board of Management. The Audit and Review Committee will continue to monitor implementation of internal and external reviews, from a risk and audit perspective, as per its Charter. However, there is also a critical role for the CSD Board of Management to provide ongoing monitoring for any other project or management based actions that go to the overall operation of the Care and Protection System.	Completed Strategic Projects arising from reviews of Care and Protection Services are reported to the Community Services Directorate Board of Management.
Recommendation 4 (a): Chapter 4 - The Working Environment The Community Services Directorate should improve its workforce planning, capacity, capability and support, by: (a) developing a system to report its staff numbers accurately and in a consistent manner by its various Branches;	Agreed The Community Services Directorate has developed a comprehensive Workforce Development Strategy. There have been a range of specific responses identified to meet recruitment and retention needs of Care and Protection Services. These include initiatives such as Care and Protection staff modelling, international recruitment, local recruitment, university linkages, induction training and a retention allowance for frontline caseworkers.	Completed HR21, the ACT Government's Human Resources Software was implemented within Care and Protection Services mid 2013, allowing accurate reporting on staff numbers.
Recommendation 4 (b) The Community Services Directorate should improve its workforce planning, capacity, capability and support, by: (b) developing and implementing a process whereby when Duty Statements are updated internally and are provided to the Directorate's Organisational Services Branch;	Agreed	Completed Through the Integration of Statutory Services change management project a HR specialist has been employed and has undertaken a review and rewrite of all duty statements across the Care and Protection and Youth Justice services. This work was done in consultation with staff and the CSD Human Services team.

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Recommendation	Government Response	Implementation Status
Recommendation 4 (c) The Community Services Directorate should improve its workforce planning, capacity, capability and support, by: (c) fully implementing its learning management software, centrally recording learning and development plans of all staff and requiring all staff to have a learning and development plan to comply with the Community Services Directorate's Enterprise Agreement 2011-13 (High Priority)	Agreed	Completed Capabiliti, The Community Services Directorate's (CSD) learning management software, has been implemented, recording all learning and development attended by staff and allowing CSD to analyse training needs. CSD expects all staff to have an Individual Performance Agreement. The proportion of Individual Performance Agreements completed will be incorporated into Executive Performance Agreements.
Recommendation 4 (d) The Community Services Directorate should improve its workforce planning, capacity, capability and support, by: (d) assessing whether specific care and protection training courses are needed for new team leaders and managers	Agreed A project under the Refreshing the Service Culture program is already underway to identify any gaps in training and new training required to deliver new policy and procedures. This project will address whether there needs to be any further training courses for team leaders and managers.	Completed Care and Protection Services training is being reviewed consistent with the implementation of the CPS IMS. Implementing the IMS into business as usual has included the development of a 'Fundamentals' course for Managers, and will inform new core training. Significant training and support has been provided to CPS managers in relation to staff supervision and leadership. This work will continue with the implementation of an integrated child protection and youth justice service. The recruitment of an additional Practice Leader has occurred, along with three Principal Practitioners. These positions provide mentoring, support and advice to caseworkers along with role modelling good practice in casework. Learning Circles commenced in March 2015 which seeks to assist managers and team leaders manage change, continue the focus on developing leadership, build resilience in a time of significant change, assist managers to become coaches and mentors for staff, manage time in pressured environments, build skill to assist managers to have hard conversations with staff, and support accountable practice and decision making. These Learning Circles will continue for 12 months with a review to determine other areas of development required for team leaders and managers.
Recommendation 4 (e) The Community Services Directorate should improve its workforce planning, capacity, capability and support, by: (e) maximising participation in training through providing flexible learning options, such as on line courses;	Agreed	Completed Flexible learning options are currently considered in Individual Performance Agreements, for example through the use of mentors or co-working with experienced colleagues.

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Recommendation	Government Response	Implementation Status
Recommendation 4 (f) The Community Services Directorate should improve its workforce planning, capacity, capability and support, by: (f) encouraging the reporting of incidents so that it becomes part of the culture in the Care and Protection Services Branch;	Agreed	Completed Reporting of incidents within the Community Services Directorate currently occurs consistent with the ACT Insurance Authority (ACTIA) reporting requirements. CSD has implemented the use of RiskMan in reporting workplace issues.
Recommendation 4 (g) The Community Services Directorate should improve its workforce planning, capacity, capability and support, by: (g) assessing the reasons why the Employee Assistance Program is not widely used by Care and Protection Service's staff and to provide staff with an opportunity to gain targeted support;	Agreed	Completed The Community Services Directorate's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is widely promoted within workplaces of the Directorate. The EAP is also promoted through Respect, Equity and Diversity training. CPS staff also access targeted support through supervision. CPS Practice Leaders provide CPS staff with the opportunity to debrief after critical incidents.
Recommendation 4 (h) The Community Services Directorate should improve its workforce planning, capacity, capability and support, by: (h) integrating staff supervision agreements with professional learning and development plans;	Agreed	Completed Individual Performance Agreement templates have been revised by the Community Services Directorate and completion by all staff is monitored on an ongoing basis. Care and Protection Services staff are encouraged to develop supervision agreements and Individual Performance Agreements concurrently.
Recommendation 4 (i) The Community Services Directorate should improve its workforce planning, capacity, capability and support, by: (i) undertaking regular quality assurance reviews on supervision requirements and related documents;	Agreed	Completed An external audit of staff supervision has been completed under the auspice of the CSD internal audit and review committee work plan.
Recommendation 4 (j) The Community Services Directorate should improve its workforce planning, capacity, capability and support, by: (j) continuing to implement the supervision project and providing staff in the Care and Protection Services Branch with external supervision and/or mentoring opportunities (High Priority); and	Agreed A Strengthening Supervision Project was conducted from February 2012-February 2013 and lifted the quality of supervision given to staff. The project has involved clinical and live supervision, supervision training, online surveys (to identify strengths and deficits of supervision) -The project officer has conducted 80 clinical and live supervision sessions over the course of the project. The project is now embedded in caseworker and supervisors practice and supported by ongoing Practice Groups.	Completed

