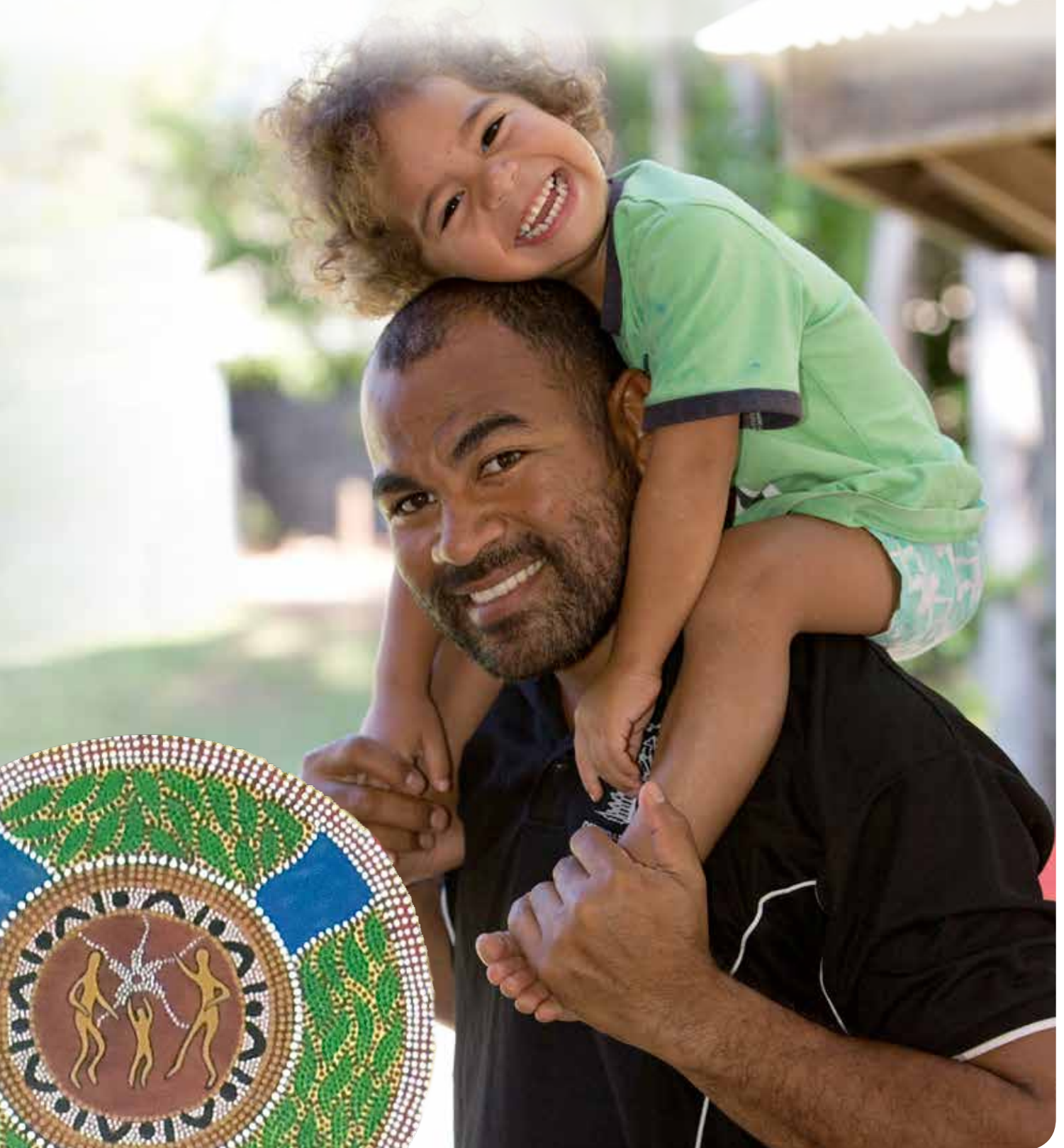


Towards a Queensland action plan for vulnerable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families





Introduction

The new *Supporting Families Changing Futures* publication builds on the commitments and progress of the Queensland Government and partner organisations to implement the recommendations of the 2013 Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry.

