Acknowledgements

We respectfully acknowledge the traditional land of the Kulin Nation and we acknowledge the Wurundjeri people who are the traditional custodians of this land. We pay our respects to their elders past and present and recognise that their sovereignty was never ceded and the structural inequality created by colonisation continues to this day.

We appreciate and celebrate diversity in all its forms. We believe diversity of all kinds makes our teams, services and organisations stronger and more effective.
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Introduction

The child and family services sector (‘the sector’) is committed to providing the best possible support to every child, young person and family in Victoria in need of our services. The Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare (‘the Centre’), as the peak body for child and family services in Victoria, has developed a four-year industry plan (‘the plan’) based on extensive sector consultation.

The plan is intended to guide the sector’s transition from a service system focused on crisis response to one characterised by early intervention, evidence-informed practice, and a more seamless response to meeting the needs of children, young people and families who are disadvantaged or experiencing vulnerability.

Fundamental to the plan is the sector’s recognition that Aboriginal self-determination is a key enabler for improving the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal children and families. The plan is consistent with the principles of the 2015 Beyond Good Intentions statement which outlined the sector’s commitment to building a fair, just and restorative child and family welfare service system.

The plan is also consistent with the priorities articulated in the overarching Community Services Industry Plan and the more detailed transition plans of specialist homelessness services and community housing. It takes into account Victoria’s legislative and policy reforms and the implications of these for our workforce, including the need for robust change management systems and processes.

The plan outlines how as a sector we can continue to provide all children in Victoria with the best possible start in life; support our young people to remain engaged in learning and connected to family and community; and provide our families with the necessary supports and services to create safe and nurturing home environments where all family members can develop and thrive.

It outlines how we can better support our workforce and organisations to provide high quality services and how we can continue to build a strong, resilient and sustainable sector.

The plan sets out a vision for our sector. It identifies priorities and the outcomes we hope to achieve as an industry over the next four years.
Purpose of the plan

The purpose of the plan is to:

- Articulate a shared vision for the sector that will enable a coordinated approach to planning for future demand and workforce requirements
- Identify current challenges, emerging trends and capability gaps to position the sector to be able to respond effectively to these
- Identify new opportunities to enable the sector to respond to changing social, political and community requirements
- Promote the value of the sector and acknowledge the social and economic contributions of our workforce to supporting community cohesion and wellbeing and reducing the impact of trauma
- Identify priorities for investment to align with key legislative and social reforms and initiatives
- Provide a series of actions to help guide the sector’s approach to future demands.

Vision

The plan is underpinned by the following vision for the sector:

- Children and young people grow up in safe, stable home environments, connected to family, community and culture, with the care and support needed to advance their health, education, wellbeing and development. This includes Aboriginal children in the care of and supported by Aboriginal organisations
- Families have access to quality, flexible, culturally informed support where and when they need this and are supported in ways that enable family members to fulfil their potential
- The child and family services sector works in partnership with the broader community services system, the people we serve, communities and government, to build a better, more equitable future.

The plan presents an important opportunity to work together as a sector to build on our existing strengths, experience and evidence about what works and to collectively drive the changes needed to achieve our shared vision.
Sector profile

The people we support

The core function of child and family services is to provide support to children, young people and families experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage and to those who support them across the spectrum of universal, targeted and tertiary services. It is to protect children from harm and ensure their safety, wellbeing and developmental needs are met.

Users of our services include, but are not limited to:

- Babies, toddlers, children and young people
- Biological, carer, step, donor conceived, LGBTI and adoptive family members
- Children and young people in care arrangements (informal or in the statutory system) and care leavers
- Children and families from diverse cultural, ethnic and language backgrounds
- Aboriginal children and families
- Refugees and people seeking asylum
- People with a disability
- People of diverse sexuality, sex and gender
- Children and young people whose parents are incarcerated or involved with the criminal justice system.

The sector is situated within a much broader community services system. Although not included in the scope of this plan, these broader services – such as housing, drug and alcohol services, mental health, maternal and child health, financial counselling, settlement services, specialist family violence services – are also critical in addressing the needs of children, young people and families and are often a key referral pathway for more intensive family support. Many of these agencies provide complementary services, such as services to support vulnerable adults, and the same workforce may provide a range of such services.

The snapshot on the next page provides some key statistics relating to children in Victoria.
Snapshot of children in Victoria

- In 2016, there were more than 1.8 million children and young people under the age of 25 in Victoria.
- Children and young people aged 24 and under make up nearly one third (31.3 per cent) of the total state population in Victoria.
- The Aboriginal population aged 24 and under has increased by 20 per cent since 2011, numbering just under 25,000. Aboriginal children and young people make up more than half of the total Victorian Aboriginal population. They also represent 1.3 per cent of the total Victorian population in this age group.
- In 2016, 41.8 per cent of Victorians aged 19 and under had one or both parents born overseas while 16.2 per cent of Victorian children and young people were born outside Australia.
- More than 10,000 students with a refugee background were estimated to be attending government schools in Victoria in 2016.
- The number of young people in Victoria with special health needs is estimated to be nearly one in five.
- The number of children and young people in Victoria with a profound or severe disability is 36,265, which represents just under three per cent of Victorians aged 0 to 19 years.
- One per cent of Victorian children and young people’s gender does not align to the gender assigned to them at birth. Data on the proportion of Victorian young people who are LGBTI is not available.
- The population growth of Victorians aged 19 and under between 2011 and 2016 was mainly focused in the greater Melbourne area, particularly in the southern and western suburbs.
- Around 45 per cent of Aboriginal children live in the greater Melbourne area. A large number of Victorian Aboriginal children and young people (under 20 years old) are concentrated in a few locations, with more than 40 per cent of this demographic living in just ten Local Government Areas (LGAs). Most of these are outside of Greater Melbourne, and include Greater Geelong, Mildura, Greater Shepparton, Greater Bendigo, Ballarat and Whittlesea.


The infographic on the following four pages gives a snapshot of vulnerabilities experienced by children in Victoria. Many of these individuals and groups represent our core service users. They frequently experience multiple, complex, intersecting forms of discrimination and exclusion.
10,312 Victorian children were in out-of-home care in 2017, of whom 20% were Aboriginal. Aboriginal children are 16 times more likely to enter care than non-Aboriginal children. 50% of out-of-home care placements are in kinship care.⁶

40,415 Victorian children received Child Protection services in 2016-17 and 70% of these were repeat clients. 25% of Victoria’s Aboriginal children received these services compared to only 3% of all Victorian children. Of the 15,488 Victorian children who were the subjects of substantiated Child Protection notifications in 2016-17, 36.7% of them were babies and toddlers (0-4 years).⁷

Almost all Victorian children enrolled with a Maternal Child Health service are seen by their nurse in the immediate days following birth. However, follow up visit rates decrease as children grow older. Ongoing engagement declines for Aboriginal children, children from lone-parent households and children in the Greater Melbourne region.⁹
Victoria is highly culturally and linguistically diverse. Almost half (49.1%) of Victorians have at least one parent who was born overseas. For 38.5% of Victorians, both their parents were born overseas. Over a quarter of Victorian households speak a language other than English.

An estimated 4000 refugees are settled in Victoria every year; roughly half of them are under the age of 19.

In 2016-17, Victoria Police attended 76,500 incidents of family violence and children were present at 23,857 (31%) of these.
Over a quarter of presentations to Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) in 2016-17 were by families with children. Children made up 22% of all SHS clients in 2015-16.¹

17% of all Victorians have a disability.¹⁶ 45% of Victorians with a disability live in or near poverty. Women and girls with a disability are more likely to be victims of family violence.¹⁷

In 2015, one in five prep children in Victoria was assessed as developmentally vulnerable in one or more domains. These children are 50% less likely to score in the top two NAPLAN quintiles for reading in Year 3.¹⁸
Youth offending has declined by 37% from 2006-2015.¹¹ Less than 0.02% of Victoria’s 10-17 year olds were in detention in the December quarter of 2016 and Victoria had the second lowest detention rates of any state or territory in 2015-16.¹² However, Victoria’s young offenders are disproportionately likely to have been in out-of-home care and subject to abuse, trauma and neglect in childhood, and be from Aboriginal or CALD backgrounds.¹³

Children in regional Victoria are 2-3 times less likely to score in the top two NAPLAN quintiles, have higher rates of absenteeism and are less likely to complete Year 12 than their Greater Melbourne peers.¹⁵
Our workforce

The exact number of child and family services workers in Victoria is unclear. There are no specific datasets that focus on this subset of the community services sector workforce, and the workers who comprise the child and family services workforce cover a broad and diverse range of roles and occupations. The Fair Work Commission defines social and community services as:

- the provision of social and community services including social work, recreation work, welfare work, youth work or community development work, including organisations which primarily engage in policy, advocacy or representation on behalf of organisations carrying out such work and the provision of disability services including the provision of personal care and domestic and lifestyle support to a person with a disability in a community and/or residential setting including respite centre and day services.\(^{19}\)

The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) estimates that there are likely to be around 1,500 full-time and part-time staff working in the sector.\(^{20}\)

In 2016, DHHS commissioned the Centre to conduct a survey of the family services workforce to inform sector planning. The survey attracted 618 sector respondents. Respondents were mainly from Integrated Family Services. The survey findings below provide a useful proxy in the absence of a more comprehensive data set.