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Recommendation	Government Response	Implementation Status
Recommendation 4 (k) The Community Services Directorate should improve its workforce planning, capacity, capability and support, by: (k) filling permanently both the Practice Leaders positions and ensure that the roles and responsibilities of the duty statements are fulfilled (High Priority).	Agreed Recruitment to the Practice Leader position is underway.	Completed Recruitment to the Practice Leader position has been finalised. A third Practice Leader position has been created and recruited to.
Recommendation 5 (a): Chapter 5 - Working Together The Community Services Directorate should lead the improvement of cross Government collaboration for children, young people and their families, by: (a) analysing concern reports to identify which reports are care and protection matters and which could have been referred to other government agencies or the community sector and presenting these results to the Director General's Strengthening Vulnerable Families Committee (High Priority);	Agreed However, the results of the analysis of Child Concern Reports will be presented to the executive bilateral forums with the Health Directorate, the Education and Training Directorate, the Australian Federal Police and the community sector.	Complete New Management and operational reporting capabilities are in development (see 3h). Management and operational reports will be generated to provide information and analysis on Care and protection trends for management review. An internal project will be developed to analyse child concern reports and will be reported to the Director-General, CSD. The Strengthening Families Committee governance structure no longer exists. It has been replaced with the Better Services Taskforce as the overarching whole of government strategic framework guiding community engagement, community building and service delivery. The Human Service Gateway and the Child, Youth and Family Services Program have improved their focus on early intervention for vulnerable families.
Recommendation 5 (b) The Community Services Directorate should lead the improvement of cross Government collaboration for children, young people and their families, by: (b) continuing to support the Directors-General Strengthening Families Committee in implementing its Improving Services with Families Project (by the end of 2013);	Agreed The purpose of the Committee is to develop and authorise a 'one service' culture of service delivery which focuses on a person centred approach to the needs of families with multiple needs, and to develop a performance framework for reporting publicly on family outcomes in the ACT. The approach will involve working with families to co-design their individually tailored service offer, to ensure the coordination of the right services, and to create sustainable changes that will allow families to move on with their lives.	Completed The Strengthening Families approach has been funded in the 2014-15 ACT budget and is being expanded to support 50 families.

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Recommendation	Government Response	Implementation Status
Recommendation 5 (c) The Community Services Directorate should lead the improvement of cross Government collaboration for children, young people and their families, by: (c) developing a protocol or some other mechanism for: - cooperatively continuing to work with the Health Directorate, Australian Federal Police (ACT Policing), Education and Training Directorate, Youth Supported Accommodation Assistance Program; and Care and Protection Services Branch and Housing ACT; and Care and Protection Services Branch and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services Unit, to better integrate their services internally;	Agreed	Completed The <i>Human Services Blueprint</i> is a multi-year plan to achieve an integrated, cohesive and person-centred human services system in the ACT. The <i>Human Services Blueprint</i> outline's how all human service agencies will work to collaboratively support children, young people and their families. The <i>Human Services Blueprint</i> is the mechanism to achieve cross government and collaboration to improve outcomes for children, young people and their families. A range of initiatives include: - West Belconnen Local Services Network and trial of the local services network for the West Belconnen community - Strengthening Families program - The Human Services Gateway ACT Government Directorates and key community partners, including peak bodies are involved in the implementation and monitoring of these initiatives. The Community Services Directorate has lead the development of these initiatives and work is ongoing. OCYFS and Housing ACT have a signed protocol. As part of the Protocol joint training will be undertaken to strengthen collaboration. A joint CSD and ETD committee to improve the education outcomes of children and young people in care has been established. The committee met for the first time in November 2014. Health Liaison Officers work between The Canberra Hospital and Care and Protection Services, offering accessible and flexible working arrangements to provide face to face contact with ACT Health and CPS staff. They offer extensive knowledge to assist CPS and ACT Health staff to understand and navigate each other's Directorate. They also identify system issues and inform improvements to engagement protocols and processes.
Recommendation 5 (d) The Community Services Directorate should lead the improvement of cross Government collaboration for children, young people and their families, by: (d) documenting all ACT Government collaborative programs and initiatives for vulnerable children, young people and their families, and make this information available to relevant Government agencies and their staff, the community and the community services sector (High Priority);	Agreed Consultation with other ACT Government Directorates will be required.	Completed The Contact Card lists all services for vulnerable children, young people and their families in the ACT and is available on the Parentlink website. Both the Children, Youth and Family Services Gateway and the Child and Family Centres are contact points for this information.

