

# Next Steps for Our Kids

## Action Plan 1: Summary

FY 2022-2026



ACT strategy for strengthening families and  
keeping children and young people safe

## Acknowledgement of Country

The ACT Government acknowledges the Ngunnawal people as traditional custodians of the Canberra region and recognises any other people or families with connection to the lands of the ACT and region. The ACT Government acknowledges and respects their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this city and this region.

The ACT Government would also like to acknowledge the value of traditional parenting practices and communal culture in child rearing. In particular, grandparents, aunts and uncles hold a significant and respected position in families and play an important role in the development of a child or young person's sense of identity, belonging and culture.

We believe the experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture is a strength and protective factor in our work with families. We also understand for thousands of years, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents, families and communities have provided safe, strong and loving care for their children, based on cultural wisdom, shared knowledge and traditions that uphold the belief that children have a sacred value to their community.

## Accessibility

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If English is not your first language and you require the **Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS)**, please contact us through the **TIS phone interpreting line on 131 450**.

If you are deaf, or have a hearing impairment or speech impairment, you may wish to contact us through the **National Relay Service (NRS)**. See the NRS page on the Infrastructure Australia website [www.infrastructure.gov.au](http://www.infrastructure.gov.au)

## Introduction

The ACT Government wants all ACT families to be strong and connected and for their children and young people to reach their full potential. Next Steps for Our Kids 2022-2030 (Next Steps) is the Government's strategy to help achieve this by strengthening families and keeping children and young people safe.

Next Steps holds a central role in the Government's broader reform program of the ACT's children and family services. It also strongly aligns with Safe and Supported: The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021-2031 (Safe and Supported).

The vision for Next Steps is:

**'Children and young people in the ACT are safe, strong, connected and living their best life'.**

This requires an ACT child protection system that:

- is child-centered and family-focused
- integrates early family support, prevention, child protection, out of home care and youth justice
- strengthens families who interact with this system.

To deliver the changes outlined in Next Steps, two 4-year action plans will be co-designed with service users, people with lived experience and government and non-government organisations to determine how the work will be achieved and in what order. This is Next Steps first action plan.

Action Plan 1 sets the foundational priorities and critical actions that will enable the whole reform program. It aligns with Next Steps key domains, broad focus areas and guiding principles, grouping the actions to be undertaken in the first 4 years into 5 priority initiatives. These are:

1. Our Booris, Our Way
2. Sector development, workforce capability and training
3. Relationships and culture
4. Reform enablers
5. Service reform and establishment

Action Plan 1 is a living document, recognising the importance of being able to adapt to emerging trends, evidence and issues as they arise and to monitor progress across the plan's 4-year lifespan.

The information below is a summary of the actions that will be undertaken under Action Plan 1. You can access the full details in the full action plan on the ACT Government's website.

The ACT Government thanks everyone who contributed to the development of this action plan.



# Priority initiative: What we will do

## Priority initiative 1: Our Booris, Our Way

**What we will do:** Improve supports and system responsiveness for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families through a broader focus on early supports that are culturally safe, integrate service delivery and lead with self-determination as a core principle.

### NEXT STEPS DOMAIN: OUR BOORIS, OUR WAY

#### Actions:

- Fully embed the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle in legislation, policy and practice.
- Support the development of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) in the sector and transition responsibility for case management.
- Establish an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People Commissioner.
- Establish a specialist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led team to partner with the community.
- Engage with ACCOs to understand capabilities and interests, and determine where service development or partnerships are required.
- Ensure all child and youth protection practice is culturally safe and leads with self-determination.
- Strengthen efforts in community led decision-making and service design to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.
- Improve family access to culturally safe early support to keep children safe and prevent escalation into crisis.
- Fund services to provide legal representation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.
- Advance data sovereignty for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

### NEXT STEPS DOMAIN: TRUST AND TRANSPARENCY

#### Actions:

- Establish a specific Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander birth advocacy service.

