

COMMUNIQUÉ

The Children and Families Tripartite Forum (the Forum) met on 15 November 2019 in Alice Springs. This was the sixth scheduled meeting of the Forum and involved discussions with the Chief Minister, The Hon Michael Gunner, the Minister for Territory Families, the Hon Dale Wakefield and a presentation by the Productivity Commission on their draft Final Report '*Expenditure on Children in the Northern Territory*'. The Hon Ken Wyatt, Minister for Indigenous Australians was unable to attend and sent a message committing to attend the next Forum meeting. The Hon Michelle Landry MP, Assistant Minister for Children and Families, was also an apology and also committed to attending the next meeting of the Forum.

Minister Wakefield spoke with members about the progress and highlights from the *Safe, Thriving and Connected 2018-19 Annual Report*, which was released in October 2019. Forum members welcomed the positive results that are emerging as a result of the reforms for children, young people and families involved with the child protection and youth justice systems. Forum members also agreed that a long-term approach is needed to address the vulnerability many children and families experience in the Northern Territory.

Representatives from Aboriginal Peak Organisation Northern Territory (APONT) provided an overview of the '*What are the Key Core Services Needed to Improve Aboriginal Childhood Outcomes in the NT*', Framework which was developed by the NT Aboriginal Health Forum in 2016. Members discussed the importance of a core services framework for child and family support services to ensure the equitable allocation of resources and services across the Northern Territory. Members agreed to progress this out of session, drawing on the work of the NT Aboriginal Health Forum.

The Productivity Commission presented the draft Final Report from their study into Commonwealth and Northern Territory Government expenditure in the Northern Territory in the area of children and family services relevant to the prevention of harm to children. Forum members discussed the draft findings and recommendations from the Draft Report and provided comment and feedback on the Productivity Commission's Draft Report, particularly in relation to:

- Development of community plans, with a preference for regional level plans informed by community level data, need and aspirations;
- Issues regarding data, how it is collected, used and whether or not is made publicly available;
- Review and evaluation mechanisms that include community voices and which are adequately resourced;
- The importance of investing in capacity building and infrastructure to support the delivery of effective services, including the provision of housing in remote communities for staff;
- Longer funding contracts that are supported by a relational contracting approach and which include transition to Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations; and
- Increased oversight to report on progress, noting the potential impact of the Forum and the need for increased resourcing for the secretariat body, the Reform Management Office.

The Forum agreed to provide a formal response to the Productivity Commission, which is due by 20 December 2019.

The Chief Minister visited the Forum and discussed law and justice issues in remote communities, integration of services and how best to respond to critical incidents. Forum members appreciated the opportunity to speak with the Chief Minister about recent events and stressed the importance of involving elders and community members in planning and implementing action to address community safety.

The Forum will meet again in February 2020.