

2021

**THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

Government Response to the Coroner's Report into the death of Bradyn Dillon

**Presented by
Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA
Minister for Families and Community Services**

November 2021

Introduction

The death of Bradyn Dillon was a tragedy that has had a devastating and lifelong impact on his family, those close to the family and to all Canberrans who have been impacted by family violence. As a community, we mourn any death that is the result of family violence and recognise our duty to do more. Family violence does not discriminate, it is pervasive, and we as a community must do everything in our power to confront this issue.

The ACT Government remains absolutely committed to the prevention of domestic and family violence and protecting the most vulnerable in our community. Over the past five years there have been significant changes across the child protection system, in addition to improvements more broadly across the domestic and family violence sector. There is still more work for us to do to ensure children and young people are safe, strong and connected to family and the community, and we need to sustain a clear focus on this.

This response to the Coroner's findings from the Bradyn Dillon inquest serves as the ACT Government's commitment to do more, to confront domestic and family violence head-on, to continue to invoke systemic changes and to do everything in its power to make the ACT a safe place for the entire community.

Background

At the time of Bradyn Dillon's death on 15 February 2016, he was nine years old. Bradyn's life had been taken from him by his father, Graham Dillon. The circumstances that led to Bradyn's death carry immense sadness and grief for those who played a role in his life and across the ACT community.

In February 2016, the ACT Attorney-General announced an independent external inquiry to consider how effective ACT Government directorates and service providers were at responding to family violence, including collaborating, and sharing information to keep families safe. The Board of Inquiry was chaired by Mr Laurie Glanfield AM.

In May 2016, the ACT Government released the *Review into the system level response to family violence in the ACT Report* (known as the Glanfield Report). The Glanfield Report identified 31 recommendations in the areas of delivering better:

- > family outcomes
- > mandatory reporting
- > decision-making, quality assurance and oversight
- > sharing information and
- > facilitating collaboration and integration.

Two additional ACT reports released around that time made similar recommendations: *The Review of Domestic and Family Violence Deaths in the ACT* (May 2016) by the Domestic Violence Prevention Council (DVPC), and the *ACT Domestic Violence Services System Final Gap Analysis Report* (May 2016) by the Community Services Directorate.

The ACT Government released the *ACT Government Response to Family Violence* (June 2016), to respond in whole to all three reports simultaneously.

The ACT Government has addressed all recommendations in the *ACT Government Response to Family Violence*, with many now completed and others nearing completion. Following community consultation, some of the recommendations have evolved into other projects or recommendations.

On 4 June 2018, Graham Dillon was convicted of murder for the death of his son, Bradyn, along with other charges relating to Bradyn's sister and stepmother. Graham Dillon was sentenced to 41 years and one month in prison.

On 11 October 2018, a coronial inquest into the circumstances of Bradyn's death commenced. The purpose of any coronial inquest is to independently investigate the death of a person, including ascertaining the identity of the deceased person and the manner and cause of their death. In addition, there is also a broader purpose for coronial investigation that relates to matters of public safety – that is, to contribute to the reduction of preventable deaths through investigation, findings and the making of recommendations.

In 2018, Chief Coroner Lorraine Walker, with the agreement of involved parties, identified the issues to be considered during the Dillon inquest relating to the manner and cause of Bradyn's death. Those issues were:

- > How was it that Bradyn had become isolated from the community? What was known by the various authorities, and how was that information communicated to those who could act on it?
- > Of the agencies that had intervention with Bradyn in 2014-15, how was it that intervention from these agencies stopped?

In 2019, Coroner Margaret Hunter OAM was appointed the Coroner for this inquest. Coroner Hunter confirmed in her report that the issues raised and agreed by Chief Coroner Walker and parties were appropriate and were subsequently considered as part of her investigation.

The evidence considered in the Dillon inquest comprised:

- > 30 hearing days
- > oral evidence from 31 witnesses
- > 14 folders of material from the Australian Federal Police (AFP) investigation team
- > 5000-plus pages of subpoenaed material
- > 149 exhibits tendered during the proceedings and
- > a 2516-page transcript from the proceedings.

Coroner Hunter stated during the last sitting of the inquest that it was one of the largest inquests ever heard in the ACT, second only to the bushfire inquiry.

Coroner's findings and recommendations

On 29 April 2021, Coroner Hunter handed down her findings. They included the following conclusion:

'I have come to the conclusion that no one could have predicted the outcome that eventuated. It is my view that no one could have predicted that Graham Dillon would murder his son.

Despite the numerous reports which indicated that there was abuse being perpetrated by Graham Dillon, none of those reports could be said to have been a precursor to what eventuated.'

Coroner Hunter found that in connection to Bradyn Dillon's death, an issue of public safety existed. In response to this finding, Coroner Hunter's report includes 17 recommendations across the areas of child protection (10 recommendations); education (three recommendations); and information sharing (four recommendations).

Systemic progress since 2016

Since 2016, the ACT Government has undertaken substantial work to respond to the findings and recommendations of the Glanfield Report, *The Review of Domestic and Family Violence Deaths in the Australian Capital Territory* and the *ACT Domestic Violence Service System Final Gap Analysis Report*. The Government has committed significant investment and implemented major reforms to improve policies and practices across both the ACT's child protection and domestic and family violence service systems. These have included changes to legislation, policy, practice and culture. This work is ongoing and will continue, along with further work to respond to Coroner Hunter's report, to ensure public safety in the ACT and especially the safety of the most vulnerable in our community.

The work undertaken by the ACT Government since 2016 is outlined below.

Domestic and family violence

In June 2016, the ACT Government outlined its commitment to action in the *ACT Government Response to Family Violence Report*. This included the following actions:

- > Appoint the Coordinator-General for Family Safety – a fulltime position to lead change and provide accountability across the service system.
- > Implement a collaborative and integrated approach to service re-design and improvement through the Family Safety Hub.
- > Build collaborative practices.
- > Further develop a skilled and educated workforce, especially frontline staff, responding to the needs of adults and children experiencing family violence.

In 2016, the Coordinator-General for Family Safety was appointed. The Office of the Coordinator-General for Family Safety works closely with the sector to understand the ongoing needs of people who experience domestic and family violence.

An important aspect for the ACT Government to understand needs to design and implement effective reform has been to undertake meaningful research, drawing on people's lived experiences, including women, other survivors of domestic and family violence, children, families and perpetrators.

In 2019-20, the Family Safety Hub and the ACT Children and Young People Commissioner partnered to listen to young people talk about their experiences of family violence so those needs could be better understood. It is only by listening to children and young people themselves that we can understand how they think and feel about family violence and what support they need in response.

These conversations with young people helped to shed light on the unique experiences they face when there is violence in their homes. The project led to a series of insights to guide how we can expand and improve services to better meet the needs of children and young people. These insights have now been published in *Now You Have Heard Us, What Will You Do?* and is available online.