Key priorities in *Supporting Families Changing Futures* include responding differently to the over-representation of vulnerable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families in the statutory child protection system, reducing child and youth sexual abuse, and closing the gaps in life outcomes.

Supporting Families Changing Futures commits to develop and deliver **an action plan for vulnerable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families**.

This is in recognition that much more needs to be done to overcome both the broader issues of social and economic disadvantage and the specific circumstances in families that drive the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the statutory child protection system. We need to break this cycle. We need a fundamental shift in how child protection, family support and other services work with, and for, Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

This is an opportunity to acknowledge the deep and enduring historical trauma for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families dealing with the child protection system and respond in ways that enable people, families and communities to heal.

The action plan will be developed through a **collaborative approach** involving Elders, relevant government agencies and community leaders, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and peak bodies.

It will build on consultations over the past 18 months and on initiatives being undertaken by government and partner organisations with urban, regional and remote communities. It will include **existing as well as new practical actions**.

A particular focus will be on key factors that can lead to contact with the child protection system including parental substance abuse, domestic and family violence, inter-generational abuse and trauma, mental health, and contact with the justice system.

The action plan will **draw on the strengths and capabilities** of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, communities and organisations.

It will be **guided by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives** through **listening to** Elders, community leaders, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and families.

The action plan will draw on **evidence of what works** and promising models here and abroad in parenting, family and community support, and on **learnings from initiatives** to close the gap in Queensland in early years, education and health outcomes.

The action plan will be considered by the Queensland Government by the end of 2016.

'This picture is about my connection with my family and my land.'
Norah, 15 years old, living at the local youth shelter





Immediate commitments

The Queensland Government has committed to the following actions as the first wave of contributions towards the action plan.

Investment of more than **\$150 million** over the next five years from 2016–17 in revamped **parenting and family support and wellbeing services** delivered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations. This includes around \$60 million in extra funding. Funding rounds will occur in various stages from May 2016, with services starting across Queensland by early 2017.

Establishment of an **Empowering Families Innovation Fund**, an investment of **\$6 million over three years** to support prevention and intervention programs that strengthen families, support reunification, and support greater stability and permanency of children in care and bring forward the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families to guide service design, practices and decision-making. Initial expressions of interest for the **Empowering Families Innovation Fund** will be called in July 2016.

Ministers convening a roundtable and other forums as part of our commitment to hearing and incorporating the views and priorities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities and organisations in the action plan.

Partnering with the **Queensland Family Matters Working Group**, to facilitate development and implementation of the action plan. Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak (QATSICPP) will lead Queensland's response to the Family Matters national campaign and facilitate community input to the action plan.

Initiation of an annual **Queensland 'Family Matters' Gathering**, with the first to be held in 2016 to bring together Indigenous and non-Indigenous community leaders, organisations and networks to look at how best to drive action and implement services at local and regional levels.

Why we need an action plan

If current trends continue, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people will account for **more than half of all Queensland children in care within the next five years**. We need to continue closing the gaps in areas of health, education, employment, housing, imprisonment and mental health outcomes.

Over the past 18 months, we have been engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders, children and families, community leaders and organisations, and non-government organisations and agency staff across Queensland. The knowledge, experience, leadership and expertise within communities and the broader sector makes it clear that we are not starting with a blank slate.

We have listened and heard that we need to rethink how family support, child protection and other services work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in Queensland.

We have received clear messages that together we need to:

- recognise the deep and enduring trauma inherent in child removal and family disruptions, and respond in ways that enable people and communities to heal
- empower parents, families and communities, and engage Elders and grandparents, to help solve problems and achieve aspirations for their children to grow, learn and thrive
- recognise that connection to culture, country and kin are primary protective and resilience factors
- support the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled sector to focus on prevention and early intervention, on early childhood development, on young parents and on life-stage transitions
- adopt broader healing and wellbeing approaches as well as proven models of support, intervention and reconnection
- deliver coordinated, tailored and integrated services that respond to local priorities, support families earlier and strengthen community and family connections
- build mechanisms that enable family and community-level decision making and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination
- recognise the role of men in family, community and culture to address key issues such as domestic and family violence and promoting the safety and development of children
- increase stability for children in out-of-home care and reconnect children wherever possible to family, kin, community and country
- support post-care transitions to independent living
- deliver community and personal histories services and continue to build inclusive communities that value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage
- invest in accessible, culturally competent and effective services, focused on both their results and relationships, with accountability to families, communities and investors
- adopt new ways and technologies that enable families to navigate and connect with the right services, at the right time and in the right way
- build a service system based on community-driven design to promote collaboration and partnerships that deliver wrap-around supports to children and families
- value and trust that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community is best placed to determine how to meet the needs of their children, families and communities.