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Recommendation	Government Response	Implementation Status
Recommendation 5 (e) The Community Services Directorate should lead the improvement of cross Government collaboration for children, young people and their families, by: (e) developing an information system for sharing information on vulnerable children, young people and their families between ACT Government directorates and entities while taking into account privacy issues (High Priority).	Agreed in Principle The Community Services Directorate agrees to the notion of improving information sharing between directorates. The Directorate will work closely with whole-of-government policy processes that are looking at information sharing and privacy issues. CSD will contribute to understanding practical issues about interoperability through its scoping a system replacement for CHYPS. However the development of an information sharing database would be subject to larger whole-of-government policy agreement, legislative change and budget funding, drawing on legislated privacy principles through, for example, the <i>Children and Young People Act 2008</i> , <i>Privacy Act 1988</i> and the <i>Human Rights Act 2004</i> .	Completed The Community Services Directorate agrees to improve information sharing between directorates, however, the development of an information sharing database would be subject to budget funding and legislated privacy principles through the <i>Children and Young People Act 2008</i> , <i>Information Privacy Act 2014</i> and the <i>Human Rights Act 2004</i> . The client information management system options identified through the REOI will be capable of sharing information with other ACT Directorates, along with out of home care agencies, and foster carers themselves. Sharing of information protocols were developed through the Strengthening Families Together project.
Recommendation 6 (a): Chapter 5 - Working Together The Community Services Directorate should improve its management and quality control over out-of-home care community service providers, by; (a) all future forecast numbers for out-of-home care reflecting probable numbers to facilitate the allocation of an adequate budget, as was done in 2012-13;	Agreed As the Auditor-General noted the Community Services Directorate was able to obtain adequate budget to support Out of Home Care placements in 2012-2013. The Community Services Directorate will continue to forecast the needs of children and young people in out of home care.	Completed Significant modelling work was undertaken in the development of "A <i>Step Up For Our Kids</i> " (OOHC Strategy) and informed the Strategy which was launched on 22 January 2015.
Recommendation 6 (b) The Community Services Directorate should improve its management and quality control over out-of-home care community service providers, by; (b) continuing to replace the 2009 ACT Out-of-Home-Care standards with the 2011 National Standards during 2013 and having these notified under the Children and Young People ACT 2008;	Agreed The pilot ACT Out of Home Care Standards are currently being reviewed against the national Out of Home Care Standards and the national Standards will be notified under the <i>Children and Young People Act 2008</i> during 2013.	In Progress An independent, to CPS, regulation and monitoring system for out of home care providers has been established under "A <i>Step Up For Our kids</i> " (OOHC Strategy). This body is known as the Human Services Registrar. Government has agreed to adopt the National Standards as the ACT Standards. The Standards support the objectives of the <i>Children and Young People Act 2008</i> and the vision of the Strategy. Amendments to the <i>Children and Young People Act 2008</i> to enable the Human Services Registrar to assess and hold organisations accountable against Standards in order for them to register and maintain registration has been agreed by Government. The amendment will provide the ability for government to intervene in instances of non-compliance. Note the Standards will be notified following the passage and enactment of the Amendments Bill by the ACT Legislative Assembly.

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Recommendation	Government Response	Implementation Status
Recommendation 6 (c) The Community Services Directorate should improve its management and quality control over out-of-home care community service providers, by; (c) continuing to give priority to conducting audits of ACT out-of-home care providers against the 2009 Standards. (High Priority);	Agreed In May 2012, the Community Services Directorate commenced an independent external audit program. This initiative is well advanced and will be completed by the end of 2013.	Completed Individual audits of out-of-home care agencies have been undertaken and are now complete. Monitoring of implementation plans against recommendations arising from the audits continues. An independent, to CPS, regulation and monitoring system for out of home care providers has been established under "A <i>Step Up For Our kids</i> " (OOHC Strategy). This body is known as the Human Services Registrar and sits within Service Strategy and Community Building, CSD. The framework for assessing the suitability of an organisation and the development and implementation of a regulatory system through legislative amendments is being undertaken by the Human Services Registrar. Organisations interested in services under A <i>Step Up for Our Kids</i> are currently being assessed against suitable entity criteria.
Recommendation 6 (d) The Community Services Directorate should improve its management and quality control over out-of-home care community service providers, by; (d) developing an overall quality control system that includes accreditation and monitoring of community service providers providing out-of-home care services, the Public Advocate and Children and Young People Commission should be consulted in the development of the system (High Priority);	Agreed	Completed An independent, to CPS, regulation and monitoring system for out of home care providers has been established under "A <i>Step Up For Our Kids</i> " (OOHC Strategy). This body is known as the Human Services Registrar. Wide consultation over a period of two years was undertaken in the development of A <i>Step Up for Our Kids</i> , including consultation with the Public Advocate and Children and Young People Commissioner.
Recommendation 6 (e) The Community Services Directorate should improve its management and quality control over out-of-home care community service providers, by; (e) Updating the 3 year funding agreements to reflect the 2011 National Standards and the revised quality control system and assurance activities;	Agreed	Completed An independent, to CPS, regulation and monitoring system for out of home care providers has been established under "A <i>Step Up For Our kids</i> " (OOHC Strategy). This body is known as the Human Services Registrar. Tendering of new services is currently underway. A new regime of systems performance and quality management will be overseen by the Human Services Registrar.