Furthering this work, the Family Safety Hub is currently engaging with the youth sector and relevant people in government, the community sector and the general community to explore opportunities to co-design and collaborate on the implementation of solutions to address the needs identified by young people.

In January 2020, the ACT Government released *Reducing Domestic and Family Violence in the ACT* – a report into responses to domestic and family violence perpetrators. The Government acknowledges a continued focus must be on responses that change the behaviour of people who use violence. The report highlighted the need to take a risk assessment approach and to improve practices for holding perpetrators to account for their abuse and violence, while at the same time offering them timely opportunities to change their behaviour.

The report's findings were based on a literature review of best practice for perpetrator programs and interventions, as well as two forums held with key ACT stakeholders and national experts. This work will continue to guide the ACT's approach to responding to people who use domestic and family violence. The ACT Government has provided ongoing funding to the Domestic Violence Crisis Service (DVCS) to deliver Room4Change, a therapeutic residential men's behaviour change program. Room4Change supports the whole family and is one of a small number of residential behaviour-change programs in Australia.

In the 2021-22 Budget, the ACT Government invested a further \$35.9 million over four years for Safer Families initiatives. This funding expands the ACT Government's evidence-based approach to addressing domestic and family violence. It will support a range of initiatives that strengthen the capacity of frontline services to respond to domestic and family violence, improve coordination across government, build important partnerships with the community sector and test promising new approaches.

This funding included an additional \$2.16 million over four years for DVCS and the Canberra Rape Crisis Service as primary domestic and family violence responses, in addition to existing baseline funding. A further \$4.06 million went to supporting three health justice partnerships. These partnerships integrate lawyers into healthcare settings where they can reach people

experiencing domestic and family violence who would otherwise not have safe access to receive such help.

Importantly, the Budget also included \$249,000 for 2021-22 to continue the effective and innovative Family Safety Action Pilot, which supports high-risk families experiencing domestic and family violence by sharing information to identify, assess, and manage risk. It also provides case management, case coordination, and support for individuals and families.

The new investment in 2021-22 also included an initial \$388,000 over two years to scope and design community-led responses to address the trauma and harm from domestic and family violence for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. This will support implementation of the *We Don't Shoot Our Wounded* recommendations.

The Budget also continues the Support for Women and Children to Leave Violence initiative, which provides \$2,000 to eligible people to support them to sustain or re-establish a family home in the private market following the experience of family violence. This initiative will also scope options around access to housing that is affordable, long term and safe for people/women leaving.

Connected to the insights gained through research and the various reviews, the ACT Government has also made significant investments in upskilling its workforce in domestic and family violence responses. Dedicated training programs have been developed and delivered to operational staff and these remain a core training requirement for those on our frontline. In 2019-20, the Government committed \$2.48 million over four years to deliver domestic and family violence training for all ACT public servants, to continually develop our skilled workforce and ensure they are equipped to recognise and respond to the needs of people experiencing domestic and family violence.

Partnerships with external services and information sharing

The Community Services Directorate is the government agency responsible for responding to concerns of child abuse and neglect that occurs within a family context, through Child and Youth Protection Services (CYPS). CYPS has established liaison and referral points with government agencies and community sector providers to better meet the needs of vulnerable children, young people and their families. To further support these partnerships and information sharing efforts, a range of external partners now co-locate with CYPS on a regular basis.

Education Directorate Liaison

The Education Liaison Officer commenced in February 2017, with a focus on improving coordination and collaboration between CYPS and the Education Directorate. This position provides additional support to ACT public schools seeking to consult on matters they believe require a child concern report to CYPS. The liaison officer works with the school to determine if a report should be made, or if other community-based supports or services would better respond to the needs of the child or young person and their family.

This role ensures that CYPS staff are assisted and informed about how to support children and young people to remain engaged with their education. They also advise Education Directorate staff on the existing services delivered through CYPS and provide advice and training about the interpretation of the *Children and Young People Act 2008*. They are a critical contact point for enquiries about known clients of CYPS and support the management of potential welfare issues. By providing this assistance, they support early intervention for children and young people with complex home or family circumstances.

Canberra Health Services liaison

Two liaison officer positions were established in 2006 as part of a combined strategy between the Canberra Health Services (CHS) and CYPS. The CYPS Health Liaison Officer is co-located at the Canberra Hospital one day per week, and the CHS Liaison Officer is based in CYPS offices two days per week.

On a day-to-day basis, the work of the liaison officers is to provide education about each organisation's role and responsibility, identify system issues in the working relationship between the two organisations, improve engagement protocols and processes, and facilitate interaction between the two organisations through forums and training. A key function of the CYPS Health Liaison Officer is to provide a consultation service to CHS staff when they are considering making a child concern report to CYPS.

Domestic Violence Crisis Service

Over \$400,000 has been committed since 2019 to fund the Safer Families Collaboration pilot program. This program funded two experienced DVCS staff to work alongside CYPS staff to enhance collaboration between the two organisations and provide critical supports to the community in responding to domestic and family violence. The Government will continue this partnership between CYPS and DVCS, with additional funding allocated over the next four years for DVCS staff to continue this arrangement.

OneLink

CYPS has a protocol in place with OneLink (Woden Community Services) to fund one fulltime equivalent community-based child protection practitioner, who is embedded in the CYPS Intake service to facilitate direct and timely referral pathways for families known to CYPS. The OneLink practitioner provides information about and referrals to services including child/youth and family services, tenancy support, homelessness support, legal services, financial counselling, mental health assistance and other support services.

Family Law Courts

A pilot program to co-locate child protection practitioners and police officials within the Family Law Courts has commenced. CYPS has had a senior child protection practitioner in this role since June 2020, however COVID-19 restrictions have affected the ability to co-locate since the pilot began. This resulted in a delay in the commencement of co-location, however co-location was able to commence towards the end of 2020.

Over the first half of 2021, CYPS, the AFP and Family Law Court staff developed positive relationships and information sharing practices for both the court and CYPS. This relationship has extended to regular contact with Legal Aid, the Judges' Associates and the Judicial Registrars. During the current ACT COVID-19 lockdown, these established relationships have been critical in the ongoing ability to ensure real time information sharing. The Family Law Court Liaison has continued to attend court (virtually) as required and there has been regular communication with the court and appropriate stakeholders.

Key networks are in place to support this information sharing on a broader scale, including the National Community of Practice (co-located officials from all participating jurisdictions) and locally an Information Sharing Reference Group. Both networks focus on removing barriers to ensuring that CYPS and the Family Law Court have the necessary information to keep families safe.

In October 2020, a new harmonised 'Notice of Child Abuse, Family Violence or Risk' form was developed by the Federal Circuit Court to provide CYPS substantially more information regarding risk factors for children who may be the subject of Family Law proceedings. Any party filing an initiating application, response or application for consent orders seeking parenting orders must file a Notice of Risk which is provided to CYPS. CYPS then conducts a risk assessment in relation to the information provided and the Family Law Court Liaison provides a response to the court outlining any child protection history in the jurisdiction.