'My picture is about the love that my sister and I share together.'
Child in care, 6 years old

How the action plan will be developed



The action plan will be developed and delivered in partnership with Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders, families, communities, organisations and leaders, supported by whole-of-government and whole-of-sector efforts and investments. In particular, it will:

- be jointly sponsored by the Treasurer, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships and Minister for Sport, the Honourable Curtis Pitt MP, and the Minister for Communities, Women and Youth, Minister for Child Safety and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence, the Honourable Shannon Fentiman MP
- be developed in collaboration with the Queensland Family Matters Working Group, a network of key Indigenous and non-Indigenous community leaders and non-government organisations convened to develop a Queensland response to the National Family Matters campaign for addressing over-representation
- be supported at a community-level through Regional Child and Family Committees and local level alliances
- bring together an alliance of organisations that can contribute to supporting vulnerable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families
- be co-led and facilitated by the Queensland Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services (DCCSDS) and the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships (DATSIP), working with Elders and senior leaders across the Queensland public and community sectors.

The Queensland Family and Child Commission will provide input and oversight as per its statutory functions. Queensland will also seek the cooperation of the Australian Government and local governments.





Making the action plan work with other initiatives

To make an enduring difference, the action plan must work with other national strategies and initiatives. These include the:

- Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Closing the Gap initiatives
- National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children third three-year action plan, 2015–2018, *Driving Change: Intervening Early*
- strategies from the National Family Matters campaign, which is currently in development and being driven by the non-government sector.



The action plan will also align with and leverage off new and existing Queensland Government action plans, strategies and initiatives including:

- *Jobs Now, Jobs for the Future* and *Working Queensland* initiatives (all agencies)
- working with communities to improve social and economic well-being and participation and enhance the quality of life in discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (DATSIP)
- *Queensland Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Strategy* (multiple agencies)
- *Making Tracks toward closing the gap in health outcomes for Indigenous Queenslanders by 2033* and other health initiatives (Queensland Health)
- the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social and emotional wellbeing strategy and *Queensland Mental Health, Drug and Alcohol Strategic Plan 2014–2019* (Queensland Mental Health Commission)
- Queensland housing strategy — *Working together for better housing and sustainable communities* discussion paper (Department of Housing and Public Works)
- early childhood, education and training action plan for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, students and young people (Department of Education and Training)
- Recommendations from the Youth Sexual Violence and Abuse Steering Committee (DATSIP)
- *Queensland Financial Resilience and Inclusion Action Plan* and program (DCCSDS)
- National Disability Insurance Scheme (DCCSDS with the National Disability Insurance Agency)
- potential initiatives within a Queensland youth strategy.



Building on initiatives

The action plan will build on existing initiatives in child protection, family support and other services to provide a cohesive, integrated response to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

Across government agencies and partner organisations, considerable effort and investment is already being committed including:

