

# COMMUNIQUÉ

24 February 2025

The Children and Families Tripartite Forum (the Forum) held its 24th meeting on 24 February 2025 at the Desert Knowledge Precinct in Alice Springs.

The Forum was chaired by Donna Ah Chee (in Rob McPhee's absence) and attended by members and observers from the Northern Territory and Australian Governments, Northern Territory Council of Social Service (NTCOSS), North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency and Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory (APO NT). A Welcome to Arrernte Country was provided by Aunty Rosalie (Kumalie) Riley.

The Forum's vision of '*children and young people in the Northern Territory grow up safe, thriving and loved in their families, cultures and communities*' is underpinned by a shared commitment to working together collaboratively and transparently in equal partnership, which is captured in the Forum's Terms of Reference.

Members discussed the importance of upholding the [Terms of Reference](#) to operate as "the principal source of advice regarding Children and Families in the Northern Territory to the Northern Territory and Commonwealth governments" working towards becoming a decision-making body, strengthening its role as a formal policy partnership and ensuring commitment for early partnership and proactive engagement on children and families reforms by governments (Northern Territory and Commonwealth) with the community sector.

With the responsibility for Closing the Gap socio-economic outcomes concerning all child and family youth justice, child protection and education matters, members reviewed related data provided by the Department of Corrections, Department of Children and Families and the Department of Education and Training (NT) and agreed the need for a sharpened and deeper focus at each meeting on one specific target – to look beyond already accessible indicators to understand the true story of progress and proactively identify gaps and opportunities for improvement. The next meeting will focus on Target 4 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children Thrive in their Early Years.

Members welcomed the announcement of the new Partnership Agreement on Northern Territory Remote Aboriginal Investment, which was historic both in terms of funding and being a trilateral agreement between the Commonwealth Government, Northern Territory Government and APO NT.

Members are watching the NTG's development of diversified pathways and responses for young people closely and were pleased to see early positive indicators to reducing incarceration in the Circuit Breaker program. Whilst there was no increase in numbers of young people in detention (point-to-point between the period of November 2024 and February 2025 Tripartite Forum meetings), substantial work needs to occur in the Northern Territory to improve performance against the youth incarceration Closing the Gap target.

The early intervention pathway has seen a high uptake (70%) of families entering voluntary Family Responsibility Agreements which include the provision of the essential Family Support Services that many families have been seeking. The meeting also heard that child protection income management up to 70% is being used as an additional support to high needs families where appropriate. The community sector has requested regular updates on its expansion throughout the NT.

The meeting also included briefings from the:

- Northern Territory Children's Commissioner on research reports related to young people in detention and facing homelessness, which will inform the Forum's work;
- The Commonwealth on food security initiatives including the low-cost essentials subsidy scheme, which will lower the price of 30 essential items in remote communities.

Members noted the advice that NT Government have committed to undertake a broader review of the *Care and Protection of Children Act* noting the disproportionate number of Aboriginal children in child protection.

The Forum noted the continuing decline in average school attendance to the end of 2024 and noted the introduction of the new School Attendance Officers who will hopefully play a key supporting role to assist families ensure that their children attend school. If this program is working, then there should be an improvement in school attendance in the first quarter of 2025. Improving school attendance remains a key priority area for action.

Following Machinery of Government changes, the department with responsibility for youth justice is no longer a member of the Forum. Members agreed to request formal membership from the Department of Corrections to the Tripartite Forum as part of strengthening and upholding the Terms of Reference.

The next meeting is scheduled for **May 2025**.