The pilot is in its early stages in the ACT and is part of a broader national effort – almost all Australian jurisdictions are involved and have implemented similar programs. All participating jurisdictions meet regularly and are working together to problem-solve and share processes and knowledge to work towards the goal of ensuring safety is paramount in decision-making for children and families involved in Family Court proceedings.

Interstate liaison and inter-jurisdictional information sharing protocols

The Interstate Liaison Officer position in CYPS is central to enacting information sharing protocols agreed between states and territories. In September 2020, these protocols were expanded with the implementation of Connect 4 Safety.

Connect 4 Safety is the outcome of a national interjurisdictional project that delivered a system to allow all state and territory child protection authorities to share basic demographic information about children and their families known to child protection systems. It provides real-time checks and alerts child protection services when a child at risk, or an adult of interest is known to child protection authorities in other jurisdictions.

Rollout is underway with five jurisdictions, including the ACT, already providing data on a regular basis. The information sharing provisions of each jurisdiction's child protection legislation were utilised to allow the sharing of this sensitive information only between child protection practitioners.

Recruitment, training, and workforce development

Since 2012, the ACT Government has delivered record investments through successive Budgets to support a substantial reform agenda and ensure the ACT child protection system is better resourced and staff are better supported to undertake this essential work with Canberra's most vulnerable families.

The 2012-13 ACT Budget allocated almost \$1.2 million a year towards increasing the CYPS frontline workforce by 10 positions to increase system capacity to manage demand. This funding increased to almost \$1.5 million each year for an additional two fulltime equivalent positions in the 2014-15 financial year.

In response to the growing number of child concern reports being received by CYPS from the community, the 2017-18 Budget further committed \$2.5 million a year to establish two additional frontline casework teams.

Child and Youth Protection Professional classification structure

CYPS has undertaken significant work to recruit and retain professional case managers. The Child and Youth Protection Professional (CYPP) classification structure was established under the ACT Public Sector Technical and Other Professional Enterprise Agreement 2018-2021 to support this work.

The Community Services Directorate has, in parallel, implemented the CYPP Capability Framework that identifies domains of practice, capabilities and competencies that collectively identify the knowledge, skills and behaviours necessary for all CYPP frontline staff.

The CYPP classification structure also acknowledges the significant contribution individuals with Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander or other cultural heritage and experience bring to improving outcomes for children and young people. The classification structure provides a means for employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people where they have appropriate and relevant cultural experience and knowledge in lieu of tertiary qualifications.

Practice development and training

An internal practice development and training team was established in CYPS in February 2016 to deliver on commitments made through various reforms, including the integration of the child protection and youth justice systems, implementation of *A Step Up for Our Kids* Out of Home Care Strategy, the Glanfield Report and other independent reviews.

The CYPS Practice Development and Training team has developed, implemented and managed a significant number of professional development initiatives since that time, including a new supervision and individual performance framework, a training development pathways framework and a range of eLearning and face-to-face training programs.

In the 2019-20 Budget Review, \$2.8 million over four years was committed to strengthen the oversight and delivery of services to vulnerable children, young people and their families. The funding went towards providing ongoing staff and resources specifically for CYPS to support workforce training and operational policy development to ensure CYPS can continue to develop and mature its service response.

Domestic and family violence training

In 2016, a comprehensive five-day training course for CYPS staff was launched, Working with Families Affected by Domestic and Family Violence. The training is run in partnership with:

- > DVCS
- > Victims of Crime Commissioner
- > Australian Federal Police (AFP)
- > Legal Aid (ACT)
- > Director of Public Prosecutions
- > CYPS Cultural Services Team
- > Office of the Coordinator General for Family Safety and
- > ACT Corrections.

Two of the five days are dedicated to learning about engaging and working with fathers and engaging and working with perpetrators of violence and exploring offender behaviour in the context of working with risk. An accompanying eLearning program consolidates the learning achieved through the five-day course, with a short assessment at the end of the eLearning program.

CYPS has taken further steps to refine and improve direction to operational staff regarding issues of family violence. This has been in response to contemporary research. Funding was secured for the Safer Families Collaboration Project in the 2020-21 ACT Government Supply Bill, which included \$128,000 for CYPS to fund a significant training package from the American based company, the Safe & Together Institute, to deliver training to CYPS staff regarding domestic and family violence.

Cultural Development Program

Over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in the child protection, youth justice and out of home care systems is a national problem. In the ACT, CYPS recognises staff and systems must increase their level of cultural proficiency to effectively engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Development Program for CYPS staff continues to be embedded as core training, combining face-to-face and online components.

Operational policies, procedures and guidance

CYPS Integrated Management System

CYPS administers its operational policies, procedures, practice guidance, risk management and compliance through its Integrated Management System (IMS) and an accompanying online Knowledge Portal. These provide guidance to staff in a coherent, interdependent and unified way so service delivery is consistent and builds quality practice.

Over the course of 2016, CYPS reviewed key policies and procedures, specifically its Intake and Appraisal modules and Risk Assessment Framework. Language was strengthened to highlight the importance of collaboration and referral to support services for families experiencing domestic and family violence. The new Intake and Appraisal modules and revised Risk Assessment Framework were launched in November 2016. The review of all CYPS operational policy modules is ongoing.

Family violence guide

In October 2017, CYPS finalised and launched its family violence guide *Working with families affected by domestic and family violence*, to support frontline workers when responding to allegations of family violence. The document describes the CYPS approach to understanding and managing family violence in the context of child protection and youth justice work. It includes:

- > a definition of domestic and family violence drawn from the latest research
- > CYPS' understanding of the impacts of family violence on children and young people
- > CYPS' practice approach to the assessment of family violence and the impacts on children and young people
- > the role of CYPS staff, community partners and other key people in addressing family violence in their work
- > CYPS' approach to working with families and perpetrators.

Working Together for Kids

In consultation with the Australian Red Cross Birth Family Advocacy Support Service and the Women's Legal Centre ACT and Region, the *Working Together for Kids* booklet was redesigned into five individual guides for parents and families working with CYPS. These guides were endorsed by the CYPS IMS Governance Committee in August 2017 and are available in printed form and on the Community Services Directorate's website. The guides include:

- > Guide 1 – *Child Concern Reports*
- > Guide 2 – *Going to court and working to reunite families*
- > Guide 3 – *When children are in care*
- > Guide 4 – *Feedback and raising concerns and*
- > Guide 5 – *Representing yourself in court.*

Mandatory reporting

Feedback to mandated reporters

CYPS has engaged with stakeholders to improve and target feedback to reporters, particularly mandated reporters. To improve the quality of feedback provided to mandated reporters, CYPS facilitated a think tank in October 2016 with key agencies who make high volume reports to CYPS. Based on feedback from the think tank, CYPS developed a new feedback letter for mandated reporters and trialled it with Education Directorate staff in 2017. The letter is now used for all mandated reporters.