The survey highlighted key strengths – such as how qualified the sector is as a whole – but also key areas to address to make sure our workforce can support the number of children, young people and families who need our services. For example, 20 per cent of children in care are Aboriginal yet the survey suggests only 3.6 per cent of respondents working in family services are Aboriginal. Around 42 per cent of Victorians aged 19 and under have one or both parents born overseas yet only 15 per cent of respondents working in family services were born overseas. The survey also highlights the disproportionate number of females working in family services compared with male workers. The survey confirms the need to develop a more diverse workforce that more closely reflects the profile of service users. Key data from the survey is included below. It is important to note that subsets of our workforce may have unique features that are not documented. For example, the level of qualifications for the Aboriginal and CALD community workforces is unclear.

It should be noted that there is need for a larger workforce to incorporate the growing demands on service providers and child protection practitioners and the ageing of our workforce.
Our organisations

In June 2018, there were around 150 DHHS-funded community service organisations (CSOs) providing child and family services in Victoria. These organisations vary in size, areas of specialisation, and in the types and number of services offered. They include not-for-profit and for-profit agencies. They cover metropolitan, regional, and rural areas with some larger organisations providing services interstate. They include CSOs, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), community health organisations and local governments. Many providers are faith-based and some are culturally specific. The formal workforce is supported by a vast number of volunteers. Our sector also includes state government departments.

Formal and informal carers who support, and are being supported by, child and family services to provide home-based care to children and young people form a subset of the formal workforce.

Regardless of organisation type or specialisation, our organisations focus primarily on catering for the needs of children, young people and families experiencing disadvantage and vulnerability.

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**Snapshot of family services workers in Victoria**

In 2016, the Centre, on behalf of DHHS, conducted a Family Services Workforce Survey to identify skills gaps and inform a redesign of the family services system. The survey found that of the 618 respondents working in family services:

- 90.9% are female.
- 84.6% were born in Australia or New Zealand.
- 3.6% identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.
- 62.4% are aged 40 years or over.
- 73.7% of respondents hold tertiary level qualifications (Bachelor degree or higher).
- 90.4% of respondents plan to be working in the same organisation in a year’s time.
- 97.2% plan to be working in the community services sector in a year’s time.
- 69.5% per cent have worked in the community services sector for six years or more. Those respondents mainly hold a VET diploma or advanced diploma or a university associate or bachelor’s degree.
- The majority of respondents were involved in case work, direct care, case management or case planning in their current role, and work 31-40 hours per week.

Changing external environment

Our industry plan takes place within, and needs to be responsive to, a dynamic external environment at the national and state levels. Below are some of the key trends that have implications for the skills, knowledge and expertise required of our workforce in the future.

Key national developments and trends include:

- The shift to delivery of services through individualised funding arrangements, such as the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), which encourage workforce casualisation and transactional relationships.
- Conditional welfare schemes such as ParentsNext, which have been introduced at the federal level with stricter compliance requirements. Evaluations show mixed results with some participants left worse off under such schemes.
- A national housing affordability crisis and a growing divide between the wealthy and disadvantaged in Australia, with many families struggling. The benefits from years of economic growth have been unequally distributed with too many people locked out of paid work, including young people, people with disability, those with caring responsibilities, Aboriginal Australians, those from CALD backgrounds, and many in regional areas.
- Other national trends with implications for Victoria’s child and family services, including the long-term impacts of Australia’s ageing population, of young people living at home for longer, and of rapid technological change.
- Changing industrial conditions, including growth in precarious employment which creates uncertainty for workers and families. Short-term contracts rather than ongoing full-time employment affect workers’ ability to plan and their desire to remain in the sector, possibly contributing to staff turnover.
- Greater restrictions and diminished access to supports for asylum seekers and refugees. Together with the ongoing impacts of colonisation on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, Australia has large cohorts of people facing daily challenges to maintain families in shelter, with sufficient food, with their rights being recognised, and with access to intensive family or child support as needed.
- A steady increase nationally in the rate of children who were the subjects of notifications. Between 2012–13 and 2016–17, the number of children with child protection notifications rose by 27% from 184,216 to 233,795; and the number of children who were the subjects of substantiations rose by 22%, from 40,571 to 49,315. Nationally, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in this period were seven times as likely as their non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peers to have received child protection services.

Victorian developments and trends include:

- The commitment of government and CSOs to Aboriginal self-determination and the right of Aboriginal children and families to be supported by Aboriginal organisations. The National Aboriginal Health Strategy Working Paper (NAHSWP) defines self-determination as ‘[t]he ability of Aboriginal people to determine their own political, economic, social and cultural
development as an essential approach to overcoming Indigenous disadvantage.\textsuperscript{34} A key element of self-determination is the transfer of responsibility and resources from mainstream organisations working with Aboriginal children and families to ACCOs.

- A steady increase in the number of child protection notifications and the numbers of children entering out-of-home care in Victoria.\textsuperscript{35} In 2016-17 in Victoria, 40,415 children received child protection services.

- The disproportionate presence of Aboriginal children and young people in the out-of-home care and juvenile justice systems.\textsuperscript{36} Of the 980 Aboriginal children in out-of-home care reviewed as part of Taskforce 1000:
  - 42% were placed away from their extended family
  - 86% were case managed by a non-Aboriginal agency
  - Over 40% with siblings were separated from their brothers and sisters
  - Over 60% were placed with a non-Aboriginal carer.\textsuperscript{37}

- An increase in the number of infants (children under one year) who have been the subject of substantiations. Between 2013-13 and 2016-17, the rates of substantiation for this age group were consistently higher than the rates for any other age group.\textsuperscript{38} In Victoria, of 15,488 children who were the subjects of substantiations of notifications received during 2016–17, 47.1 per cent were for children aged 9 or under.\textsuperscript{39}

- An increasing risk threshold for statutory child protection involvement, meaning that child and family services are working with higher risk families without the appropriate resources and skills.\textsuperscript{40} Overwhelming demand on the service system means at-risk families are missing out on crucial early intervention and access to the right support, as and when they need it.\textsuperscript{41}

- Limited access to services of all types in rural areas.\textsuperscript{42}

Our sector is also being re-shaped by a wide range of reforms and initiatives at the state level.

The 2016 Royal Commission into Family Violence made 227 recommendations, including the establishment of 17 Support and Safety Hubs; new information sharing legislation; a central information point enabling the sharing of data to hold perpetrators accountable; more specialist family violence courts; greater access to family-centred services and programs – including programs that focus on cultural strengthening – and intensive therapeutic child-centred programs.

The \textit{Roadmap for Reform}, released by the Department of Health and Human Services in 2016, outlines three strategic directions, each supported by specific reforms, to guide systematic and far-reaching reforms in the sector:

- Building supportive and culturally strong communities and an enhanced role for universal services
- Supporting children, young people and families in need with integrated, wraparound supports and targeted early intervention
- Strengthening home-based care and improving outcomes for children and young people in out-of-home care.
The Roadmap complements other key reform initiatives across Victoria, including *The Education State, Victoria’s 10-Year Mental Health Plan, Health 2040 and Ending Family Violence: Victoria’s Plan for Change.*

The sector is also adapting to the introduction of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

Some of the targeted initiatives arising from the overarching reforms, which have implications for industry planning in child and family services, include:

- Re-design of Victoria’s child and family services. This re-design work is guided by the System Framework for Strong Families and Safe Children, and focuses on three pathways for early help, targeted and specialist support, and continuing care.

- Implementation of a range of key policies, strategies and reforms designed to better support Aboriginal children, families and communities in line with the principles of self-determination and a rights-based approach. These include:
  - *Wungurwil Gapygadpuir: Aboriginal Children and Families Agreement,* a tripartite agreement between the Aboriginal community, Victorian government and CSOs to reduce the number of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care by building their connection to culture, country and community
  - *Korin Korin Balit-Djak: Aboriginal health, wellbeing and safety strategic plan 2017-2027,* which includes, amongst a range of priority areas, a priority focus on building a strong and sustainable Aboriginal workforce
  - *Aboriginal Employment Strategy 2016-2021 and Supporting Aboriginal self-determination: Prioritising funding to Aboriginal organisations*
  - *Advancing the Treaty Process with Victorian Aboriginal Bill 2018* to set up an Aboriginal Representative Body to establish the entities, rules and resource base necessary to facilitate future treaty negotiations, a critical step towards achieving self-determination.

- The shift towards delivery of evidence-based and evidence-informed programs and practice. As part of the Roadmap reforms, the government has established a state-wide learning system, funded the Centre to manage the Outcomes Practice Evidence Network (OPEN), laid the foundations for a menu of evidence-informed practices and programs, developed a Children and Families Research Strategy 2017-19, and provided Learning System Grants to support a selection of mainstream and Aboriginal organisations to take their promising practice to the next level.