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Recommendation	Government Response	Implementation Status
Recommendation 6 (f) The Community Services Directorate should improve its management and quality control over out-of-home care community service providers, by; (f) Accreditation and monitoring being undertaken in the Directorate but independently of Care and Protection Services Branch and the executive head of the unit responsible for accreditation reporting directly to the Director General (High Priority).	Agreed	Completed Administration of the regulation and monitoring system of out of home care providers will be undertaken by the Human Service Registrar in the Regulation, Oversight and Quality Services Unit within the Community Services Directorate (CSD) and report directly to the Director-General of CSD. This unit is independent of Care and Protection Services and independent of the Office for Children, Youth and Family Support.
Recommendation 6 (g) The Community Services Directorate should improve its management and quality control over out-of-home care community service providers, by; (g) requesting that the Children and Young People Commissioner give consideration to the effectiveness of the overall quality control system twelve months after it has been in operation.	Agreed	Complete The Interim Children and Youth Services Council is overseeing the implementation of A Step Up for Our Kids, including quality assurance. This council reports directly to the Minister for Children and Young People. The Human Services Registrar will provide 'state of the sector' reports as a mechanism to monitor the sectors effectiveness, identify themes for improvement and identify best practice. In lieu this established monitoring and review mechanism there is no longer a need to request the Children and Young People Commissioner undertake this role.
Recommendation 7 (a): Chapter 6 - Statutory office holders The Community Services Directorate and the Public Advocate should: (a) develop a system to ensure that information they share and report on is accurate and comprehensive, particularly regarding section 507 Reports and Annual Review Reports.	Agreed The Community Services Directorate agrees to develop a system to ensure that information between the Directorate and the Public Advocate is accurate and comprehensive.	Completed The compliance and quality of the Annual Review Report process has been improved (Recommendation 1 (m)). Care and Protection Services and the Public Advocate have met to discuss improved reporting processes in relation to 507 reports. A new template for recording S507 reports has been developed which will improve accuracy of identification and reporting of this information to the Public Advocate.

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Recommendation	Government Response	Implementation Status
Recommendation 7 (b) The Community Services Directorate and the Public Advocate should: (b) assess whether the risks associated with the Public Advocate's reduction in percentage of Annual Review Reports being examined is adequately addressed through triaging and the implementation of a quality control process (Recommendation 1(m)), and if not, options for addressing this should be developed. Findings of the assessment and options for addressing any shortcomings, if needed, should be reported to the Minister for Community Services.	Agreed With the implementation of an accreditation system for out of home care providers, a strengthened internal quality assurance process and developing a policy on visitation for children and young people in out of home care any risks associated with the Public Advocate's triaging of Annual Review Reports is mitigated by the Directorate's internal processes.	Completed The new Annual Review Report process will mitigate risk (Recommendation 1(m)). Care and Protection Services have met with the Public Advocate to discuss improved reporting. New procedures have been established by Care and Protection Services to improve the quality, timeliness and compliance of Annual Reviews. 1) All Annual Review Reports are quality assured by a compliance officer prior to lodgement, and 2) Fifty percent of all Annual Review Reports are referred to a panel that meets fortnightly. This panel, chaired by a Senior Manager, focuses on the quality of the Annual Review Reports, in particular the voice of the child and quality of Care Plans. The Public Advocate has acknowledged a significant improvement to the quality of Annual Review Reports since implementation of the new process. CPS IMS policies, procedures, practice guides and information sheets have been implemented and provide clear guidance to staff in relation to managing children in out of home care.
Recommendation 8 (a) The Justice and Community Safety Directorate should facilitate a process to assist the Public Advocate and Human Rights Commission better undertake their roles, by: (a) identifying any legislative amendments that may be required to define 'systemic matters; and processes for referral of these from the Public Advocate to the Human Rights Commission;	Agreed.	Completed These issues are being considered in the review of statutory office holders that provide rights protections services.