- implementing the **Queensland Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Strategy 2016–2026** in collaboration with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and organisations. This includes trialling integrated service responses where service providers and government agencies work together, sharing information and undertaking collaborative risk management to enhance the safety of victims and their children and importantly, providing opportunities to hold perpetrators to account and change their behaviour
- adopting a **new strengths-based child protection practice framework** across Child Safety services, with Indigenous Practice Leaders to drive culturally appropriate practices
- designing new service models for children and families in Queensland's **discrete Indigenous communities**, commencing in 2016–17. These are being designed in collaboration with discrete communities to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families' access to existing universal and secondary support services, and develop appropriate community-based referral processes, including differential responses and collaborative case management
- commissioning of **Family and Child Connect** and **Intensive Family Support Services** across the state, including Indigenous FaCCs, as well as new services in Mt Isa/North West, Cape York and Torres Strait/Northern Peninsula Area in 2016–17
- appointing an **Indigenous person** as Commissioner to the Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC). The QFCC will play a key role in community engagement, evaluation and oversight of the action plan, as well as delivering the next stage of the **Talking Families** campaign
- investing \$38.8 million over four years for Queensland's **Children and Family Centres** to deliver vital early education, child and maternal health, and family support services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families
- partnering with key organisations — including Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak (QATSICPP), the Healing Foundation and Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) — to **recognise and harness the practice, cultural, organisational and leadership capability** across Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and non-Indigenous organisations, agencies and workforce. This includes initiatives facilitated by the QFCC, DCCSDS, DATSIP and the Public Sector Commission
- pursuing initiatives to **strengthen family-led decision-making processes**, and to reframe and improve support for **kinship carers**
- pursuing reforms during 2016–17 to the **Child Protection Act 1999** based on evidence and expertise about best practices and the lived experiences of children and families. Areas of focus include broadening the implementation of the Child Placement Principle, enhancing collaborative approaches and family-led decision making, and examining opportunities for increasing decision-making authority to community controlled entities
- continuing the work of the **Family Responsibilities Commission** in communities participating in welfare reform
- delivering access to **Triple P** parenting information and support for all Queensland parents and continuing to support universal access to **kindergarten**
- kindergarten services provided by state schools to children aged 3.5 to 5.5 years in identified Indigenous communities in Queensland.

These initiatives, together with input from Elders, families, communities and organisations across Queensland, will help to develop an action plan that will contribute to achieving the fundamental shift required to meet the needs of vulnerable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

How to get involved and stay informed

Communities and organisations will have the opportunity to be a part of the development and delivery of the action plan in a number of ways, building on consultation over the past 18 months. This includes a roundtable and other forums with communities, key organisations and local government, and across the public, community and private sectors. More information will be available through the Supporting Families Changing Futures e-newsletter and website at www.qld.gov.au/supportingfamilies

Share your feedback

Let us know your thoughts about the action plan through the feedback section at www.qld.gov.au/supportingfamilies

Useful websites

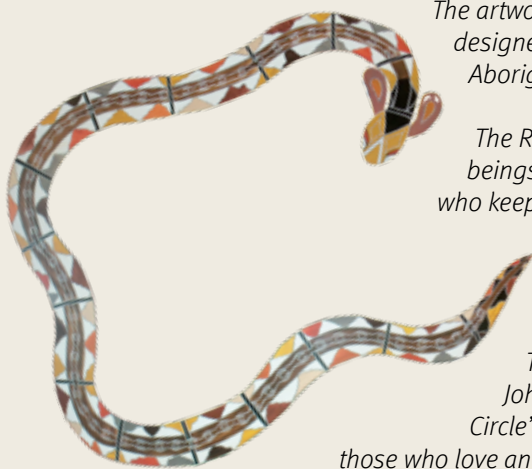
These organisations will be involved in the development and delivery of the action plan at statewide and local levels.

Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak (QATSICPP) — www.qatsicpp.com.au

Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships (DATSIP) — www.datsip.qld.gov.au

Partners in reform at www.qld.gov.au/supportingfamilies

Family Matters campaign site — www.familymatters.org.au



The artwork featured in this publication is courtesy of Lee-Ann Davis Collier who designed a mural in conjunction with children in care and encompassing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.

The Rainbow Serpent featured throughout is the protector and source of all beings on the land. The shapes within the serpent are dreamtime ancestors who keep the connection with land and family. The individual artwork and stories featured on pages two and four are from the children in care who contributed to the mural. The mural can be seen at Innisfail Child Safety Service Centre.

The outer circle depicts the local environment, the Johnstone River and the rainforest; the 'Gathering Circle' has the three figures, which denote the child and those who love and protect the child; the circle in between is the traditional gathering circle, which represents a meeting place for their family and others who care for them.



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