- Development of a new kinship care model. This model is providing additional kinship workers, a First Supports program for new placements, improved community case management, and one-off brokerage to support existing kinship care placements.

- Development of a new therapeutic model aimed at young people in residential care with complex trauma and mental health issues.

- Establishment of the Orange Door (Support and Safety) Hubs. These hubs are intended to provide a more streamlined approach to service provision, bringing together family violence...
specialists and child and family services specialists with child protection and other allied workforces to better meet the needs of highly vulnerable children, young people and families.

- Introduction of the Family Violence Information Sharing and Child Information Sharing Schemes and development of the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Risk Management framework. These reforms are aimed at keeping child and adult victim survivors safe and holding perpetrators to account.

In Victoria, there has been a long tradition of government outsourcing services to CSOs. This means the sector is well positioned to contribute to the co-design of services and supports with government. Our knowledge and experience has also informed social and legislative reforms.

Our priorities

Our Industry Plan and actions are structured around four key priorities focused on:

- The people we support
- Our workers
- Our organisations
- The sector as a whole.

The plan outlines our key priorities for the next four years:

- **Priority 1**: Using evidence-informed practice to support our children, young people and families
- **Priority 2**: Building an appropriately qualified and skilled workforce
- **Priority 3**: Developing well-resourced and effective organisations
- **Priority 4**: Growing a strong, responsive and sustainable sector.
Priority 1: Using evidence-informed practice to support our children, young people and families

Priority action 1.1: Undertake a whole-of-system documentation of how the perspectives of children, young people and families are being captured by mainstream and Aboriginal service providers to improve services.

Reflecting the voices of the people that we support

It is critical that the voices of children, young people and families are captured in an ongoing way and that their values, needs and experiences inform the design and delivery of services. Their feedback should drive decision-making and advocacy, help determine outcomes and shape service responses across the sector. The sector recognises, and must support in more systematic ways, the agency of children, young people and families. We acknowledge that they have the capacities and rights to have a say in the important decisions affecting them.

In particular, we need to incorporate the voices of children, and others who might not always be heard, into design and delivery. Good practice requires an ability to recognise and respond to diversity, making sure that minority groups experience the same level of access to and quality of service as mainstream groups. Our sector has a responsibility to advocate for, support and safeguard the rights of all people.

Some of the ways in which organisations currently collect feedback include anonymous online input; family-led decision making; participatory opportunities embedded during service provision; feedback using rubrics as a tool; and interviews with service users. We need to share successful mechanisms but also develop new ways of enabling the perspectives and experiences of service users, including Aboriginal families and families from non-English speaking backgrounds, to be captured regularly and used to inform practice.

Effective practice means embedding Aboriginal self-determination through culturally safe ways of collecting feedback and ensuring services for Aboriginal children and families are informed and led by the people who use these services.

This priority action is about making sure all children, young people and families who engage with our services are able to help shape how these services are designed and delivered.

Priority action 1.2: Invest in strategies and tools to coordinate and promote collaborative ways of working within and across the sector and with allied sectors.

Working together more effectively

The sector recognises the importance of working together to achieve more streamlined and effective service delivery within and across services, with governments (local, state and federal), and with allied sectors, such as health professionals. This is particularly important with social policy reforms that require preparedness on the part of multiple organisations across a range of services and sectors to work together for a common purpose.
However, organisations need the tools and resources to be able to develop collaborative partnerships given that collaboration is so time-intensive and needs to be built into roles and workloads. There are also external challenges to collaboration, such as funding streams that encourage CSOs to compete against each other for funding. Funded partnership brokers in organisations (place-based) could facilitate these partnerships.

While some organisations already work closely with philanthropic and corporate groups, the sector could benefit from developing a structured approach to working with these groups to benefit service users and the people who work in the sector. For example, through co-design of targeted projects; mentoring opportunities; in-kind support for projects, secondments; increasing Aboriginal involvement in leadership and strategic projects involving philanthropy and business.

Adopting multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches means understanding the practice paradigms of other workforces, identifying the common areas, strengths of each discipline, the particular skills sets each can provide, and how differences can be resolved so that the people who come to us for a service or support receive a ‘seamless’ service response, without having to repeat their stories to a succession of practitioners.

**Sharing information**

In the context of various inquiries and investigations that have highlighted the critical importance of organisations sharing information about our children, young people and families more efficiently and effectively, the sector recognises the need to improve the ways in which information is shared, while being compliant with legislative requirements.

Our industry plan recognises the critical importance of child and family services being able to network and share and learn together. For example, the Centre holds quarterly network forums that provide members with the opportunity to discuss and address strategic and long-term issues for the sector. The network forums cover a range of topics and are targeted at different workers within and across the sector, concentrating on specific fields of work and providing opportunities for shared good practice.

Organisations also play an important role in promoting and supporting staff to work in alliances within and across sectors. The child and family services sector needs a more coordinated approach to practical, planned joint initiatives, such as better interdisciplinary forums and stakeholder programs to establish rapport and reduce siloed work practices.

Our workforce also needs to understand and comply with Victoria’s new information sharing reforms.

**Providing a continuum of supports**

The sector is strongly committed to providing an integrated continuum of services with streamlined referral systems that do not create a barrier to families receiving timely wraparound supports. Providing a continuum of supports requires a holistic systems-approach to working with families, which:

- Recognises the unique role and value of services such as Maternal Child Health (MCH) nurses who see every child and engage early with families
 Draws on the expertise of Early Parenting Centres as an important link in the chain between MCH and kinder/childcare and other family services
 Provides smooth referrals to specialised services, some of which are co-located with mainstream services, to achieve more coordinated approaches
 Provides equitable access to locally responsive, community-driven and culturally safe supports no matter where a person lives
 Supports parents who have had their children removed to engage with the necessary services and supports that could enable reunification where this is in the best interests of the child
 Supports kinship, foster, permanent and residential carers, and lead tenants, to provide trauma-informed support for the children in their care
 Supports young people and their families to make a successful transition to adulthood
 Supports children, young people and families who have experienced significant trauma and provides therapeutic and healing services to address the trauma and build resilience.

We recognise that for service provision to be streamlined and ‘seamless’ there needs to be sector-wide shared principles, models of practice, assessments and practice frameworks, including a common language, to provide continuity and consistent quality for families and create a system that is easier to navigate. It also requires re-consideration of human services curricula at tertiary institutions to ensure there are core common foci of attention.

Investing in technologies

To meet legislative and policy requirements around information sharing and evidence of outcomes, service providers will need access to information technology that can support electronic-based data management and case management, efficient and effective remote access for staff, and training in the use of collaborative software tools such as Skype, SharePoint Online and OneDrive for Business. The sector would look to DHHS to provide a lead in relation to client-related technology to make sure any investment is consistent with system directions.

Priority action 1.3: Use the best available evidence to develop a coordinated response to raising Commonwealth government awareness about the impact of welfare reform measures on children and families.

Working with government and other sectors

Planning for our sector requires the ability to manage relationships with local, state and Commonwealth governments, and with allied sectors, to support investment in and delivery of programs and practices that have been shown to work.

As a sector, we need state and Commonwealth governments working together to address poverty and inequality and improve outcomes for vulnerable children, young people and families. For example, existing approaches to social security implemented by the Commonwealth are likely to have compounding, adverse effects on Victoria’s most vulnerable families. Over two-thirds of Victorians who presented to Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) in 2016-17 relied upon, as their main source of income, social security payments that are now subject to harsher conditionality.33 As a sector, we must work with the state government to develop a clear and coordinated approach to address these
impacts as our already stretched community services will be in greater demand. We also need to raise Commonwealth government awareness about the impacts of more stringent welfare policies on already vulnerable children, young people and families.

The Centre currently hosts a Treating Families Fairly network, a small alliance of representatives from peak bodies, organisations and universities with a strong focus on raising awareness about the impact of Commonwealth policies on Victorian families in financially straitened circumstances. This group could form the nucleus of an expanded coalition to place a Children’s Rights lens over all Commonwealth welfare policies. Such a coalition could be similar to the Smart Justice for Young People coalition, which is made up of youth advocates from community legal centres, youth services, peak bodies, and other community organisations interested in the legal and justice issues of young people. It provides a coordinated approach drawing on the expertise and perspectives of a broad range of interested bodies to form a powerful advocacy group.

**Priority action 1.4: Implement a state-wide strategy to embed competency in cultural safety and respect for diversity in every organisation working with children, young people and families.**

This priority action focuses first on Aboriginal children in Aboriginal care and then on the cultural competency of CSOs.

*Cultural safety*

Cultural safety means creating ‘an environment that is safe for people: where there is no assault, challenge or denial of their identity, of who they are and what they need. It is about shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and experience of learning, living and working together with dignity and truly listening’.

One element of cultural safety is being culturally competent, which encompasses:

- Being aware of one’s own world view
- Developing positive attitudes towards cultural differences
- Gaining knowledge of different cultural practices and world views
- Developing skills for communication and interaction across cultures.