With the introduction of CYPS' new client management IT system in November 2019, further improvements were identified and the letter and process for responding will be simplified and made more efficient.

Mandatory reporting guidance

CYPS reviewed and updated its reporting guide, *Keeping children and young people safe*, in 2017 and again in 2019. It is available on the Community Services Directorate's website. The guide provides information about the role of CYPS and the role of the community and mandated reporters in responding to concerns of child abuse and neglect. It includes guidance about what matters should and should not be reported to CYPS, encourages reporters to consider offering other forms of support as a more appropriate response for families and provides information about what reporters could do before they make a report.

In addition, CYPS developed a supporting information sheet specific for mandated reporters about alternative actions they can take to engage with families they have concerns about. It is intended that through improved education of alternative community supports and encouraging reporters to look at the individual circumstances of their concerns, the number of reports made to CYPS that do not relate to the abuse and neglect of children and young people will decrease, leading to reduced demand on the system and allowing the statutory system to respond to children and young people at risk of abuse and neglect.

Mandatory reporting training

CYPS developed an eLearning training program to support mandated reporters to better understand their obligations to report concerns of child abuse and neglect, but also to recognise their responsibilities to respond appropriately to children and young people they are involved with. This training standardises the information available to mandated reporters and aims to improve decision-making about when to report to CYPS and the quality of information provided by mandated reporters when they do make reports.

In addition to this training, CYPS practice leaders and liaison officers provide education sessions to various mandated reporter groups, including the AFP's Sexual Assault and Child Abuse Team (SACAT), CHS and Calvary Public Hospital. CYPS also responds to individual requests for these education sessions, which more recently have included Legal Aid (ACT), psychiatry interns and registrars, and non-government and community organisations.

All teachers in the ACT are required to obtain and maintain registration with the Teacher Quality Institute. To do so, teachers must also obtain and maintain a Working with Vulnerable People General Registration, which includes a police check.

Participation in child safety online training (*Keeping Children and Young People Safe*) is compulsory for teachers in the ACT public system. The Education Directorate reminds all public school based staff of their obligations regularly. Mandatory reporting training features in the induction program for new educators in public schools. Teachers in non-government schools are also made aware of mandatory reporting obligations.

Decision-making, oversight and review

Decision-making in CYPS can be contentious and complex and is guided by the principles of the ACT's *Children and Young People Act 2008*. These principles focus decision-making on the best interests of children and young people, with their needs, protection, safety and wellbeing considered paramount over the needs of anyone else involved. Most decisions made by CYPS staff are the right decisions, made in a complex environment. Child protection practitioners are skilled and committed, and it is crucial to ensure that experienced staff are supported to stay in these critical roles.

Work is underway to improve internal decision-making processes within CYPS in response to feedback about what needs to change to improve the consistency and transparency of CYPS decisions. Consultation occurred in 2020 with key external and internal stakeholders on a model for internal review of child protection decisions. This included consultation with the ACT Human Rights Commission, Australian Red Cross Birth Family Advocacy Support Service, CREATE Foundation, Carers ACT, Legal Aid (ACT), Women's Legal Service, ACTCOSS, ACT Together, Karinya House and ADACAS. Workshops were also held with staff internal to the Community Services Directorate including the Quality, Complaints and Regulation team, CYPS senior managers and the CYPS Leadership, Performance, and Complaints and Client Services teams. This work is in the final stages of completion and it is anticipated the model will be piloted through a 'try, test, learn' approach throughout 2022.

To support the implementation of the internal decision review model, a restorative practice guide and a program of practice development will be developed. The focus of this work is to build the skill base of child protection practitioners, ensure a baseline skill level across the workforce and enhance the capacity of enabling functions to support the operational workforce.

The ACT Government is also undertaking work with the ACT Human Rights Commission to develop and implement a model for external merits review of child protection decisions in the ACT. This is driven by a community expectation and government understanding that external merits review should be available for more child protection decisions.

Two roundtables were held in 2020, with community members and organisations, interstate stakeholders and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Organisations contributing their expertise. Following the roundtables, the ACT Government committed funding for an independent consultant to devise a model for an external merits review process within the ACT context.

CYPS is committed to continuing to embed a culture of transparency and engagement in relation to decision-making. There is already a strong oversight regime for the ACT's child protection system, including external monitoring by the Courts, the ACT Human Rights Commission and the ACT Ombudsman. CYPS also has its own internal business units that review and analyse decision-making, including the Application and Review Committee (ARC), the Operational Compliance team, the Case Analysis team and the Complaints and Client Services team.

Further, CYPS has collaborated with the ACT Public Advocate's office to improve the timeliness of information provided to the Public Advocate regarding matters in the ACT Childrens Court. This includes after emergency action is taken and when applications are filed in the Childrens Court, including applications to amend, extend or revoke care and protection orders. In addition, CYPS and the Public Advocate have established a secure shared facility on the ACT Government IT network to share information. This facility enables CYPS to upload documents to a central location accessible only to the Public Advocate's office and CYPS, resulting in relevant documents being accessible promptly and in a more easily identifiable and trackable manner.

Complaints and Client Services team

In May 2018, the Complaints and Client Services team was established with an agreed focus on internal complex case matters and complaints. The team engages directly with parents, carers, schools and community organisations as an independent point of contact on CYPS decisions. The team provides feedback on the rationale for decisions and provides complaint resolution.

The team is currently redesigning the complaints processes to follow a more restorative and resolution-focused approach to complaints management, with an emphasis on conciliation and participative involvement in complaints handling. The team has adapted an approach that seeks to resolve as well as respond to concerns and issues raised by complainants.

In developing this new approach, the team has considered feedback provided through the *Report on Child and Youth Protection Services (Part 2)* of the ACT Legislative Assembly's Standing Committee on Health, Ageing and Community Services (Report 11, 30 July 2020), submissions received in response to the *Review of Child Protection Decisions in the ACT* discussion paper and an audit of complaint handling processes within the Community Services Directorate conducted in 2020.

CYPS has also consulted the ACT Human Rights Commission to develop a training package for the Complaints and Clients Services team, and CYPS staff more broadly, to support delivery of this conciliatory and strengths-based style of resolution. This training seeks to enhance decision-making, decision review and complaint resolution capabilities of CYPS staff.

Case Analysis team

In the 2016-17 ACT Budget, almost \$2.5 million was allocated through the Safer Families Package to enhance quality assurance of child protection services through a new Case Analysis team within CYPS and the development of an independent Child and Youth Protection Quality Assurance and Improvement Committee, now known as the Strengthening Practice Committee. Both initiatives have subsequently received ongoing funding.

Since the Case Analysis team was established in early 2017, this new capability has supported a stronger focus on to the reflective practice of CYPS. As a result, the Directorate has made it a priority to continue the team's functions and funding.

The establishment of the team has been a key platform for improving decision-making and the quality of case management across CYPS. The team:

- > provides independent analysis of individual cases at key decision-making points
- > identifies practice concerns, knowledge gaps and examples of good practice
- > improves research, risk assessment and analytical skills of team members.