## Priority initiative 2: Sector development, workforce capability and training

**What we will do:** Build and sustain a strong child and family workforce and sector, including strong and supported kinship and foster carers.

### NEXT STEPS DOMAIN: TRAUMA RESPONSIVE AND RESTORATIVE PRACTICE

#### Actions:

- Invest in restorative and trauma responsive training for child and youth protection workers and community partners. practice is culturally safe and leads with self-determination.

### NEXT STEPS DOMAIN: PARTNERING WITH THE COMMUNITY

#### Actions:

- Build common assessment frameworks between Child and Youth Protection Services (CYPS) and non-government organisations to support referrals and information sharing.
- Improve information sharing, data development and analysis.
- Build case analysis expertise.
- Invest in leadership, management, supervision and practice support.
- Invest in contemporary training for CYPS staff, non-government organisations and kinship and foster carers.
- Training and professional development to build a professional, collegiate and supported workforce across the system.

## Priority initiative 3: Relationships and culture

**What we will do:** Establish a respectful relationship culture across government and non-government to ensure a joined-up system that enables joint decision-making, shared work, information sharing and collaboration.

### NEXT STEPS DOMAIN: TRAUMA RESPONSIVE AND RESTORATIVE PRACTICE

#### Actions:

- Reconsider how government and non-government services work together to facilitate shared accountability and responsibility.

### NEXT STEPS DOMAIN: PARTNERING WITH THE COMMUNITY

#### Actions:

- Establish a Ministerial Council involving community partners to elevate the voices of people with lived experience.
- Focus on integrated service delivery and partnered decision-making.
- Create a more collaborative approach to system governance to enable government and service providers to work together more effectively.
- Clearly articulate the roles and responsibilities between government and non-government services to facilitate shared accountability of outcomes.



## Priority initiative 4: Reform enablers

**What we will do:** Provide the foundational work needed to underpin and support the implementation and success of Next Steps' reforms.

### NEXT STEPS DOMAIN: TRUST AND TRANSPARENCY

**Actions:**

- Align the Children and Young People Act 2008 to contemporary practice and support better information sharing.
- Develop Charter for Parents and Families involved with ACT child protection services.
- Develop a new Charter for Carers.
- Review the role of the children's legal representative and clarify role expectations.

### NEXT STEPS DOMAIN: STRENGTHENING FAMILIES

**Actions:**

- Strengthen connections between children and family services and other sectors to deliver more integrated support to families.
- Strengthen connections between child protection and early education services to better support families at risk of statutory involvement.
- Increase and improve family finding.
- Revise mandatory reporting approaches within health and education agencies.
- Expand options to address repeated concern reports that do not meet the statutory threshold.

### NEXT STEPS DOMAIN: PARTNERING WITH THE COMMUNITY

**Actions:**

- Ensure all child and family services operate as Child Safe Organisations.
- Deliver new funding models that enable flexibility to meet the individual needs of children and young people.
- Implement shared and linked performance management, evaluation and outcomes frameworks to identify areas of system success and deficiency.
- Strengthen contract management approaches.

## Priority initiative 5: Service reform and establishment

**What we will do:** Improve service quality and help people have more say over the services they use and who provides them, through better engagement, ways of working and governance arrangements.

### NEXT STEPS DOMAIN: TRUST AND TRANSPARENCY

**Actions:**

- Establish best practice external decision review processes.
- Embed restorative practices as the expected way of working in CYPS.
- Work with young people to review the language used across the child and youth protection system.
- Engage and consult with children and young people in ways that enhance and benefit their care experience.
- Fund services to provide support and advocacy for parents with a disability.
- Change the form of service/support for carers.