Our industry plan recognises the need for a more evidence-informed approach to cultural safety by the sector as a whole and by CSOs. It recognises that individuals need to be culturally competent while organisations need to deliver services in ways that enable children, young people and families to feel culturally safe.

*Aboriginal services for Aboriginal children and families*

Aboriginal cultural safety shifts the focus from the individual practitioner or worker to the child and family service system in which they operate. It focuses on the service interactions, particularly on the power relations between client and professional, and calls for genuine partnership. The presence of cultural safety can only be defined by Aboriginal children and families who receive the service and by their organisations. Only they can determine if their cultural identity and meanings are being respected and not subjected to discrimination. Aboriginal cultural safety is inextricably linked to self-
determination and the right of Aboriginal children and families to be supported by Aboriginal organisations.

Ensuring culturally competent mainstream services for Aboriginal children and families

CSOs need to be able to ensure cultural competency in their staff not only to create culturally safe working environments for Aboriginal staff but accessible and culturally responsive services for those Aboriginal families who choose to use mainstream services. CSOs need to fully appreciate and understand issues related to culture, community and self-determination when making case plans and providing services.

Providing culturally responsive services for CALD families

Understanding the nature of the migration, displacement and settlement experiences of people from diverse backgrounds is critical to providing culturally responsive services for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. A 2014 audit by the Victorian Auditor General’s Office found that cultural competency was often described in generic terms relating to tolerance and diversity rather than in terms of workers being required to understand the particular and multiple needs of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, including the factors that facilitate or hinder decisions to accept or access child and family services.

CALD communities are not fully utilising early childhood services such as kindergarten and maternal and child health services for a range of reasons, including lack of mothers’ confidence in speaking English; limited access to interpreters and translated resources; transport difficulties; lack of understanding about service availability; and poor follow up between services.

To address this issue there needs to be a targeted approach to enhancing cultural competency in early childhood services, to enable better access for families and children from culturally diverse backgrounds.

Our industry plan seeks to embed cultural safety practices within and across the sector. We recognise that current strategies to promote cultural competency need to be part of a wider commitment to ensuring culturally safe environments for service users and workers.

Priority action 1.5: Build a strong culture of using evidence to inform decision-making and practice, fostering a culture of sharing what works, supporting individuals and organisations to translate research into effective practice, and measuring and evaluating the effectiveness of our work.

Consistent with government policy and reforms, our sector is strongly committed to developing and sharing best practice models and using innovation to support quality practice and program development and delivery. This is evident in the widespread interest in and support for OPEN, which is funded by the Victorian government to support the translation of research into practice and is managed by the Centre.

OPEN brings together service providers and tertiary institutions, practitioners and researchers, to build and disseminate evidence of what works to engage with and support families and carers to provide safe, nurturing environments for children. OPEN is a critical mechanism for building Victoria’s
evidence base, providing implementation support, and improving outcomes for children, young people and families.

As a sector, we need to encourage a strong focus on ‘what works’ in supporting vulnerable families experiencing complex issues and disadvantage in the community, particularly in relation to the duration and intensity of intervention required to achieve best outcomes. We need tools to measure impact and produce compelling evidence for what works and an investment approach that fosters and supports this work.

Evidence-Based Programs (EBPs) require specialist skills and training to implement. They can be expensive to replicate with fidelity to the original model, as most EBPs currently being implemented in Victoria are overseas models with high costs associated with licences, training, implementation and evaluation. To develop our sector’s capacity to generate home grown EBPs and practice, Victoria needs to invest adequately in the training of our workforce.

EBPs are only one component of an evidence-informed approach. Additionally, there needs to be clear mechanisms for practitioners to generate evidence based on their practice wisdom and direct work with people and for this to be valued. Practitioners have unique insight into the challenges and experiences of the people they are supporting. There needs to be a commitment from government whereby in the establishment of new programs the budget allows for the development of service evaluation as a standard funding component.

Evaluation and data collection
The sector needs access to free and available data from DHHS to drive and capture better outcomes for children, young people and families from policies and programs. A common theme in sector consultations about this industry plan has been the need to improve the usefulness, consistency and accessibility of the data we collect and to explore ways to streamline administration within organisations and reduce database barriers. Another theme has been the need to use culturally appropriate outcomes and methodologies when assessing the impact of services on Aboriginal children and families.

To this end, the sector would benefit from a refined common tool/framework to measure implementation processes, outcomes and progress, coupled with a uniform understanding of the framework. Currently there are multiple frameworks developed by CSOs and government. Outcomes need to be tied to progress not absolutes, with comparable sector-wide data that enables robust conclusions to be drawn based on agreed outcomes and methodologies.

For the sector to have the best available evidence underpinning our approaches, we need to make sure practitioners have opportunities for critical reflection to enable continuous improvement, to continue building capacity and capability in research and evaluation, engage in more participatory action research in the field, and build on what is already working well. Data collection and analytical skills need to become a required capability of all staff, including the ability to know what information is required to make a judgement and to weigh up different sources of information.
Priority action 1.6: Strengthen and resource research and evaluation capacity within Aboriginal organisations to build the evidence base of what works for Aboriginal children and families.

The strategic action plan for *Wungurilwil Gapgapduir* includes actions to develop Aboriginal evidence-informed practice principles and approaches to guide program design and evaluation; to document practices and programs with an evidence-informed program logic to build the evidence base for Aboriginal child and family services; and to strengthen and resource the research and evaluation capacity within Aboriginal organisations. The sector recognises that Aboriginal child and family services and programs need to be evaluated using culturally appropriate outcome measures and methodologies and to be adequately resourced to build the evidence base for programs and practices that have a positive impact on the lives of Aboriginal children and families.

Priority 2: Building an appropriately qualified and skilled workforce

Priority action 2.1: Implement a state-wide approach to building workforce capability to develop an appropriately qualified and skilled workforce and identify key strategies and initiatives to promote the value of our sector.

The Community Services Industry Plan and the plans of child and family services, specialist homelessness services, community housing, and family violence, and the Aboriginal Workforce Strategy collectively provide the basis for a comprehensive, state-wide approach to building workforce capability and responding effectively to future workforce challenges. Such an approach is informed by other strategic plans and frameworks, including *Korin Korin Balit-Djak: Aboriginal health, wellbeing and safety strategic plan 2017-27*; *Victoria’s 10-Year Mental Health Plan*; *Absolutely Everyone*: the State Disability plan 2017-2020; *Health 2040: Advancing health, access and care*; *Marrung: Aboriginal Education Plan*; *The Education State*; *Victorian and proud of it: Victoria’s multicultural policy statement* and the *Aboriginal Employment Plan*.

**Core, specialist and transferrable skills**

We need to better understand the generalist and specialist nature of the various roles undertaken by our workforce. Generalist skills include the ability to work collaboratively, provide culturally safe environments, identify and use evidence to inform practice, collect and use relevant data in the interests of continuous improvement, use new technologies effectively, and be able to provide services along the continuum of need. These are some of the core competencies and transferable skills our workforce needs to provide the best possible service.

Trauma-informed practice and understanding of intergenerational trauma are core competencies across the entire sector. Allied sectors need also to be trauma-informed. The children, young people and families who seek our services have frequently experienced significant and cumulative harm that affects their capacity to make decisions, be safe, hold families together, reunify when children have been removed, and live healthy and productive lives. A sector that is trauma-informed with services that have therapeutic intent enables more targeted responses to people in need.

As a sector we need to reflect the diversity of the people who come to us for support. According to the 2016 census, 28 per cent (or more than one in four Victorians) of Victoria’s population were born overseas. Increased efforts to recruit a diverse workforce, including more bilingual and multilingual...
staff, and continued emphasis on cultural competency capabilities, will assist organisations to more effectively respond to this demographic reality. The significant over-representation of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care highlights the need for culturally appropriate ways of working with children and families to be embedded in our service system. Aboriginal children in Aboriginal care, in line with self-determination, means resourcing ACCOs to build the necessary workforce capability to meet demand.

One highly vulnerable group is the young people who are in, or at risk of entering, the youth justice system. Our workforce needs to have the skills to be able to support young people early enough in their lives before they are lost to our sector and enter the criminal justice and corrections systems. This is particularly so for children and young people who are Aboriginal, in the child protection system and with disability.51

We need to maintain and grow the necessary specialist skills and services, including emerging skill sets, such as those needed to implement evidence-based programs and practice elements. Other specialised areas include working with the children of offenders, with young people from refugee backgrounds and families from emerging CALD communities, people with disability, and in infant mental health. We need to develop an inclusive workforce that reflects the diversity of the children, young people and families we work with.

To work more effectively as a unified system, we need to develop greater clarity and understanding of the various roles and responsibilities in the sector, including for government, allied sectors, and the community.

Professional development and training
The sector would benefit from a state-wide approach to building workforce capability, including mapping existing roles, identifying the core capabilities needed for these roles, delivering consistent and ongoing sector-wide training in key foundation components of family support, developing training to respond to new and emerging areas of skill and expertise, and having clearly articulated and consistent career paths across the sector.