A case analysis allows child protection practitioners to think about long-term cumulative harm, rather than a single incident of immediate risk, and ensures the voice of the child is at the front and centre of decision-making. Case analysis also explores the risks and vulnerabilities to a child's safety and if there are sufficient protective factors to mitigate those vulnerabilities.

The team's model of analysis includes an information gathering meeting with the allocated case manager and their team leader, as well as a feedback meeting once the analysis has been completed. In the feedback meeting, the practice strengths, challenges and issues are explored with the case manager and team leader and are reflective and add value to future case direction.

Strengthening Practice Committee

As noted above, the Strengthening Practice Committee was established through the Safer Families Package in the 2016-17 Budget. Its aim is to strengthen the quality of child protection practice in the ACT and to foster ongoing improvement of the child protection system.

The Committee operates in an advisory capacity to drive a culture of practice improvement to ensure better outcomes are achieved for children whose safety is at risk from abuse or neglect. The Committee is made up of representatives from ACT Government and independent interstate experts.

Reportable Conduct

The Reportable Conduct Scheme began on 1 July 2017 and requires designated entities to report allegations, offences and convictions of child-related misconduct by their employees to the ACT Ombudsman.

The ACT Government has invested over \$1.5 million since 2019-20, with an additional \$2.2 million allocated over the next three financial years, to establish a reportable conduct function within CYPS to ensure improved capacity to share information across the child protection service system and support engagement with the Reportable Conduct Scheme, overseen by the ACT Ombudsman.

Child and Youth Record Information System

The 2015-16 ACT Budget allocated funding to commence the development of a new case management IT system known as the Child and Youth Record Information System, or CYRIS, with further investments allocated over subsequent budgets. CYRIS went live in 2019.

The first and second phases of CYRIS have been implemented and resulted in significant improvements in how CYPS staff access and link information across different family units. As CYRIS development continues, it will deliver improved information sharing between CYPS and the Education Directorate, Police and funded community providers that deliver out of home care services, as well as with carers and children and young people.

Education

The ACT Government provides for the continued enrolment and engagement of ACT students in approved forms of education. There is a wide range of supports available for vulnerable students, and protections for them through the teachers and staff within the ACT education community. The Education Directorate, ACT public schools, and non-government education providers work closely to support continued improvements to practice that relate to enrolment and attendance of students.

The ACT Government, informed by the recommendations of the Glanfield Report, has undertaken a number of activities to improve the way it manages the enrolment and attendance of ACT students. The ACT Government has:

- > amended the *Education Act (2004)* (part 6.1A) in 2019 allowing for greater sharing of information across jurisdictions regarding a child or young person being enrolled at an education provider or registered for home education. These provisions apply to all schools in the ACT

- > commenced a review of the Education Directorate’s Enrolment and Attendance policy and procedure to ensure alignment with the legislative amendments, and to strengthen current practice in public schools. These policies are not formally adopted by non-government schools, however, are used to provide cross-sector advice and guidance
- > continued to strengthen the use of the School Administrative System (SAS) to ensure attendance data for ACT public schools is accurately collected and analysed, to enable early intervention and responses to students/families of concern
- > established a School Attendance Team within the ACT Education Directorate to improve the monitoring of student enrolment, attendance, and reconnection with education for children and young people in all ACT schools.

The Education Directorate’s responses relating to student engagement and attendance have been intended to minimise the risk of children and young people “disappearing” from the education system, noting this was an issue which was subject to commentary in the Coroner’s report.

The findings and recommendations from the Coroner’s report align to the findings of the Glanfield Report. This affirms that the system reform and investment outlined above, to improve supports and services since 2016, has been correct and appropriate, however further improvements can be made.

The Education Directorate has provided and continues to expand the range of wellbeing supports to students and families, and training for school staff in ACT public schools, which also serve as protective factors for students. These include:

- > increasing the availability of psychologists in all ACT public schools. Psychologists assist with immediate intervention needs for students but also play an important part in linking students and families with health practitioners and clinicians, community-based supports and services
- > facilitating the employment of social workers and youth workers by ACT public schools to further assist with the wellbeing and referral of students and families to community-based supports
- > implementing mandatory online training for all ACT public school teachers on *Keeping Young People Safe*, ensuring they are well trained in recognising the signs of abuse and trauma informed responses
- > supporting innovative models of program support. In 2020, the ACT Government funded a trial for the provision of Legal Liaison Officers in ACT public colleges. These legal officers provide legal support to students and families and may refer them for representation in certain circumstances, including where there are circumstances of domestic or family violence. This program has been funded to continue for another four years and will continue to support at risk students and families in ACT public colleges.

Cross sectoral collaboration occurs regularly, both formally and informally. This provides an opportunity to discuss improvements to the legislative framework and policy as well as to share examples of best practice for the public and non-government school systems.

Progress made but more to do

The findings and recommendations from the Coroner's report align with the findings from the Glanfield Report, *The Review of Domestic and Family Violence Deaths in the Australian Capital Territory* and the *ACT Domestic Violence Service System Final Gap Analysis Report*. The system reforms and investments by the ACT Government outlined above to improve supports and services since 2016 have therefore already ensured significant progress to improve public safety and keep children and young people safe. But there is still more work to do.

The ACT Government is continuing to develop new and sustainable ways of working across government and community that focus on intervening earlier, reducing barriers to access, joining up and integrating services, responding to diverse needs and holding perpetrators to account.

Government response to recommendations

The Coroner's report includes 17 recommendations across the areas of child protection (10 recommendations), education (three recommendations) and information sharing (four recommendations). The Government has carefully considered the findings and recommendations from the Coroner's report and has identified common themes across the 17 recommendations. These themes are:

- > Theme 1: Workforce development, training and guidance.
- > Theme 2: Better support and training for mandated reporters.
- > Theme 3: Contemporary legislation and information sharing.
- > Theme 4: Increased funding to meet demand and enhanced partnerships.

The Government's response to the full 17 recommendations against these identified themes is outlined below.

Theme 1: Workforce development, training, and guidance

<p>Recommendation 1 – AGREED</p> <p>Renewed training initiative with a focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">i. strengthening the understanding and application of risk assessment, including cumulative harmii. strengthening the understanding and application of legislative thresholds in informing decision-makingiii. strengthening the understanding of forensic interviewing of children and parentsiv. the role of supervision, to include provision of improved quality assurance of decision-making and administrative functions.
<p>Recommendation 2 – AGREED</p> <p>Continue funding for the induction training package for new frontline workers.</p>
<p>Recommendation 3 – AGREED</p> <p>Funding and investment in training frontline managers and team leaders to develop and strengthen skills in risk analysis and quality assurance.</p>
<p>Recommendation 6 – AGREED</p> <p>Funding to be provided for junior staff in intake to develop and enhance their skills in frontline work which includes risk assessment and cumulative harm.</p>

Recommendations under theme 1 focus on improving the induction, ongoing support, training and development of the ACT's child protection workforce to enable them to continue to respond to the increasing demand and complexity of families being reported to CYPS. The ACT Government commits to build on the efforts outlined in the previous section (Systemic progress since 2016) and continue to implement a range of initiatives in these areas to strengthen staff expertise, risk analysis, engagement, decision-making and quality assurance.

