

COMMUNIQUÉ

15 April 2019

The Children and Families Tripartite Forum (the Forum) held its second meeting of 2019 on 15 April in Darwin. The meeting was chaired by Ms Donna Ah Chee, who welcomed attendees and thanked Pricilla Atkins for chairing the previous meeting, the minutes for which were accepted by all Forum members. As agreed at the January Forum meeting, the thematic focus for the April meeting was “Early Intervention and Prevention”.

The Forum was attended by representatives from the Northern Territory and Commonwealth Governments, NT Council of Social Service, and North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency.

Before the meeting members requested that the agenda also include a discussion on the proposed child protection and youth justice related legislative amendments. Territory Families provided an overview of the government’s recent package of legislative amendments to Youth Justice and Care and Protection of Children. Forum representatives acknowledged the significant progress that the amendments reflected and positive direction of the proposed Care and Protection of Children amendments. However, community sector representatives expressed disappointment about the lack of consultation on the amendments relating to youth detention operations passed under urgency in March 2019, and that the legislative amendments related to raising the age of criminal responsibility to 12 years old and restricting entry into detention for children under 14 years old would be included in later legislative reform.

The Forum discussed the partnership between Northern Territory and community sector, including the proposed whole-of-government Social Outcomes Framework. The Framework which is being developed through a partnership between the Northern Territory Government and Community Sector will establish a shared agenda and common language for supporting the wellbeing of Territorians. The Forum supported the continuing work on the Social Outcomes Framework.

The Commonwealth facilitated an initial discussion on the scope and approach for the development of a Coordinated Funding Framework which generated significant discussion. Forum members acknowledged the importance of the Framework and advised the Northern Territory and Commonwealth Governments to aspire to a fully integrated funding approach that focusses on best available evidence and privileges local community voices and control. The Forum is looking forward to contributing to and responding to the Productivity Commission Study into Children in the Northern Territory. The Forum recommended that the framework be developed and implemented in a staged manner. The Forum will lead future strategic discussions on the development and implementation of the framework.

A number of presentations were made to the Forum to update members on programs and services that are part of the reforms relating to Early Intervention and Prevention in *Safe, Thriving and Connected* and *Starting Early for a Better Future*. Presentations included:

- the establishment of Child and Family Centres;
- Family Support reforms;
- Maternal Early Childhood Sustained Home visiting program; and
- Early childhood education reforms including expansion of Families as First Teachers.

The Forum noted the positive progress on the identified reforms and the efforts and commitments to approach the reforms in a coordinated and collaborative manner.

