

COMMUNIQUÉ

18 May 2021

The Children and Families Tripartite Forum (the Forum) held its second meeting of 2021 in Alice Springs on 18 May 2021. 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 commenced with a Welcome to Country from Central Arrernte elder, Aunty Sabella Turner who spoke about the value of Aboriginal language, culture and kinship in supporting children. She urged the forum to work together to build a better future for families.

The Forum considered Centrelink income support trend data for the Northern Territory, presented by the Australian Department of Social Services. The Forum noted the general increase in the number of income support recipients in the Northern Territory, particularly following the introduction of the JobSeeker program, however observed that there were periods where the number of recipients declined in some regions. The forum noted that the changes to the Community Development Program announced in the 2021 Australian Government budget was an opportunity to improve the provision of income support in the NT.

The Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities provided a briefing to the Forum on the May 2021 youth justice legislative amendments including changes to the *Bail Act*. The community sector members of the Forum outlined their opposition to the changes, particularly the lack of consultation with the sector and Aboriginal community leaders prior to the introduction of the legislation. The community sector members asserted that the approach to the making of the May 2021 legislative amendments was not consistent with Children and Families Tripartite Forum collaborative approach, and NT Government commitments to sharing decision-making with Aboriginal people under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

The Tripartite Forum's Generational Strategy Working Group reported back on their progress in developing the 10-Year Generational Strategy for Children and Families in the Northern Territory (Generational Strategy). The Forum heard from Ms Donna Hunter, a Co-Chair of the Aboriginal Expert Advisory Group about their priorities for the Generational Strategy. These included healing from trauma, the importance of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kinship system and allowing adequate time to consult with Aboriginal people and for them to consider the planned content of the Generational Strategy. The Forum noted a draft discussion paper and engagement strategy for the Generational Strategy and commended the working group on its efforts. The Forum agreed that the Working Group should work to finalise the strategy by November 2021.



The meeting hosted Northern Territory and Australian Government Ministers:

- The Honourable Lauren Moss MLA, Northern Territory Minister for Children, Minister for Youth, Minister for Education, Minister for Seniors, Minister for Women
- Senator the Honourable Anne Ruston, Australian Government Minister for Families and Social Services, Minister for Women's Safety
- The Honourable Kate Worden MLA, Northern Territory Minister for Territory Families and Urban Housing, Minister for Disabilities, Minister for Sport, Minister for Multicultural Affairs
- The Honourable Ken Wyatt AM MP, Australian Government Minister for Indigenous Australians via Videoconference.

The Ministers welcomed the opportunity to address the Forum. They outlined their key priorities, noting the commitments made in the recently announced Australian and NT Government Budgets for 2021-22.

Minister Moss updated the forum on the Child and Family Centre program including the launch of the new Alice Springs Town Camps Child and Family Centre, operated by Tangentyere Council Aboriginal Corporation. The Minister provided an update on the development of the Northern Territory Education Engagement Strategy and invited Forum members to provide input.

Minister Worden highlighted her continued commitment to kinship carers and stated that part of the reforms to the Out of Home Care system which will provide continued financial and social support to young people who have left care until they are 21 years old, if they choose.

Minister Ruston announced that the Australian Government response to the Productivity Commission's *Expenditure on Children in the Northern Territory* final report had been published that day. The Forum members welcomed the response.

Minister Worden, Minister Ruston and Minister Wyatt discussed with the Forum the impact of family and domestic violence and identified that the prevention of violence continues to be a key priority area for their portfolios. The Forum congratulated the Ministers on their commitment to this important issue. Minister Ruston spoke about the significant \$1.1 billion investment in family and domestic violence support by the Australian Government in its Budget. The Forum welcomed the news and emphasised the importance of equitable allocations for this funding across jurisdictions, pointing to the high level of need in the Northern Territory.

Minister Wyatt discussed the Closing the Gap targets to reduce Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander incarceration rates. The Minister reiterated the importance of addressing the underlying issues that attribute to these rates such as education, health and family safety.

At the request of the North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency, the Forum heard a proposal by Ms Natalie Hunter and members of the community group advocating for a Top End Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Agency (TEAICCA). The proposed agency would act as a peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families in the Northern Territory. The Forum thanked Ms Hunter for her presentation.

Tom Collins, Director of Integration in the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) provided an overview on the uptake and utilisation of the National Disability Insurance Scheme in the NT, as requested by the Forum at the 5 March 2021 meeting. The Forum discussed the opportunity to encourage greater uptake and utilisation of NDIS plans in the Northern Territory and resolved to explore the issue in-depth at the next meeting.

The next Forum meeting is scheduled for 19 August 2021 in Darwin.