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Recommendation	Government Response	Implementation Status
Recommendation 8 (b) The Justice and Community Safety Directorate should facilitate a process to assist the Public Advocate and Human Rights Commission better undertake their roles, by: (b) clarifying whether 'consideration', as per section 11(2) of the <i>Public Advocate Act 2005</i> is to be construed as having the same meaning as the consideration provisions in the <i>Human Rights Act 2005</i> ;	Agreed. The Justice and Community Safety Directorate agrees that clarity in the roles and functions of statutory office holder under legislation is important and notes the link with recommendation 9 (a).	Completed These issues are being considered in the review of statutory office holders that provide rights protections services.
Recommendation 8 (c) The Justice and Community Safety Directorate should facilitate a process to assist the Public Advocate and Human Rights Commission better undertake their roles, by: (c) clarifying, and if needed, identifying legislative amendments to facilitate the releasing of information by the Public Advocate to the Human rights Commission, when 'systemic matters' are referred.	Agreed. The Justice and Community Safety Directorate will explore whether legislative amendments should be prepared to address this issue.	Completed These issues are being considered in the review of statutory office holders that provide rights protections services.

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Recommendation	Government Response	Implementation Status
Recommendation 8 (d) The Justice and Community Safety Directorate should facilitate a process to assist the Public Advocate and Human Rights Commission better undertake their roles, by: (d) identifying how funding, when needed, is to be provided to the Human Rights Commission to undertake major inquiries/investigations on 'systemic matters' (High Priority).	Not Agreed. The Justice and Community Safety Directorate advise that the <i>Financial Management Act 1996</i> provides a clear framework for the appropriation of funds through the budget process and the making of provision for unexpected events (through the Treasurer's Advance). There are clear guidelines about how funding is bid for, and there are clear guidelines and criteria in relation to Treasurer's Advances.	Not Agreed
Recommendation 9 The Public Advocate and Human Rights Commission should enhance their ability to meet legislative requirements and improve their governance arrangements by: (a) developing a protocol to define the process whereby the Public Advocate refers 'systemic matters' to the HRC for consideration, and the Commission advises the Public Advocate of any actions taken as a consequence. (b) keeping their strategic plans up-to-date and documenting on the plans when they are reviewed. (c) reviewing their performance indicators to better reflect their key activities that can delivered within their allocated budget; and (d) collecting information that can be independently verified when reporting on their performance against their performance indicators.	The Public Advocate and Human Rights Commission have agreed to this recommendation.	Completed. (a) In October 2012, the Commission and the PAACT signed a Memorandum of Understanding, which includes provisions regarding appropriate information sharing, and the referral of advocacy matters and systemic concerns relating to children and young people. (b) The Commission has updated its 2013-15 Strategic Plan. A copy is available on the Commission's website (www.hrc.act.gov.au). (c) The Commission has reviewed its performance indicators to better reflect its key activities. (d) The Commission has met with the Auditor-General to confirm the information required by the Auditor-General to independently verify performance against performance indicators, and is collecting this information.

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Recommendation	Government Response	Implementation Status
Recommendation 10 The Public Advocate and Human Rights Commission, and the Justice and Community Safety Directorate should finalise their protocols and include information in this on the process these independent statutory office holders should use to seek additional funding, both supplementary funding and 'one-off' funding.	Agreed A memorandum of understanding between the Justice and Community Safety Directorate and the Public Advocate had been settled as ready for signing. A memorandum of understanding between the Directorate and the Human Rights Commission is close to finalisation. The Directorate and office holders have been operating as if the previous MOUs are still operating.	Completed In July 2013, the Commission and JACSD signed a Memorandum of Understanding.
Recommendation 11 (a), (b), (c), (d) The Chief Minister and Treasury Directorate should provide a mechanism to: (a) increase the transparency of financial information on the Public Advocate and Human Rights Commission presented in budget papers; (b) increase the accountability of the Public Advocate and Human Rights Commission by requiring that financial information reported in their Annual Reports is audited. (The protocols between the Public Advocate and Human Rights Commission and the Justice and Community Safety Directorate (Recommendation 9(c)) could state how this is to be achieved); (c) increase the quality of performance indicators, used by the Public Advocate and Human Rights Commission, so that these are aligned with funded outputs; and (d) hold the Public Advocate and Human Rights Commission accountable for reporting on their performance indicators with these being assessed by the Audit Office before being included in their Annual Reports. (Their protocol with the Justice and Community Safety Directorate (Recommendation 10) could state how this is to be achieved).	Agreed The Chief Minister and Treasury Directorate will work with the statutory office holders and the Justice and Community Safety Directorate to increase transparency of the funded outputs.	Completed Improvements to accountability indicators were made in the 2013-14 Budget papers.



ACT
Government
Community Services

A Step Up for Our Kids

One Step Can Make a Lifetime of Difference

OUT OF HOME CARE STRATEGY 2015–2020 OVERVIEW

We only get one chance at childhood.

Most ACT families do a great job of raising their children and young people. These families work hard to provide the care and support children and young people need to grow into happy, healthy adults. But this is not the experience for all children and young people in the territory. It may be a surprise to learn that around 600 children and young people are vulnerable and cannot safely live with their parents.

These children and young people may be neglected or may suffer physical, sexual or emotional abuse. Their childhood is marked by fear, deprivation and insecurity. They are likely to have one or more parents struggling with mental illness, substance abuse or domestic violence and often, families' abilities to solve their problems are hampered by poverty and social isolation.