To be able to meet existing and future service needs, we need to be clear about the training and professional development required at each point – for people seeking to enter the sector, those in beginning practice, and existing experienced workers. Such clarity will enable us to communicate with training institutions about sector needs, recruit the right people with the right skills and strengthen our existing workforce capability to respond to change.

The sector recognises the importance of having consistent and accessible training across the state, with a practical connection to the work. There is currently no universally shared training across the sector and a lot of training has been developed in response to local imperatives. It was clear from the industry plan consultations that increased resourcing for training in the sector is needed as training requires significant organisational resources. Training also needs to be available in more accessible and affordable ways for staff in regional and rural organisations.

Given that there are often similar training needs across allied sectors and between different areas of the child and family services sector, our workforce would benefit from more shared training
opportunities with professionals in maternal child health, family violence, and mental health. For example, child and family services professionals could be included in child protection mandatory training and beginning practice training.

During the consultations for this industry plan, many organisations expressed concern about losing their training investment in workers when workers move on. A coordinated approach across the sector to high quality training that is relevant across a range of roles and service areas could assist in easing this concern, as services could then expect to receive a higher number of applications from similarly trained workers.

Professionals at our industry plan consultations expressed a desire to have opportunities for career development and advancement that enable them to remain connected with children, young people and families – such opportunities are currently very limited.

For training and professional development to be most useful, organisations must be able to support workers to integrate their training and reinforce learning. It is important that workers are observed working and receive feedback, however, this can be confronting and would need to be normalised within a workplace.

Additionally, middle managers need to be recognised for the particular operational expertise they bring to the sector. We need to identify ways of investing in building the capability of operational managers in the context of child and family services.

Another identified gap in professional development and training is around inclusive practice, making sure our workforce has the skills to support LGBTIQ children, young people and their family members.

**Priority action 2.2: Invest in the Aboriginal workforce to meet the demands of self-determination.**

The government’s commitment to self-determination, including the transition of Aboriginal children into the care of ACCOs, requires significant investment in the Aboriginal workforce to build workforce capability to meet demand. To attract and retain a highly skilled workforce requires adequate levels of funding that will enable salaries to be competitive with government and other industries.

Some of the key challenges raised in a recent forum on developing an Aboriginal workforce strategy included the intense demand/competition for capable skilled Aboriginal staff; insufficient recognition of the value of lived experience; lack of awareness about career pathways and options; uncertainty of tenure created by short-term funding; inaccessible recruitment processes; inadequate supports to keep Aboriginal people in education; and insufficient on-the-ground and in-community training.52

The sector commits to working with ACCOs and DHHS to support the development and implementation of an Aboriginal workforce strategy to meet the demands of self-determination, and with tertiary institutions to facilitate access and completion of courses by cohorts that are currently marginalised.
Priority action 2.3: Develop and implement strategies to support quality student placements and graduate opportunities.

Building the skills of our graduates

We need to ensure that training institutions such as universities are strongly connected with the sector and understand the competencies and skills required for work in the community services so that graduates have a strong foundation to prepare them for work across a range of practice areas. The sector must focus on providing more high-quality student placements to make sure that graduates are work-ready for roles in the sector.

We will work to build stronger relationships with universities to make sure graduates are well prepared for working with children, young people and families experiencing vulnerability. For example, the sector could pilot extended paid internships for final year students, to make sure graduates are appropriately knowledgeable and familiar with the sector and nature of the work when they come into organisations. Closer relationships could also provide more opportunities to help shape some of the curriculum content, such as inclusion of the Best Interests Principles in courses.

Similarly, we could explore the options of introducing paid traineeships for graduates who need additional skills or experience to work in the child and family sector, for professionals in connected sectors to move across, or for professionals who have had a long break from the sector. This would have the added benefit of providing more leadership and mentoring opportunities for existing staff. It could also mean that students feel less pressure to undertake placements while studying and working to support themselves, making the industry more attractive potentially to work in. Paid placements would also enable the sector to tap into an older cohort of potential employees who are more likely to have life experience.

Additionally, the sector needs to find ways of encouraging universities and TAFEs to engage more closely with the sector to increase course relevance; cultural appropriateness of what is delivered and how; and to attract a diversity of students that reflect the diversity of our workforce, including refugee and recently arrived migrant groups that have not traditionally worked in the sector.

It means using evidence to inform the ways in which learning environments, resources and courses can be made culturally safe for Aboriginal students to access, including involving Aboriginal people in the co-design and co-delivery of the courses. It also means working closely with other cohorts of students to attract, enrol and support completion.

The sector needs to increase the number of bilingual and bicultural staff working in child and family services. Providing targeted support for families and children from diverse backgrounds requires a well-trained pool of skilled workers. Mainstream and ethno-specific service providers have an important and complementary role to play in developing such a pool.

To meet future workforce recruitment needs, the sector could also develop an internship program targeting non-traditional groups of potential workers.
**Priority action 2.4:** Develop a more coordinated approach with and between carers, peak carer bodies and the sector to enable carers to provide the best possible support for the children and young people in their care.

**Supporting our carers**

Strengthening home-based care to improve outcomes for children and young people in out-of-home care is a key strategic priority. The sector relies heavily on foster, kinship, respite and permanent carers to provide safe and secure home environments for children and young people who, for a range of reasons, are unable to live with their parents (including biological, step, donor conceived, LGBTI and adoptive parents).

In Victoria, CSOs, DHHS, and peak bodies such as Kinship Care Victoria, Foster Care Association of Victoria and Permanent and Adoptive Care Victoria provide a range of supports for carers. Victoria has also developed a state-wide training strategy in the form of Carer KaFE to support the information needs of carers.

Attracting and retaining foster and kinship carers is a high priority for all governments across Australia. A 2017 national study of foster and kinship care attraction and recruitment highlighted the need, among other things, for adequate financial allowances and provision of respite care.53

In Victoria, peak bodies have argued for:

- Improved access to funds that would enable carers to meet the range of needs children have (such as medical, therapeutic, travel, school and sports-related needs)
- Access to quality respite care
- Carer inclusive case management
- Advice and support following client incident reports and allegations
- Culturally appropriate assessments and supports aligned with Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care (ACAC) principles and government policies relating to Aboriginal self-determination
- Advice and support following quality of care reports and allegations.

Despite recent initiatives and reforms relating to foster, kinship and permanent care in Victoria, and the implementation of Carer KaFE, the state does not have a state-wide strategy that provides all carers with the necessary advice, advocacy, policies and processes, and access to up-to-date information about their rights and availability of paralegal, financial and other supports. We also need to provide carers with structured opportunities to be heard, to contribute to policy and program development, to give feedback on their interactions with professional services, and to advise on the kinds of support that make a difference to the lives of the children in their care. While the peak carer bodies provide a range of services, we need a more coordinated state-wide approach with and between carers, peak carer bodies and the sector.

**Informal carers**

The number of informal carers in the child and family services sector in Victoria is not known. Informal carers have the potential to make a significant difference to the lives of the people they support, yet many people with a caring role do not identify as carers, which means they are unlikely to access
information, services and supports. Informal carers need to be included in data collection, consultations and strategic planning as they have no clearly defined advocacy body. We need to research this unknown subset of carers to be able to provide support for the care being provided.

**Priority action 2.5:** Support and strengthen the contribution made by volunteers to the child and family services sector.

**Strengthening the contribution of volunteers**

Victoria has a strong volunteer culture. In 2010, around 35 per cent of people aged 18 years and over participated in formal volunteering in Victoria (1.5 million people). In 2014, 21 per cent of volunteers in Victoria worked in the welfare/community sector. We have little or no data to indicate in relation to the child and family services sector:

- Types and range of roles performed by volunteers in our sector
- In which organisations and in which parts of the organisation these roles are located
- Impact of these roles, particularly in relation to contributing to better outcomes for children, young people and families
- Economic value provided by volunteers to our sector
- Key challenges facing volunteers in our sector
- How we could be better supporting volunteers in child and family services.

Having a better understanding of the nature of the support provided by volunteers to our sector would mean we could better acknowledge, celebrate and support this contribution in the interests of vulnerable children, young people and families. Volunteers are potentially a significant source of support for organisations working with our most vulnerable families.

**Priority 3: Developing well-resourced and effective organisations**

**Priority action 3.1:** Continue to build the case for implementing flexible, long-term funding models and investment.

Our plan supports the continued development of organisations that can grow and adapt in response to community need and provide services when and where they are needed; that invest in strong, capable leadership and board capability; and that use technology to drive improvements. However, developing well-resourced and effective organisations requires flexible funding models, professional development and training, investment in infrastructure, good governance, and targeted support for ACCOs.

There is a compelling need for change given that each child and family services program has its own pricing and funding structure – in some cases developed decades ago – and a combination of unit prices and non-unit priced (block) funding with little transparency around use of this funding. Inflexible program eligibility also inhibits tailored and wraparound support. There needs to be more funding certainty to providers while enabling them more flexibility to scale up or down the support they provide in line with the needs of service users.
Consideration also needs to be given to the impact of flexible funding on the workforce of smaller CSOs to ensure it does not create instability for these organisations. While flexible funding is a positive measure it needs to contribute to a stable, well-educated and appropriately remunerated workforce.