Specifically, the ACT Government recognises the complex work undertaken by CYPS staff and is committed to the continued delivery of specialist training to support this essential work. A Foundational and Ongoing Learning Framework is currently being developed to support the work of CYPS staff, and it is aligned with the skills and experience necessary for staff at each classification level. A key focus is strengthening delivery of forensic interviewing for more experienced CYPS staff and a foundational interviewing program for new starters that introduces them to a framework for engaging and interviewing children. An important aspect will be to review the current risk assessment system and enhance it through provision of supporting tools and resources that capture all aspects of risk assessment identified through this Inquiry.

CYPS staff will also continue to engage in the internationally recognised Safe & Together training model delivered by the Safe & Together Institute. This model uses a suite of tools and interventions designed to support child protection practitioners to become domestic violence-informed.

The work progressing to implement internal and external review of decisions models will also contribute to the upskilling of CYPS staff. Internal review of decision work will have a strong focus on enhancing the practice skills of operational and leadership staff in relation to restorative and relationship-based practice. This practice development will have a particular focus on CYPS staff in leadership positions, emphasising reflective analysis, decision-making and quality assurance. The internal review model will be piloted over 2022 as a 'try, test and learn' pilot to understand the demand and impact on families and CYPS.

Theme 2: Better support and training for mandated reporters

Recommendation 9 – AGREED-IN-PRINCIPLE

Funding to engage a team of trainers in relation to providing mandatory reporters with skills to identify matter which require reporting to CYPS and those which could be referred to appropriate community organisations.

Recommendation 9 focuses on how CYPS can improve engagement with and support of mandated reporters who are concerned about the wellbeing of children and young people in the ACT.

CYPS will explore how to provide mandated reporters with training and knowledge of appropriate referral pathways to ensure they can better respond to the needs of children and their families, and better identify matters that must be reported to CYPS. CYPS will work with partners including Health, Education, ACT Policing and community agencies to provide an enhanced, aligned and consistent training program across the ACT to all mandated reporters.

This recommendation is Agreed-In-Principle, as the Government supports the intent of the recommendation but there is further design work required on the best approach to achieving that intent. This design work will consider the intersections between the child protection system and mandatory reporters holistically and the resources and capability required to deliver the outcome.

Theme 3: Contemporary legislation and information sharing

<p>Recommendation 4 – AGREED</p> <p>Consider legislative changes in relation to the definition of how a child concern report is defined from a ‘caller defined model’ to an ‘intake defined model’.</p>
<p>Recommendation 10 – AGREED-IN-PRINCIPLE</p> <p>Consider legislative changes to include that mandatory reporters are advised of the outcome of their reports.</p>
<p>Recommendation 11 – AGREED-IN-PRINCIPLE</p> <p>Adopt a formal process:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">i. to require parents to advise the school where a child is being unenrolled to give details of where the child will be enrolled, or home schooledii. where a child, the subject of CYPS involvement, has been unenrolled, to alert CYPS that the child has been unenrolled and the name of the school where they will be enrolled or the address for home schoolingiii. obliging the Education Directorate to contact the new school to confirm enrolment and if enrolment is not confirmed then the Education Directorate must make a mandatory report to CYPS of that factiv. making child tracking in the ACT to be mandatory for all schools.
<p>Recommendation 12 – AGREED-IN-PRINCIPLE</p> <p>To adopt and implement the National Schools Reform Agreement ‘Unique Student Identifier’ (USI) for the purposes of having a national information exchange scheme.</p>
<p>Recommendation 13 – AGREED-IN-PRINCIPLE</p> <p>To participate in the management of the interjurisdictional data transfer scheme project through the Education Council of Australia.</p>
<p>Recommendation 14 – NOTED</p> <p>Expand the usage of the Connect 4 Safety Federal initiative to incorporate a health service provider component.</p>
<p>Recommendation 16 – AGREED-IN-PRINCIPLE</p> <p>Enhance information sharing between CYPS and ACT Education in relation to real time enrolment data and identification of children at risk in conjunction with the proposal for mandatory child tracking.</p>
<p>Recommendation 17 – AGREED-IN-PRINCIPLE</p> <p>Recommend that the Attorney General at the next meeting of State and Territory Attorneys General, raise with his counterparts the establishment of a national data base for children at risk.</p>

Recommendations under theme 3 focus on strengthening legislation and other mechanisms to improve responses and information sharing. Substantial work has already occurred in these areas and will continue. The intended outcomes of these existing initiatives are expected to contribute to the Government's response to the Coroner's recommendations.

Child protection work is amongst the most complex work governments can deliver, and the workforce deserves contemporary legislation that is clear, simple and effective in guiding their work and responses to the most vulnerable and at-risk children and young people in our community.

Children, young people and their families also deserve legislation that firmly prioritises safety within family. Further, the timely and effective sharing of appropriate information amongst involved authorities is crucial to the delivery of informed, responsive and best practice services to these children, young people and families.

The *Children and Young People Act 2008* was the first human rights compliant child protection legislation for the ACT. Since that time, our understanding of research, evidence and better practice has improved. Several external independent reviews have identified the need for the ACT to have a more contemporary child protection legislation, including in relation to the definition of how a child concern report is defined. Through the 2021-22 Budget the ACT Government allocated \$1.98 million over three years towards this effort.

Progress has already been made to improve the appropriate information sharing that occurs following a mandatory report being received by CYPS. Implementation of CYPS' new client management system, CYRIS, has improved the ability of CYPS to provide relevant information to mandated reporters in a more simplified and timely manner. Feedback from mandated reporters on this revised approach was well received and further improvements are planned, with interfaces and portals under development by the CYRIS project team.

The ACT Government is committed to ensuring the safety of children and young people and will continue to strengthen its ability to support them to remain safe and engaged in education. The Education Directorate is continuing to work collaboratively with all education sectors, across government and with community partners to strengthen the formal processes that underpin the collection, management and monitoring of information relating to student enrolment status in the ACT.

Significant reform has already been progressed to address the issues canvassed in recommendations 11, 12 and 13 as outlined below. These recommendations are Agreed-In-Principle, as the Government supports the intent of the recommendations and will consider, in the context of reform underway, what further action is required to fully deliver on the intent.

All ACT children and young people of compulsory education age are legally required to be engaged in an approved education program or be enrolled in a registered education course provider.

The role of the Education Directorate in this context is both as a provider of the public education system and as a regulator of key provisions in the *Education Act 2004* relating to all education providers in the ACT. The Education Directorate's policies and processes ensure the capture of information about student movements between approved educational programs, education course providers and registration for home learning across the ACT. This information is collected in the Student Transfer Register (STR), in accordance with the *Education Act 2004*.