Children and young people living in difficult circumstances may need to move into out of home care for protection. While in care, they deserve to live the best possible lives and to grow up strong, safe and connected.

In January 2015, the ACT Government released its new five-year strategy *A Step Up for Our Kids—One Step Can Make a Lifetime of Difference* (the strategy). The strategy is one of a suite of Better Services initiatives designed to ensure that members of the ACT community receive the services they need, at the right time for the right duration.

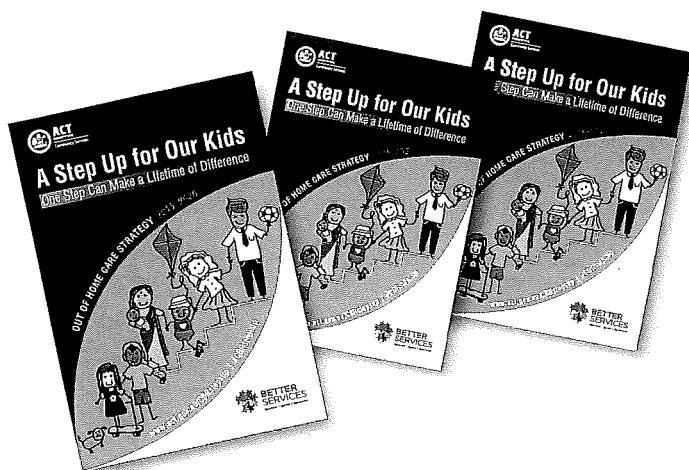
It will strengthen existing child protection and out of home care services through introducing new services and reforms. In addition to existing funding for out of home care services, the ACT Government is investing \$16 million over three years in the strategy, which is about:

- investing in the future of our most vulnerable children and young people. It is about keeping kids at home where possible and preventing future generations from disadvantage
- reuniting children and young people with their parents as quickly as possible or, for those who cannot safely go home to birth parents, providing a chance for them to grow up in a secure, loving alternative family
- better supporting foster carers and kinship carers who, as valued partners in the care system, play an important role as primary supporters and healers of children and young people in their care.

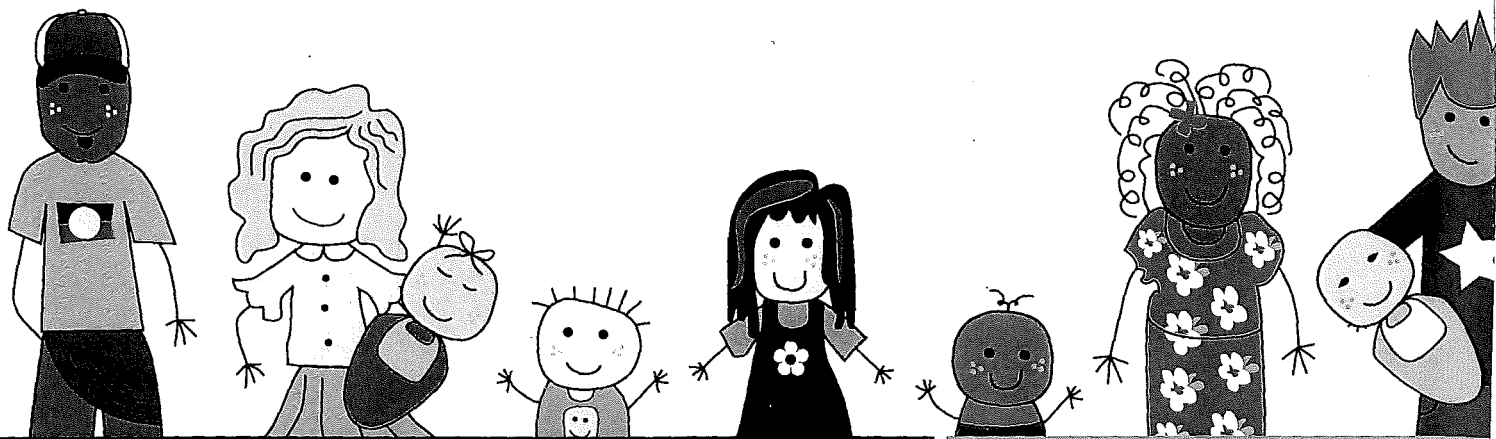
Why is this strategy important?

It is predicted that the ACT will experience a crisis in out of home care within five years if action is not taken. Child protection and out of home care services face many challenges around our nation, including:

- more children and young people entering care than ever before
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people significantly over-represented in care
- care leavers struggling with life as adults
- the increasing demand for kinship and foster carers
- a rising number of older kinship carers
- increasing care costs.



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SERVICES**
Right SERVICE | Right TIME | Right DURATION



What's new?

The strategy is about the delivery of better services for children and young people in care. It introduces a number of new and different ways of providing services that build on the best elements of existing out of home care services to make them more effective.