**Funding models and resourcing**

To meet the costs of service delivery, organisations need funding that increases in line with inflation or the costs of service delivery. Without indexation, organisations lose money, compromising their ability to maintain financial stability and sustainability and provide the best possible services to children, young people and families.

We need flexible, long-term funding and service agreements that reflect the level and complexity of child, young people, family and carer needs and that remove eligibility barriers and restrictions to accessing support. We need funding that enables organisations to widen their service responses to provide a stronger focus on prevention and early intervention. This is a challenge in a service system experiencing increasing demand and complexity. Opportunities for early intervention are currently being missed due to demand, eligibility restrictions and short-term program-based funding. Current pricing structures, especially those for out-of-home care, are outdated and do not reflect the additional costs faced by regional services.

Demand-driven and needs-based funding would enable and facilitate responsive and adaptable person-centred service delivery with seamless pathways between programs and services so that families can receive a proportionate response based on their needs, for as long as they need this support. It would reflect the true costs of service delivery, allowing for long-term planning, coordination, innovation, creativity and growth. It would create more certainty and confidence in the refunding process and funding approaches. In the longer term the sector would benefit from responsive funding mechanisms with outcomes measurement and outcomes-focused accountability and new capital investment models.

Further benefits would include facilitating collaboration rather than competition, reducing competition-driven duplication, enabling more full-time positions, and an increase in job security. It would also be beneficial for families to be able to change services, if they wish, in a timely manner. Organisations would have the flexibility to respond according to changing needs or region-specific requirements.

The costs of providing and accessing training must be considered, alongside attempts to reduce competition and promote collaboration between Registered Training Organisations, and the development of a more formal approach and evidence-informed models to support training and professional development.

Of critical importance is the need to address the unique challenges and inequities faced by our regional and rural organisations, such as additional travel and time costs and limited service availability in certain areas. There are also different challenges facing organisations, depending on a range of factors, such as type, geographical location(s), whether faith-based or not, demand for services, staffing experience, resources available, funding streams, and historical issues affecting current day service delivery. Each organisational type has distinct value and challenges and it is
important to recognise these and ensure that a diverse spread of organisations is supported across the sector according to community need. For example, larger organisations are able to draw on their wider resource base to purchase and implement expensive EBPs to demonstrate effectiveness in the Australian context and make a case for ongoing government funding for such models. A challenge for larger organisations however, is to remain connected and responsive to the local communities in which they work. Small organisations on the other hand, can maintain a close connection to the people and community that they support and be more responsive and adaptable. Unfortunately, they are also more likely than better resourced organisations to struggle in a competitive tendering environment.

We need to recognise the contributions of organisations beyond what is provided to them by government for the provision of services. Some organisations are able to generate profits which are then reinvested to provide further supports for families, such as through infrastructure improvement. As a sector we need to increase our understanding of this process, and support organisations that struggle to build their capacity.

ACCOs need to be adequately resourced for their role in providing advice to the broader sector. As a sector, we know that Aboriginal organisations are best placed to provide support for Aboriginal children, young people and families and need to work collaboratively with ACCOs to enable this to occur. We need to explore the ways in which our organisations can better support ACCOs to meet the needs of vulnerable Aboriginal children, young people and families.

**Infrastructure**

Organisations need investment in infrastructure and capital works, and support to build planning capacity if they are to grow and respond to community need. This has become especially critical as new reforms have rapidly increased staffing levels in certain parts of the sector. Physical space affects organisations’ ability to grow, host student placements, maintain confidentiality, and create personal or professional working spaces, which in turn can affect wellbeing.

Given the reliance on data from our work with children, young people and families to drive reform, organisations also need to be supported to develop appropriate information technology (IT), digital innovation and data capability. Greater investment in suitable technological resources to improve accountability, responsiveness, efficiency and flexibility is needed, such as the development of service record systems designed to meet the needs of the sector and enable the smoother transition of documents and information from agency to agency. Our sector welcomes opportunities for organisations to share success stories in IT solutions, databases and innovative uses of technology to improve outcomes for vulnerable children, young people and families.

**Priority action 3.2: Streamline compliance to maintain accountability while allowing more time for direct service delivery.**

**Accountability and regulation**

Child and family services are facing increasing demands and compliance obligations. The sector is undergoing significant legislative and regulatory changes including transitioning to the National Disability Insurance Scheme, the introduction of minimum compulsory Child Safe standards, and the
establishment of a reportable conduct scheme to better protect children from abuse and child-related misconduct. A report by VCOSS states that, ‘the reporting requirements are often not appropriate for their stated purpose, are replicated across funding streams, impose compliance costs that outweigh the benefits, and are out of proportion with the level of funding or risk associated with it’.56

There is an urgent need to streamline compliance, regulatory and auditing processes to create a more efficient system that maximises usefulness and minimises disruption and burden. CSOs are faced with legal and financial requirements, quality and service standards, and performance reporting for funding provided by governments and others. As community-controlled organisations, ACCOs also have significant reporting obligations to their communities. Organisations that receive funding from multiple government departments have additional compliance requirements.

There would be significant benefit in identifying opportunities to reduce reporting duplication and to streamline compliance, regulatory and auditing processes to create an efficient and effective system, without compromising the quality of services provided to families in need.

Compliance and regulatory systems should be clearly linked to practice frameworks and directly support the achievement of outcomes. Our practice frameworks should assist practitioners to implement compliance requirements such as child safe standards. To be effective, the purpose of each component of the system, including guidance about how organisations can effectively implement these regulatory schemes, and the obligations of organisations and their employees regarding these schemes, must be clearly communicated.

The auditing process could assist organisations to streamline their documentation processes to reduce the administrative burden. Auditing should highlight the strengths of an organisation, not only the deficits and should be subject to a cycle of review.

**Priority action 3.3:** Continue to build the skills and expertise of our existing and emerging leaders, including mid-level management.

**Leadership**

Strong and effective leadership is critical in enabling organisations to manage change effectively.57 Our sector would benefit from having our own dedicated leadership academy designed to support existing leaders, emerging leaders, team managers, and others in positions of influence or power, while also providing pathways for graduates coming into the sector.

In some areas of our sector, our workforce is ageing. It is critical that the vast knowledge, wisdom and experience of our existing leaders is passed on. Succession planning can provide pathways for growth and development within organisations, while providing continuity of support for vulnerable families.

As a sector we recognise the importance of creating and/or maintaining a culture within workplaces of professional development, continuous improvement and innovation (to determine what does and does not work). In the 2017 Family Services Workforce Survey, around 30 per cent of respondents
reported that they did not have access to reflective practice or clinical supervision. While not all respondents would have roles that required this, we need to make sure that every organisation provides appropriate opportunities for practitioners to engage in critical reflection on their practice for the purposes of professional development and better outcomes for vulnerable children, young people and families.

Feedback from sector consultations highlighted the need for middle level management to be appropriately trained in supervision and management skills, including self-care.

*Korin Korin Balit-Djak* highlights the importance of transferring responsibilities and resources to Aboriginal communities and organisations to build capacity to engage in leadership and strategic government decision making as part of self-determination.

It is not only executive and senior management and emerging leaders who need to be provided with the skills and learning opportunities necessary to create and maintain strong and effective organisations; board members also need to be given opportunities to increase their capability to engage in informed decision making and shape the organisation’s culture.

### Priority 4: Growing a strong, responsive and sustainable sector

**Priority action 4.1: Develop a more evidence-informed and strategic approach to change management.**

A strong and sustainable child and family services sector is critical to the continued wellbeing and safety of children, young people and families and to Victoria’s productivity and community cohesion.

Sustaining our sector requires the ability to manage far-reaching and ongoing change effectively, with governments providing sufficient time for organisations to understand the rationale and sufficient resources for implementation. Our industry plan sets out some of the challenges and ways to address these challenges to maintain growth and strength over the next four years and beyond.

*Change management*

Our sector has experienced rapid change in recent years, with the introduction of new social and legislative reforms, and external factors shaping the workforce and affecting people’s circumstances. Strong leadership from governments and organisations is needed to ensure a measured and considered approach to change. In particular, governments need to recognise the cumulative impact of multiple reforms on organisations and the sector more broadly and allow sufficient time to consult, reach agreement and assess the risk of the change. Organisations need time to implement, adjust, embed and review new reforms, while continuing to provide consistent and reliable support to the people who use our services.

As a sector, we also need to recognise what is already working well, so this is not lost but can be built on.

Our leaders need to be involved in reform processes and have clear mechanisms for communicating to their organisations and staff. Sharing information effectively within organisations can play a key
role in mitigating the impacts of reforms. Any change, including newly funded programs, must be planned and implemented in such a way that risks to staff are identified and managed appropriately.