The STR provides policy, procedure, and a mechanism to support the tracking of students when they transfer or move between any ACT school and other educational setting. The STR provides a uniform method of record keeping across government and non-government schools in relation to the transfer of students. It assists in managing school attendance by providing consistency of record keeping and information management for all education providers. Compliance with the requirements of the STR is required for all schools under the *Education Act 2004*.

In relation to Recommendation 11(i), the collection of a student's next education destination currently relies on the willingness of families to share the information with schools on departure. Formal procedures are in place to capture and monitor this information where it is given.

The ACT Government is examining ways to strengthen the *Education Act 2004* to better understand and manage student movement between schooling settings.

Information about student enrolments from all sectors is referred to as student transfer data and can be collected in the STR. Student enrolment information is monitored by the Education Directorate's Student Attendance Team, which was established following the Glanfield review. Opportunities to increase the targeted response capability of this team are being explored as part of a review of the Education Directorate's Student Enrolment and Attendance policy and procedure which will be shared with all sectors and will likely inform improvements to practice across all ACT schools.

The Education Directorate has implemented practical measures that support ACT public schools to collect information from parents when they are unenrolling their child from school (departure reasons), and their next education destination. A child's next education setting may be another ACT school (public or non-government), home education, an interstate school, or an international school.

The Education Directorate continues to support ACT public schools and their communities to reinforce this information collection process. The Education Directorate is strengthening procedures to support schools to maintain accurate student enrolment information and updating enrolment status to 'inactive' until the details of the next education destination are provided by families or information about enrolment is confirmed.

In relation to Recommendation 11(ii), all ACT education providers, including those providing home education, are required to upload enrolment/registration status information to the STR according to the STR procedures. This information is used by the Education Directorate to monitor student enrolments. Both government and non-government schools liaise with CYPS around individual enrolment changes where relevant.

In relation to Recommendation 11(iii), the Education Directorate has a formal process in place to monitor enrolment by using STR and SAS information to determine if a student from any ACT school has successfully enrolled in their next enrolment destination. In cases where students move between ACT schools, verification of their enrolment can be confirmed through the STR or SAS or by confirming with ACT schools directly.

The STR captures student transfer/movement information for all ACT schools. Schools enter data into this system either by making entries directly in the case of government schools, or by transfer of relevant data to the Education Directorate in the case of non-government schools.

A report is then generated from that data to identify students who have left one school with no corresponding new enrolment in a government school, non-government school or application for registration for home education within 14 school term days, as is required under compulsory education age provisions of the *Education Act 2004*.

Where enrolment or attendance non-compliance is identified by schools, or through the examination of STR data, these matters may be escalated to the Attendance Team in the Education Directorate. The Enrolment and Attendance Team further examines the circumstances of non-enrolment or attendance and works with families to support re-engagement with schooling where necessary. Where the non-compliance or an information gap relates to students whose most recent enrolment is in a non-government school, these matters are referred to the relevant sector for provision of further information or management if required. In some circumstances this may involve informal or formal compliance activities. The Education Directorate is continuing to work to promote parent/carer understanding of their legal obligations to ensure their child is enrolled in another education setting within 14 days.

In relation to Recommendation 11(iv), under the *Education Act 2004*, all ACT schools must keep a register of enrolments and attendances of students at school. The Education Directorate monitors enrolment transfers at all ACT public schools through the STR and SAS. Non-government schools provide enrolment data to the Education Directorate through the STR, and this is governed by the STR procedures and guidelines. Home education information is also captured through this mechanism.

Where a child is enrolling in another ACT public school, this information can be verified through the SAS. As participation in home education is subject to an application process, this information is also captured by the Education Directorate.

The School Attendance Team within the ACT Education Directorate uses information from the SAS and the STR to assist ACT public schools with the management of student enrolment and attendance issues, including reconnection with education in the ACT. Where there are issues identified that relate to students whose most recent enrolment has not been with an ACT public school, the School Attendance Team will contact the relevant education provider to better understand student circumstances and identify whether they remain engaged in an approved form of education within the ACT.

Where schools are unable to successfully engage or re-engage a student of compulsory education age in another approved education course, such as another school, Distance Education, Home Education or Flexible Education, non-attendance and non-compliance provisions of the *Education Act 2004* and corresponding procedures apply.

The School Attendance Team also plays an important role in working with CYPS to identify students who may be at risk. Where it is indicated that a student has left the ACT, the School Attendance Team may seek information to confirm with other jurisdictions if students at risk have re-engaged in education in another State or Territory.

Subject to a review of the Education Participation (Enrolment and Attendance) policy and procedures, the Education Directorate will enhance the guidance and support provided to ACT public schools to assist with the collection and maintenance of accurate enrolment data. This may be adopted by non-government schools as guidance to inform their practice, as has occurred with previous policies and procedures relating to these issues.

Amendments to the *Education Act 2004* have supported the Education Directorate's ability to seek information from other Australian jurisdictions about the enrolment status of individual students. Any response to these enquiries would be subject to corresponding legislation in those jurisdictions.

Where there are concerns for a child's safety, further investigations are made through the corresponding Education Department or child protection service in the relevant jurisdiction.

In relation to Recommendation 12, the ACT Government views the 'Unique Student Identifier' (USI) project being undertaken through the National Schools Reform Agreement as a key element in the suite of tools available to improve the monitoring and management of student enrolment, given that the primary purpose of the USI is to provide a national unique identifier for students.

A pilot implementation of the USI is currently being developed, with broader implementation planned for 2023.

In relation to Recommendation 13, the first application of the USI is the Interstate Student Transfer Data Note (ISTDN); this project was agreed in 2020 by Education Ministers in response to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse recommendation that the Education Council review the ISTDN in relation “to the safety and wellbeing of children, including information relevant to child sexual abuse in institutional contexts”, and is well advanced. The intent of the project is to support the exchange of data between schools and school systems when students enrol at a new school across state and sectoral boundaries. An online secure data exchange is being developed that will allow:

- > schools to request data about students enrolling from their previous school
- > schools to confirm the request matches the exact student previously enrolled
- > schools to provide student data in a standard format by manual data entry, data upload and via connected student information systems
- > exchange of records within the privacy legislation and any arrangements requiring approval of parents.

The ACT Government supports improvements to information sharing to protect vulnerable children and young people and to support them to access and attain an education, as is their right.

The ACT Government continues to actively participate in the establishment and implementation of the national child protection information sharing system, Connect 4 Safety. Five jurisdictions, including the ACT, are already providing data on a regular basis. The recommendation to expand Connect 4 Safety to incorporate a health service provider component is noted. Connect 4 Safety is a national project that has been managed and coordinated by the Commonwealth and the NSW Department of Communities and Justice. Information sharing provisions of each jurisdiction’s child protection legislation were utilised to allow the sharing of this sensitive information only between child protection agencies. The project has taken several years to complete and significant work to achieve information sharing agreements between these agencies. Further significant national work and agreement would need to occur to extend sharing of this information with other agencies.