The strategy also aims to refresh relationships across the out of home care sector, recognising and respecting the important contribution of all participants, but particularly that of foster and kinship carers. Their contribution is much greater than simply providing a place to stay. Carers are volunteers, providing safe, healing relationships for children and young people to support their development, well being and recovery from difficult earlier experiences.

New therapeutic, trauma-informed system of care

All children and young people who enter care are experiencing trauma. That is why they have come into care. They may have already been exposed to multiple traumatic experiences, such as abuse, neglect, domestic violence and drug and alcohol abuse. Coming into care exposes children and young people to additional trauma as they may lose contact with familiar people, environments, pets and toys.

In the past children and young people have been placed in foster care where it was hoped they would settle and flourish. It is now clear that traditional service approaches haven't always worked. It is also clear that 'one size doesn't fit all'. Children and young people need flexible, individualised care plans based on an in-depth understanding of their needs.

The strategy takes a new, therapeutic approach to care, to actively address trauma. It's designed to ensure all children and young people in care get the help they need and the chance to build positive, ongoing relationships with caring adults.

The new care system requires therapeutic assessments and plans to be developed for all children and young people in care to identify and treat issues early.

Carers—both foster carers and kinship carers—are central to this new approach as the child or young person's primary supporter and healer. Many of the ACT's carers have already undertaken training in trauma informed care. All carers will now be offered the opportunity to train in trauma-informed care and additional supports will be available to assist birth parents and carers who are struggling to manage difficult child behaviour.

This new therapeutic, trauma-informed system of care builds on an earlier commitment by the ACT Government to establish a trauma recovery service for children in care. Melaleuca Place opened in July 2014. It provides high-quality therapeutic services for children up to 12 years of age and support for their parents or carers.

Who is this strategy for?

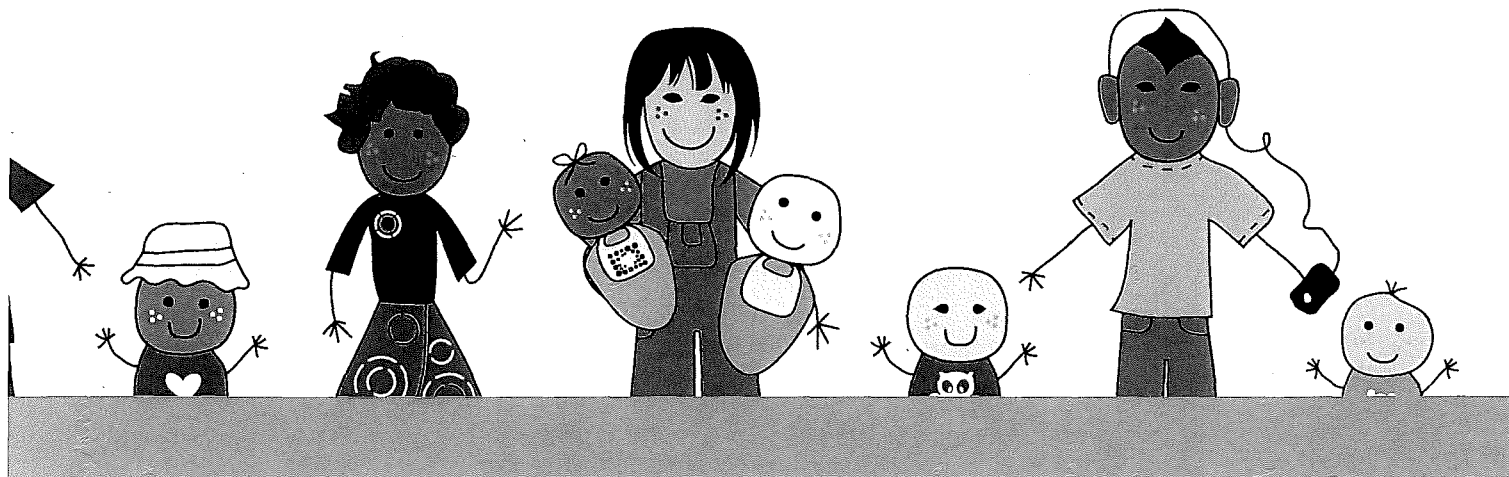
This strategy benefits a range of groups with an interest or role in out of home care and also the wider community who benefit when services are targeted to those citizens most in need and where they can make a difference.

For vulnerable children and young people

The strategy commits child protection and out of home care services to hearing the voice of the child or young person, better understanding their needs and providing flexible, personalised services, that can scale up and down in intensity as the child or young person's needs change over time.

In the first instance every effort will be made to support birth parents to keep children and young people at home or to reunify the family as quickly as possible. Where reunification is not possible, children and young people need to grow up loved and secure in an alternative family through adoption or enduring parental responsibility orders. Children and young people in care told us that they wanted to feel loved, secure and normal.

The strategy also increases both casework and financial support to care leavers to ensure that their transition to adulthood is more akin to that of other young people who can generally call upon their family for emotional and practical support.