An effective change management process includes:

- Leadership that is committed to the vision and can reinforce it
- Creation of an environment of trust built on good relationships and mutual understanding
- Open and transparent communication and shared information
- Support provided to adapt to the change, for example, training and development opportunities
- Celebration of success to maintain momentum
- Having a source of transitional funds to implement the change
- A focus on strong relationships with external stakeholders who may respond to change differently
- Inclusive governance processes.58

Priority action 4.2: Continue to advocate for industrial conditions, policies and programs that attract and retain child and family services workers.

Attraction and retention

A common theme in the consultations for this industry plan was the need to examine ways of attracting good quality graduates and experienced workers in an environment where government can offer significantly higher financial inducements than CSOs and ACCOs, and to have greater wage parity across the sector for similar roles.

Another recurring theme among practitioners was the need for a portable long service scheme that would enable people working in the sector to move within and across organisations and the sector without forfeiting long service leave entitlements.

The consultations highlighted the need to develop a more strategic approach to providing and resourcing opportunities for intra-agency and inter-agency secondments; increased opportunities for coaching, mentoring, cadetship and shadowing options to foster peer professional development opportunities; and better supervision and support for staff at all levels to support job satisfaction and avoid burnout.

Priority action 4.3: Continue to invest in a strong children’s peak body that can work in partnership to drive quality service delivery across the sector and advocate successfully for actions that lead to better outcomes for children, young people and families.

Speaking with a united voice

As a sector, we need to demonstrate strong leadership and a united voice to provide coordinated advocacy across a wide range of areas. Given the realities of the political cycle we need to develop a clear, sustainable and bipartisan political strategy with the direct involvement of service users. This will provide a strong platform for the sector to maintain and advance reform as government decision-
makers change. This means not only CSOs being able to work collaboratively but peak bodies also working in partnership across the range of community services.

Many organisations are adapting to multiple changes while faced with overwhelming demand. A commitment to continuous improvement must incorporate a shared responsibility between government and organisations in the sector for the implementation of participatory change management processes. Such processes are needed to effectively implement reforms and change in order to achieve positive outcomes.59 The plan commits the sector to working closely with government to implement change in evidence-informed ways.

This industry plan for the child and family services sector has highlighted the need for:

- Services that regularly capture and embed the views of the people who access them
- More effective collaboration in the interests of seamless service delivery
- A united voice to advocate for a more equitable society with better outcomes for children, young people and families experiencing disadvantage and vulnerability, including more effective advocacy on behalf of children and families subjected to punitive welfare policies
- Embedding competency in cultural safety and respect for diversity in every organisation working with children, young people and families
- Greater awareness of the best available evidence to drive reform and of how to translate research into practice
- A state-wide approach to building workforce capability
- More supported student placement and targeted graduate programs
- A more coordinated state-wide approach to enable carers to provide the best possible support for the children and young people in their care
- Better support and management of volunteers to get the best outcomes for volunteers and organisations
- Implementing more flexible, long-term funding models
- Streamlining the compliance burden to maintain accountability while allowing more time for direct service delivery
- Building the skills and expertise of our existing and emerging leaders
- Developing an evidence-informed and strategic approach to change management
- Industrial conditions that support child and family services staff to enter and remain in the sector.

To ensure these elements of our plan can be implemented, the sector needs to work in partnership with other peaks to advocate collectively for a qualified, skilled and culturally responsive workforce across multiple domains.
Implementation of the plan

This plan sets the priorities for our sector over the next four years. The next step will involve more detailed implementation planning with relevant stakeholders from the sector, funders, the peaks and government working together to agree on roles, responsibilities and resources. Implementation will build on existing good practice in the sector. Like the development of this plan, planning for implementation will be sector-driven with the support and guidance of government. In many cases, delivering the actions will require new ways of working rather than additional resources.

Implementation represents a further opportunity to strengthen the links across the community services sector and align implementation of the sector-specific plans with the overarching Community Services Industry Plan. Implementation also needs to take into account the changing nature of the environment, and be flexible enough to respond to emerging priorities, directions and opportunities.

The next phase of the industry plan will require the development of indicators to measure success along the way and at the end of the four year timeframe.
**Priority 1**

**Using evidence-informed practice to support our children, young people and families**

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<th>Priority actions</th>
<th>Activities</th>
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| 1.1 Undertake a whole-of-system documentation of how the perspectives of children, young people and families are being captured by mainstream and Aboriginal service providers to improve services | - Identify and collate the ways in which CSOs and ACCOs are successfully incorporating the perspectives of service users regarding:
  - accessibility
  - usefulness
  - cultural appropriateness
  - timeliness
  - impact.
- Disseminate through OPEN examples of tools, approaches and practice models that have been shown to be effective in embedding the perspectives of service users in practice. |
| 1.2 Invest in strategies and tools to coordinate and promote collaborative ways of working within and across the sector and with allied sectors | - Collect industry evidence and information on collaborative practice and its effectiveness in the sector.
- Review the effectiveness of current practice network forums provided by the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare across early years, leaving care and out-of-home care, integrated services and allied sectors. |
|                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| 1.3 Use the best available evidence to develop a coordinated response to raising Commonwealth government awareness about the impact of welfare reform measures on children and families |
| 1.4 Implement a state-wide strategy to embed competency in cultural safety and respect for diversity in every organisation working with children, young people and families |

<p>| Family Services, placement prevention and reunification, kinship care, foster care, permanent care, and other communities of practice to determine how these could better meet the needs of participants and ultimately the people who use our services. |
| Establish a state-wide network of Principal Practitioners to enhance practice leadership, including sharing evidence-informed ways of supporting child protection practitioners, facilitating staff mentoring and practice development and providing leadership in the implementation of continuous improvement strategies based on clinical best practice. |
| Develop tools and practical resources based on the literature and experiences of the Orange Door Hubs, Child First Alliances, Aboriginal Child and Youth Alliance, Aboriginal Children’s Forum, and other sector examples of collaboration to identify protocols that could be used for building future partnerships. |
| Establish a broad coalition of advocates from CSOs, ACCOs, youth services, peak bodies, and other community organisations interested in developing a coordinated strategy to raise awareness about the impact of Commonwealth policies on already vulnerable and disadvantaged children and families. |
| Collate the best available evidence into a research paper to inform the strategy and Terms of Reference, including indicators for a Children’s Rights lens to be applied on all Commonwealth welfare policies, policy gaps and potential negative impact and/or lack of clear alignment with state policies. |
| Prioritise the transition of Aboriginal children into Aboriginal care so that all organisations working with Aboriginal children, young people, families and organisations commit to and proactively support Aboriginal self-determination. |
| Conduct a state-wide audit of existing training and professional development approaches used to build cultural competency in mainstream organisations and identify tools and resources that have been shown to be effective. Such an audit would assist in identifying areas for improvement and |</p>
<table>
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<tr>
<th>1.5 Build a strong culture of using evidence to inform decision-making and practice, fostering a culture of sharing what works, supporting individuals and organisations to translate research into effective practice, and measuring and evaluating the effectiveness of our work</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✦ In line with the Victorian Government’s multicultural policy, <em>Victorian and Proud of it</em>, fund bilingual workers to support the participation of children from culturally diverse backgrounds in supported playgroups and kindergartens.</td>
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<tr>
<td>✦ In collaboration with Aboriginal and CALD peak bodies, invest in and develop practical resources to increase the level of cultural competency in all industry organisations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✦ In collaboration with Aboriginal and CALD peak bodies, develop self-assessment tools that will assist child and family service organisations to meet the needs of the diverse people and communities who access their services. Identify options to incentivise use.</td>
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</table>

| ✦ Continue to invest in and build the Outcomes Practice Evidence Network (OPEN) portal as a means of building sector capability. |
| ✦ Consistent with *Wungurilwil Gapgapduir*, examine how OPEN could work alongside ACCOs to build and share the evidence base of what works with Aboriginal children, young people and families. |
| ✦ Ensure relevant data collected by government is freely available to the sector to drive service improvement. |
| ✦ Encourage secondment pathways for staff in CSOs and ACCOs to share knowledge about what works and learn from each other’s experiences. |
| ✦ Identify, develop and provide the guidance and training needed to support organisations and professionals in child and family services to rigorously evaluate and implement evidence-informed practice. |
| ✦ Establish an annual seed funding program, similar to the 2017 Learning System Grants, to enable organisations to develop their promising practice into evidence-informed practice. |
| ✦ Provide training and support to the sector to build common understandings across the different workforces in regard to client outcomes and how we record and measure the impact of services on people’s lives. |
1.6 Strengthen and resource research and evaluation capacity within Aboriginal organisations to build the evidence base of what works for Aboriginal children and families

- Continue to invest in research and evaluation of existing models of Aboriginal services and programs, using culturally appropriate outcomes and methodologies, to identify those practice elements that made a positive difference in the lives of the children and families who use these services.
- Work with DHHS and ACCOs to develop further the Aboriginal Research Evaluation Framework.

