

COMMUNIQUÉ

25 May 2022

The Children and Families Tripartite Forum (the forum) held its second meeting of 2022 in Alice Springs.

The forum was chaired by Ms Donna Ah Chee, who welcomed members and observers from the Northern Territory and Australian Governments, Northern Territory Council of Social Service (NTCOSS), North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency (NAAJA) and Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory (APO NT).

The meeting began with a **Welcome to Country from Arrernte Elder, Aunty Kumalie**, who reflected on her work in education and the importance of both ways and bilingual education. She highlighted how engaged children are when learning in language about country and culture and that teachers should receive training in these areas.

The forum was joined in person by Northern Territory Government ministers the **Hon Kate Worden MLA** and the **Hon Chansey Paech MLA** as well as the **Hon Lauren Moss MLA** via video conference.

Minister Worden outlined the alignment between her new portfolios. As Minister for Territory Families and Minister for Police and Emergency Services there is opportunity for improved communication lines and therefore better informed decision making across both agencies. Minister Worden identified that Territory Families, Housing and Communities and NT Police were exploring the co-location of officers and confirmed that NT Police were reviewing the use of spit hoods following advice from the Tripartite Forum in March.

In his first visit to the forum, **Minister Paech** provided an overview of his priorities as the new Attorney-General and Minister for Justice. These included a focus on legislating raising the age of criminal responsibility to 12, reviewing mandatory sentencing, developing alternatives to prison programs and reviewing the Bail and Jurors Acts.

Minister Moss provided an update on her intentions as the new Minister for Mental Health and Suicide Prevention and the Minister for Youth. She also reiterated the NT Government's commitment to the 10 Year Generational Strategy and implementing youth action plans.

The forum welcomed the updates from all three ministers and were encouraged by the positive developments. Some community sector members however did raise concerns about the removal of alcohol restrictions under the *Stronger Futures* legislation and sought assurances that additional support would be available to communities if needed.

The Independent Aboriginal Chair of the **Generational Strategy Steering Group**, Rob McPhee, provided an update on their first meeting. The forum commended the skills and experience of those nominated to the newly formed group, acknowledging that eight of the 11 members are Aboriginal. The Department of Social Services also announced an additional \$1 million contribution to assist with implementing the 10-Year Generational Strategy for Children and Families in the NT which was unanimously applauded by the forum.

The NT Department of Education presented on the 2021 **Australian Early Development Census (AEDC)** data. The data reflected a worrying decline in the number of children on track in all five domains in the Northern Territory. The forum discussed some of the drivers and the supports that are needed for families to help get their children ready for school. The forum resolved to create a working group to unpack the AEDC data and coordinate interventions.

The forum heard from Territory Families, Housing and Communities on the progress of amendments to the *Care and Protection of Children Act* including an update on the review of the *Multi Agency Child and Community Safety Framework*. The community sector members of the forum acknowledged the consultation that had occurred in regards to these matters and the quality of the outcome as a result.

Acting Children's Commissioner, Nicole Hucks, presented to the forum on the monitoring of youth justice facilities in the Northern Territory by her Office. The forum noted her report including the increase of children under 14 in youth detention since mid-2021, the complex histories of young people in detention and observations of an emerging pattern of sibling and family groups entering detention.

In the afternoon, the forum heard about the new **NT Government Domestic Family and Sexual Violence Interagency Coordination and Reform Office (DFSVCRO)**, welcoming the initiative to improve coordination. They were also provided an overview of the progress of the Australian Government's *Safe and Supported: The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children* action plans and noted its strong alignment to the Generational Strategy.