For birth parents

The strategy will provide extra support for birth parents struggling to safely take care of their children and young people. This includes practical, in-home support to develop their skills so parents can get back on their feet and keep their family together. A new family advocacy service will also be funded to ensure that birth parents and other family members can access independent advice and support in their dealings with child protection and out of home care services.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community

Around 25 per cent of children and young people in care in the ACT identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. The ACT Government is keen to reduce the over representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in care, whilst still affording vulnerable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people the same rights and protections as other children.

New placement prevention and reunification services will help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to stay together. New cultural advisors drawn from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community will help strengthen decisions made about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, based on their individual needs and circumstances. The advisors will improve support for children and young people to stay connected to their families, culture and country.

For foster and kinship carers

Carers will enjoy access to improved training and therapeutic services designed to assist them to better support the children and young people they care for. All children and young people entering care will receive a comprehensive therapeutic and developmental assessment designed to identify any problems and to identify needs early.

Carers will also be able to access better health information about children and young people they care for through a child health passport which will accompany the child or young person.

Decision making affecting the carer and child or young person will be streamlined and speeded up through providing more power to agencies to make decisions. Carers will be able to obtain permanency for a child or young person earlier and more easily than in the past.

Carer subsidy payments will no longer automatically cease when the young person turns 18. Where it would assist the young person to transition to adulthood, payments may be extended up to the age of 21.

Kinship carers will receive enhanced support through training in trauma-informed care and the outsourcing of kinship care to non government providers once all child protection court work has been finalised and it has been established that the child or young person will not be returning to the care of their birth parents. This will provide equity of access to support for kinship carers in line with foster carers.

A new carer advocacy service will be funded to ensure that carers who disagree with decisions of child protection and out of home care services can receive independent advice and support.

For out of home care agencies

The strategy will provide non-government out of home care providers with a larger share of the out of home care business and greater responsibility and autonomy in providing long term care for children and young people.

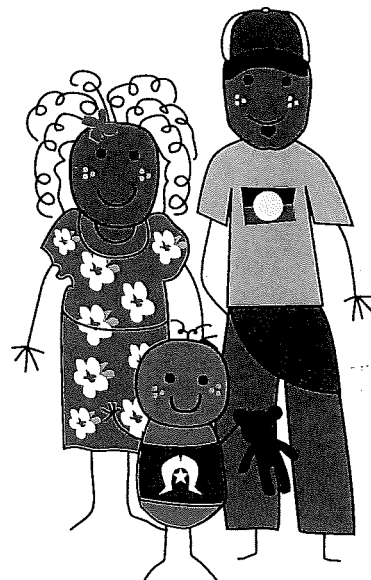
Over time, providers will be subject to performance-based contracts under new arrangements. Those agencies who deliver high quality services will be able to access additional positive performance payments.

There will be an improved, simpler and clearer regulatory environment under the new arrangements for providers.

When will the strategy commence?

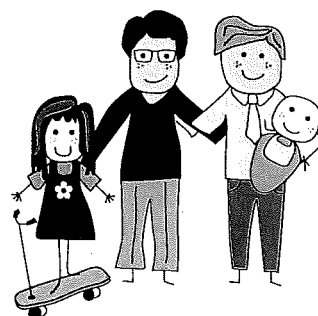
The strategy will be rolled out from 2015 to 2020. Many improvements, new initiatives and reforms are involved and five years is needed to implement them all.

We will see some changes fairly quickly but others will take more time—even a generation. The aim is for all future care leavers to succeed as adults and to form safe and secure attachments with a family they can call their own. This is a journey. It's not possible to make the leap to a new service system overnight.



Working together

Many organisations are involved in providing out of home care. Many people and organisations were consulted in the development of this strategy including young people, carers, out of home care agencies and other non-government organisations and other government services. Government alone cannot deliver the strategy's vision. The support of the ACT community, its institutions (such as schools, health services and community organisations) and families are all needed to make a difference.

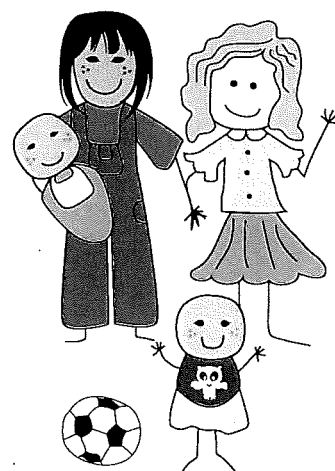


The community

The strategy will benefit the wider community by supporting vulnerable children and young people to enjoy better life outcomes. A community is only as strong, safe and connected as its members are.

We all want to live in a community that values our children and young people as we know they only get one chance at childhood. We will all benefit when care leavers are better equipped to enjoy a happy, productive adulthood.

In addition to improving the life chances of vulnerable children and young people, the strategy will save government money in out of home care costs in the medium term and reduce other downstream social and economic costs in the longer term, in the form of savings in health, community services, income maintenance and justice outlays.



Find out more

Further information on the strategy can be found at www.act.gov.au/CBRstepsup or by contacting the out of home care services team CBRstepsup@act.gov.au or 02 6207 4544



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