### NEXT STEPS DOMAIN: TRAUMA RESPONSIVE AND RESTORATIVE PRACTICE

**Actions:**

- Implement a new external decision review process.
- Establish an intensive trauma recovery service for adolescents and young adults.
- Develop a trauma recovery response for young people aged 13+ years.
- Improve internal review and complaints handling mechanisms with a focus on restorative principles.
- Improve Life Story work using restorative and trauma informed practice principles to support children and young people.
- Build on the ACT Therapeutic Children's Court.

### NEXT STEPS DOMAIN: CONTINUUM OF SUPPORT

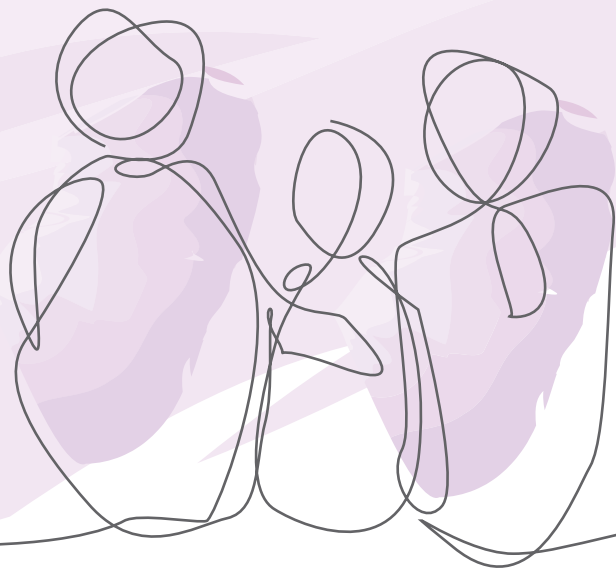
**Actions:**

- Undertake a review of supports for carers to identify gaps.
- Establish a multidisciplinary intensive case management service for young people who put themselves and others at risk.
- Strengthen therapeutic residential care and models of support for young people with significant trauma behaviours.
- Extend the provision of care to any young person seeking this until 21 years of age.
- Further extend care for young people post 18 years.
- Commission evidence-based models of care, including therapeutic residential care.
- Ensure children and young people have access to multiple mechanisms to support their engagement with decision-making.
- Streamline carer approval processes.
- Enable young people to lead their transition planning.
- Provide greater support for life transitions within and from care.
- Strengthen family connection opportunities, including for siblings.

### NEXT STEPS DOMAIN: STRENGTHENING FAMILIES

**Actions:**

- Establish a wellbeing focused reporting process that improves early referral and access for families to natural and community-based supports.
- Increase access to prenatal and early parenting support for parents at risk of engagement with child protection.
- Ensure commissioning for the Child, Youth and Family Services Program supports better outcomes for families at risk.
- Provide more intensive family support, preservation and restoration support models, including for families with children over 12 years of age.
- Provide greater case management in family preservation.
- Deliver more evidence-based parenting programs through the Child and Family Centres for families at risk of engagement with statutory services.
- Embed family-led decision-making, including family group conferencing for all families where desired and appropriate.
- Increase access to therapeutic intervention and support for young children at risk of coming into care or are in care and may experience developmental delay.



# Implementation

The Children, Youth and Families Division within the ACT's Community Services Directorate has responsibility for managing implementation of Action Plan 1. This includes coordination within the Directorate and across government and the sector.

The Ministerial Council for Child and Family Reform will conduct the ongoing monitoring of progress against Action Plan 1's deliverables.

# What's next?

To support Next Steps and Action Plan 1, a priority is to develop an outcomes-focused evaluation strategy and framework, along with associated monitoring, reporting and governance. These will be developed in partnership between government and community partners and include how children, young people and families can tell us how we are going.

Establishing robust end-to-end governance arrangements is also a priority. These will focus on strategic partnerships with shared ownership for the decisions impacting on the care of children, young people and families and the delivery of Next Steps outcomes.

# Find out more

You can read the full Action Plan 1 on the ACT Government Community Services Directorate's website:

- Search: Next Steps for Our Kids Action Plan 1