<table>
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<th>Priority 2</th>
<th>Building an appropriately qualified and skilled workforce</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Priority actions</strong></td>
<td><strong>Activities</strong></td>
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</table>
| 2.1 Implement a state-wide approach to building workforce capability to develop an appropriately qualified and skilled workforce and identify key strategies and initiatives to promote the value of our sector | - Convene a state-wide strategic planning workshop, to be facilitated by the Centre, with DHHS, ACCOs, CSOs, other industry groups, to identify key strategies and initiatives to support a state-wide approach to building workforce capability.  
- Conduct a comprehensive workforce census of child and family services staff to enable strengths and areas for further training or professional development to be identified.  
- In collaboration with government, CSOs and ACCOs and allied peaks, identify and articulate the core competencies and capabilities required for existing and future roles within the sector.  
- Develop a child and family services capability framework that will enable:  
  - Aboriginal young people to access education and training to develop skills for the sector. The sector needs to work more closely with the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association and tertiary institutions to drive better engagement with Aboriginal people and students  
  - More in-house training for Aboriginal people and staff in the form of Aboriginal staff co-designing and co-delivering training that is embedded onsite into the service system rather than only in tertiary settings |
- Greater flexibility in the education and training sector to assist with recognised prior learning and fast tracking those staff (including Aboriginal, non-Aboriginal, CALD) with little or no qualifications but extensive sector experience
- Organisations to support individual workers to gain the requisite skills and qualifications, for example, through allowing time for assessments to be completed, or supporting in-house study groups
- The sector to have greater consistency in terms of role expectations, consistency, and standards
- Joint training and upskilling of the workforce, including education, police, justice and health staff, and with other agencies.

- Develop mechanisms for identifying new and emerging areas of skill and expertise.
- Invest in a series of pilots to test models of collaboration with universities to:
  - Contribute to curriculum content in child and family services relevant courses
  - Develop paid internships for students in their final year of study to gain industry experience before entering the sector workforce
  - Attract and support individuals in non-traditional areas to make the transition to working in the child and family services sector.

Any student taking up such opportunities needs to be properly supported by the host organisations.

| 2.2 Invest in the Aboriginal workforce to meet the demands of self-determination |
| Work with ACCOs and DHHS to identify practical ways in which CSOs can support the development and implementation of an Aboriginal workforce strategy to meet the demands of self-determination. |
| Continue to work with ACCOs to facilitate the effective and efficient transfer of resources to enable Aboriginal children to be supported by Aboriginal workers. |
| 2.3 Develop and implement strategies to support quality student placements and graduate opportunities | ✶ Establish a Supported Student Placement Program to provide a ‘pipeline of excellence’ that attracts highly qualified and capable workers into the sector.  
✶ Develop a postgraduate internship program targeting non-traditional groups of potential workers to bring with them new knowledge and skills and who can better reflect the diversity of our community, for example, older men, people in other professions, people from recently arrived migrant communities. |
| 2.4 Develop a more coordinated approach with and between carers, peak carer bodies and the sector to enable carers to provide the best possible support for the children and young people in their care | ✶ Develop a state-wide carer strategy that provides carers with the necessary advice, advocacy, training, policies and processes, and access to up-to-date information about their rights and availability of paralegal, financial, education and other supports. Such a strategy would also identify existing areas of duplication or overlap and ways of providing a more streamlined approach for carers.  
✶ Provide carers with structured opportunities to be heard, to contribute to policy and program development, to give feedback on their interactions with professional services, and to advise on the kinds of support that make a difference to the lives of the children in their care.  
✶ Explore ways in which foster carers could be better supported in the workforce, including workplace contracts. |
| 2.5 Support and strengthen the contribution made by volunteers to the child and family services sector | ✶ Conduct a survey of volunteers working in the sector, to identify and evaluate the contribution they make to support the work of child and family services.  
✶ Using the knowledge and data gathered, identify how best to support volunteers to create better outcomes for themselves, and the people and/or organisations they support. |
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Priority 3</th>
<th>Developing well-resourced and effective organisations</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Priority actions</strong></td>
<td><strong>Activities</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>3.1 Continue to build the case for implementing flexible, long-term funding models and investment</strong></td>
<td>实施灵活和长期的资金模式和投资，使组织能够针对使用其服务的儿童、年轻人和家庭提供目标支持，并参与解决需求的决策。</td>
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<td></td>
<td>支持ACCOs继续成长以应对增加的责任和需求。</td>
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<td>确保政府支持需求预测和需求管理。</td>
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<td><strong>3.2 Streamline compliance to maintain accountability while allowing more time for direct service delivery</strong></td>
<td>将当前的合规要求映射到儿童和家庭服务，考虑这些要求是否可以减少和简化，以提供一个更有效率、经济和有效的问责制系统。</td>
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<td><strong>3.3 Continue to build the skills and expertise of our existing and emerging leaders, including mid-level management</strong></td>
<td>建立儿童和家庭服务领导学院，启动和促进旨在为新任、新任和现有领导开展的项目，包括更多原住民领导。</td>
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<tr>
<td>Actions associated with this priority need to incorporate the right to self-determination for Aboriginal leaders</td>
<td>与这个优先级相关的动作需要融入原住民领导的自决权利。</td>
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<td></td>
<td>与CSO董事会的主席们一起，识别培训和专业发展机会来推动产业发展。</td>
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<td></td>
<td>在管理层和监督能力方面投资，以支持工作队伍的健康和福祉，并在执行中提供高质量服务。</td>
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<td>投资于发展指导项目，为现有和成长的领导者提供持续的指导和发展。</td>
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<td></td>
<td>举办一系列关于相关话题和当前问题的研讨会和研讨会，例如变革管理、新趋势、评估组织健康和原住民案主管理过渡。</td>
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### Priority 4

#### Growing a strong, responsive and sustainable sector

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<th>Priority actions</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>4.1 Develop a more evidence-informed and strategic approach to change management</strong></td>
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  - Collate the best available evidence from our sector and other sectors on managing sector-wide change, including case studies of effective change implementation, and distribute this widely to help organisations manage department, staff and community expectations.  
  - Develop a set of indicators that organisations can use to measure how effectively change is being managed in their organisations. |
| **4.2 Continue to advocate for industrial conditions, policies and programs that attract and retain child and family services workers** |  
  - Support the implementation of a transferrable long service scheme.  
  - Develop a strategic approach to providing and resourcing opportunities for intra-agency and inter-agency secondments.  
  - Develop more coaching, mentoring, cadetship and shadowing options to create peer professional development opportunities.  
  - Identify and disseminate best practice to enable better supervision and support for staff at all levels to support job satisfaction and avoid burnout.  
  - Fund organisations to be able to offer comparable wages and conditions with government to retain workers. The *Strong Families Safe Children* reforms include common assessment and planning, which require common salary bands across the sector. |
| **4.3 Continue to invest in a strong children’s peak body that can work in partnership to drive quality service delivery across the sector and advocate successfully for actions that lead to better outcomes for children, young people and families** |  
  - Invest in the Centre to strengthen its capacity to build strong partnerships with allied sectors, ACCOs and CSOs working in child and family services, education providers, RTOs, workers, students, and governments to make sure that children are front and centre of policy and practice decision making. |
Appendix: How the industry plan was developed

In preparing this plan, the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare undertook targeted consultation with our members and a range of stakeholders working with children, young people and families, including:

- Practice network meetings
  - Foster care
  - Kinship care
  - Leaving care and post-care
  - Placement prevention and reunification
  - Child FIRST and Integrated Family Services
  - Quality learning circle
- Practitioner questionnaire
- CEO survey
- Telephone interviews and meetings
- CEO forum
- Cross-sector conversations with other peaks, including VACCHO and VCOSS
- Meetings with DHHS staff working in the reform and workforce units.

We also undertook a review of the literature on workforce trends, examined industry plans in other jurisdictions and sectors, and collated data from relevant workforce surveys.

The plan has benefited from a wide range of constructive and substantial feedback received from the sector in response to the draft plan that was circulated widely in March-May 2018.
Endnotes

1 In this document ‘family’ and ‘families’ refers to the full range of biological, carer, step, donor conceived, LGBTI and adoptive families.
2 See the Appendix for details of the consultation process.
3 In this document ‘Aboriginal’ refers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
4 See https://www.cfefw.asn.au/beyond-good-intentions/
7 Ibid.
20 Email correspondence with the Department of Health and Human Services, 6th July 2018.
23 National Disability Insurance Scheme (2018) Improving the NDIS participant and provider experience, Department of Human Services, Canberra.
24 See https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_Legislation/Bills_Search_Results/Result?bId=r5927
33 Ibid.
The text is a list of references with page numbers and publication details.
About the Centre

For over 100 years, the Centre has advanced the rights and wellbeing of children, young people and families in Victoria.

We advocate for the rights of children and young people to be heard, to be safe, to access education and to remain connected to family, community and culture. We represent over 150 community service organisations, students and individuals throughout Victoria working across the continuum of child and family services, from prevention and early intervention to the provision of out-of-home care. Our members are at the forefront of supporting children, young people and families.

cfecfw.asn.au

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