Work to improve information sharing between CYPS and the Education Directorate is also underway through the phased implementation of CYRIS. A CYRIS project deliverable to be completed in 2021-22 is to build interfaces between CYRIS and Education Directorate’s systems to improve information sharing capability between directorates, where appropriate. This will better inform the work of both CYPS and Education staff involved with a child or young person and their family. This interface could provide opportunities for early intervention and supports where they are required. Real time data sharing as proposed by Recommendation 16 is agreed in-principle and will be considered in the context of future developments and investment in CYRIS.

Work is also progressing in partnership with all states and territories and the Commonwealth Government to consider next steps to develop a national child safety and wellbeing information sharing scheme. Additionally, there are several related national information sharing projects currently progressing through Children and Families Secretaries (CAFS) meetings, the National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children, the National Action Plan to Prevent Violence against Women and their Children, and other national policy work. This includes alignment with related information sharing activities, such as enhancing national information sharing relating to Working with Vulnerable People checks, improving arrangements for carer registers, improving incident reporting and implementing Connect 4 Safety across jurisdictions.

In the ACT, the Minister for Families and Community Services rather than the Attorney-General is leading this work as the Minister responsible for child protection.

Theme 4: Increased funding to meet demand and enhanced partnerships

<p>Recommendation 5 – AGREED-IN-PRINCIPLE</p> <p>Funding a greater number of staff at the intake level of CYPS.</p>
<p>Recommendation 7 – AGREED-IN-PRINCIPLE</p> <p>Consider the establishment of an Intake Consultation Team for complex cases.</p>
<p>Recommendation 8 – AGREED-IN-PRINCIPLE</p> <p>Continue funding of the Case Analysis Team with a view to increasing staff numbers.</p>
<p>Recommendation 15 – AGREED</p> <p>Continue to evolve the relationships between CYPS, ACT Education, SACAT, DVCS and other community organisations through the use of liaison officers.</p>

Recommendations under theme 4 focus on additional resourcing to achieve improved responses and practice to the ACT community. Recommendations 5, 7 and 8 are Agreed-In-Principle, as the Government supports the intent of the recommendation and commits to undertake the further design work to determine the best approach to achieving that intent. This design work will consider the child protection system holistically and the resources and capability required to deliver the outcome.

The 2017-18 Budget committed \$2.5m per year to establish two additional frontline casework teams in response to the increase in child concern reports. It is acknowledged that there continues to be pressure due to continued increases in demand.

In 2020-21 financial year, the CYPS Intake team received 21,697 child concern reports to assess. This was a significant increase from 2019-20, where 18,663 reports were received, and which continued the upward trend seen over several years. For comparison, in 2009-10, there were 11,833 reports received and in 2015-16, there were 16,162.

This continued increase of demand experienced at CYPS Intake poses significant challenges to how the ACT child protection system can successfully risk assess and prioritise action for the most vulnerable and at-risk children reported.

In October 2021, the Government committed \$6.488 million in funding over four years to further develop CYRIS to ensure high quality information is available to comprehensively assess the risk experienced by vulnerable children and young people. In 2021-22, work is expected to be completed on a new online reporting portal as part of the phased implementation of CYRIS. The portal will replace the multiple pathways through which reports, and information is currently received at Intake and decrease administrative burden on Intake staff by stopping the need for information to be transferred from one medium to another. Streamlining this process will increase the time available to Intake staff to review information and assess reports, resulting in enhanced decision-making and responses.

The ACT Government acknowledges the increased demand on the CYPS service and agrees in-principle to consider additional funding to respond to this. The Government will also investigate the viability of piloting a response at Intake to enhance engagement with mandated reporters through a dedicated consultation team at Intake. In addition, the Government will explore how to improve the capacity of the service to better manage those matters that fall below the legal threshold for progressing to an appraisal.

The Government also agrees to continue funding the CYPS Case Analysis team as an important service for the holistic assessment of information held by CYPS in complex matters. In addition to undertaking holistic case reviews, the CYPS Case Analysis team has an increasing role in providing complex case consultations directly to operational areas. The Government will also explore the viability of expanding the remit of the CYPS Case Analysis team to coordinate or provide a quality assurance case review process for children where a threshold number of reports has been received and co-existing risk factors for cumulative harm are present.

CYPS has established liaison and referral points with government agencies and community sector providers to better meet the needs of vulnerable children, young people and their families. To further support these partnerships and information sharing efforts, a range of external partners now co-locate with CYPS on a regular basis. CYPS will continue to work in partnership and evolve the relationships with key government and community stakeholders in responding to concerns of child abuse and neglect.

Conclusion

The ACT Government takes very seriously its responsibilities for the safety and protection of Canberra's children and young people. The death of Bradyn Dillon in 2016 was a tragedy that continues to be deeply felt by his family and many in our community. The Coroner's report underscores the critical importance for a sharpened focus on systemic reform in the ACT. For the ACT Government, this refocus began in 2016 with significant reform across all areas of the child protection and domestic and family violence response systems, and this continues today as outlined in this Government Response. However, the ACT Government acknowledges there is more to be done and must continue to be done to keep children and young people safe and ensure public safety.

While the Coroner's findings lay sole responsibility for Bradyn's death with his father, that does not take away our responsibility as a government and as a community to do all we can to better protect our community's children and young people. The ACT Government is committed to continuing its reform and to respond to the Coroner's recommendations, which will require an integrated approach to reform across the ACT human services system.

The Community Services Directorate will continue to work in close partnership with the Education Directorate, DVCS and other community organisations to minimise the risk of children and young people disappearing from the education system. These relationships will be further strengthened as Directorates continue work across government and with community stakeholders.

We need to continue to develop safe and effective responses to children at risk of harm. However, outcomes for children will be better if we can connect families with support before a child is identified as being at serious risk. Advancing the wellbeing of children and families in the ACT requires collective effort across a whole-of-community response. To advance this goal, in early 2021, the Government and over 40 community organisations came together at a Children and Families Forum to jointly progress a system-wide reform agenda, taking lessons and insights from past and existing reviews, engagements and reforms. The Forum developed shared principles and explored potential new structures, mechanisms and opportunities for the community sector and Government to work differently together towards better outcomes for children and families.

The ACT Government remains committed to progressing ambitious and transformative reforms to improve the wellbeing of children, young people and their families and to work alongside community partners and families to achieve this. These reforms have and will include changes across statutory and non-statutory services, such as embedding early family support, implementing Child Safe Standards across all services and supporting the delivery of the children and young people core area in the *ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement 2019-2028*, implementation of the recommendations of the Our Booris Our Way Review and further development of the *A Step Up for Our Kids*, the ACT's out of home care strategy. Such reforms will contribute to building a child protection system that is restorative, contemporary and underpinned by transparent and inclusive decision-making.