

# COMMUNIQUÉ

9 October 2020

The Children and Families Tripartite Forum (the Forum) held its third meeting of 2020 in Darwin and via video conference on 9 October 2020.

The Forum was chaired by Ms Donna Ah Chee, who welcomed Forum members and observers from the Northern Territory and Australian Governments, Northern Territory Council of Social Service, North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency and Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory. The meeting commenced with a Welcome to Country from Larrakia elder, Dr Christine-Fejo King who also spoke of the important role of the Tripartite Forum, and the hopes and expectations of the Aboriginal community and for unity of purpose to enable reform.

The meeting hosted Ministers:

- The Honourable Ken Wyatt MP, Australian Government Minister for Indigenous Australians
- The Honourable Michelle Landry MP, Australian Government Assistant Minister for Children and Families and Assistant Minister for Northern Australia
- The Honourable Kate Worden MLA, Northern Territory Minister for Territory Families and Urban Housing
- The Honourable Lauren Moss MLA, Northern Territory Minister for Children and Minister for Youth

The Ministers welcomed the opportunity to address the Forum, outlined their priorities and emphasised the importance of working together to address issues. Forum members informed the Ministers of their continued commitment to a united approach and to addressing issues of disadvantaged children, young people and families.

Minister Wyatt and Assistant Minister Landry spoke of their commitment to working with the Northern Territory Government and organisations, for improved consultation and coordination. Minister Wyatt updated members on progress of Closing the Gap and outlined the Australian Government's intention to develop a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood Strategy in partnership with Aboriginal people, and the Australian Government will provide an update on the Strategy to the Forum in February.

Ministers Worden and Minister Moss thanked Forum members for the work they have done and recognised the Forum's role in providing input and advice on important strategies and projects. Minister Worden reinforced her priority to ensure implemented reforms are firmly embedded across government.

Community sector members commended the Northern Territory Government on the formation of the new Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities especially given the strong correlations between housing and child development.



The Forum endorsed a Managing Conflicts of Interest Protocol and updated Terms of Reference ensuring transparency and accountability of members. Members were also briefed on the progress made in establishing the Working Group for the development of the 10-Year Generational Strategy for Children and Families in the Northern Territory (Generational Strategy). The Forum endorsed the Generational Strategy Working Group's Terms of Reference and Project Plan.

A key outcome of the Forum was an agreed timeframe for the ongoing development of the Generational Strategy planned to be finalised by September 2021. The Forum also agreed for the Generational Strategy to be developed alongside and aligned with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

The Northern Territory Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities provided a presentation *Our Journey 2016-20* which provided an overview of the agency's progress, the reforms undertaken and the ensuing positive changes to the areas of child protection and youth justice. Key outcomes of the reforms include:

- 35% fewer children are now subject to child protection substantiation (from 1938 children in 2016-17 to 1248 children in 2019-20)
- a significant decrease in children subject to re-substantiations from 17% in 2017-18 to 9% in 2019-20;
- 26% fewer children entered out-of-home care (from 304 children in 2016-17 to 225 children in 2019-20)
- 79% more families are commencing intensive family support in the last two year (411 families in 2016-17 to 737 families in 2018-19)
- 15% fewer young people were apprehended by police in 2019-20.
- 46% fewer young people entered youth detention in 2019-20 compared to 2016-17.
- a significant increase in the number of young people successfully completing youth justice supervision from 51% in 2016-17 to 69% in 2019-20.

Forum members commended the Northern Territory Government on the progress to date and applauded the ongoing commitment to the reforms.

The Australian Government presented to the Forum on the review of and planned improvements to the Intensive Family Support Service program. Forum members agreed to participate in an out-of-session meeting to consider the service model in more detail and provide advice on a methodology to assess community need.

The next Forum meeting is scheduled for late February 2021.