The Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare's

Updated Organisational Forward Plan 2024 to 2026



Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare

Acknowledgement of Country

The Centre would like to acknowledge and pay respect to the past, present, and emerging traditional custodians and Elders of this country on which we work. The Centre also acknowledges the injustices and trauma suffered as a result of European settlement, the Stolen Generations, and other policies such as the forced removal of children from their families, communities, culture and land. We respect the resilience of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in the face of this trauma and respect their right to, and aspiration for, self-determination and empowerment.

We acknowledge and pay respect to the Victorian and Tasmanian Aboriginal people as the traditional and original owners, and continuing custodians of this land on which we work.

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

The Centre
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CEO Foreword

On behalf of the Board and Staff of the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, I am pleased to share with you our Updated Organisational Forward Plan 2024 – 2026.

This updated plan outlines a refreshed pathway forward for the Centre over the next eighteen months, reflecting the evolving needs of our member organisations and a rapidly changing external environment. It also acknowledges that the Tasmanian child and family services sector has now welcomed the Centre as their peak body.

At the heart of this plan are children and families affected by inequality, along with our member organisations dedicated to supporting them. Our member organisations provide innovative and evidence-based support to children and families of all kinds who are striving to enact positive change in their lives. They have demonstrated an unwavering commitment to delivering life-changing services as the needs of children and families have become more complex. The Centre is privileged to stand alongside our growing number of member organisations. Now that the Centre is on the ground in Tasmania from April 2024, we see even more opportunities to work together as a membership for the benefit of Victorian and Tasmanian children, young people, and families.

We take pride in the progress of the children and families reform agenda, along with the transformative changes that have been implemented since the release of our last strategic plan two years ago. Following years of advocacy from the Centre and our members, the Victorian Government announced that therapeutic supports would be made available to all children and young people in residential care. Victoria now leads in prioritising children with a dedicated Ministerial portfolio, adopting a child-first lens in policy development, and demonstrating a serious commitment to ensuring children are protected and nurtured. The Victorian child and family services sector is keeping families safely together through innovative approaches like the Family Preservation and Reunification response and early help pathways. Our members have been delivering evidence-based service models with great impact across the entire continuum of family services and will continue to do so. With the release of the new strategic framework for family services from the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, which focuses on outcomes-driven and evidence-based models, we are well-positioned to continue leading the way. After concerted sector advocacy, we are also witnessing progress toward raising the age of criminal responsibility, aligning the state with international norms, evidence on child development, and human rights standards.

We also acknowledge that there is still work to be done. Children and families are grappling with spiralling cost-of-living pressures, a lack of affordable housing options, and the implications of climate change. We're contending with a shortage of foster carers and the harrowing findings of the Australian Child Maltreatment Study. We're also navigating the uncertainty and excitement of AI and digital technologies, raising questions about how they'll shape services for children and families in the future.

In March 2024, the Centre's Board reviewed our strategic priorities and identified the key actions needed to achieve them. Our Board has made the strategic decision to concentrate our efforts over the next eighteen months where we know we will have the greatest impact. Three key activities were outlined to drive our progress throughout the plan. We eagerly anticipate our broader Strategic Plan Redesign process, commencing in 2025, to develop an updated Vision, Purpose, and Strategic Plan informed by our Board, our members across Tasmania and Victoria, and the views and aspirations of the children, young people, carers, and families our sector serves.

The Centre exists because of its member organisations, and it is a privilege to work alongside them, as well as in partnership with government, cross-sectoral collaborators, and the broader community. The Centre's updated Organisational Forward Plan 2024-2026 outlines the steps towards achieving our vision. We look to the next eighteen months with re-ignited enthusiasm and readiness to implement this collective vision from the child and family services sector for a better future for children and families in Victoria and Tasmania.



Deb Tsorbaris
Chief Executive Officer
Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare



Vision, Purpose, aligned to existing Forward Plan

Our Vision

Children, young people and families are safe, happy and connected, with access to support when they need it.

Our purpose

Policy and Ideas

To develop, influence and advocate for public policies that advance the rights and wellbeing of children, young people and families. We work with our sector to address the social, economic and cultural barriers to improving their lives.

Research and Practice

To lead and share research to support innovation and evidence-informed practice.

Capacity Building

To further strengthen the capacity of organisations to provide services that best suit the needs of vulnerable families and children.

Our commitment to self-determination

The Centre supports the right of First Nations peoples to self-determine and recognises that self-determination leads to better outcomes for First Nations children and families. We acknowledge the strength and diversity of First Nations children, families, and the leadership of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations in our sector.

Updated Strategic Priorities

The Centre has made significant progress in implementing the actions outlined in our previous Organisational Forward Plan 2022-2026. However, we acknowledge that there's still work to be done to fully achieve our aims. We're committed to continuing to pursue the actions aligned with our strategic priorities, whilst taking into account some significant changes in the external environment.

In light of the changing sector landscape and the Centre being welcomed as the peak body for child and family services in Tasmania, the Centre's Board has decided to update our Organisational Forward Plan 2022-2026. This update will ensure our strategic priorities align with the Centre's vision and the needs of our members.

With the Centre's recent expansion into Tasmania and the changing sector landscape, the Centre's Board decided to update our Organisational Forward Plan 2022-2026 to ensure our strategic priorities align with the Centre's vision and the needs of our members.

In March 2024, our Board reviewed our focus areas and key actions for 2024-2026 to support our strategic priorities. As a result, we have refined our priorities, actions, and outlined three key activities to drive progress over the next eighteen months.

Our refreshed strategic priorities build on our existing priorities, and will shape our work over the 2024 – 2026 period:

1. Empowering children, young people, carers and families across the jurisdictions in which we operate
2. Enabling collaboration within and across systems, sectors and workforces to achieve the best outcomes for children, young people and families
3. Promoting and embedding lived experience and the voices and rights of children, young people, carers, and families
4. Supporting the sector in drawing on evidence, knowledge and insights to enable innovation in practice and policy
5. Continuing our role as a responsive, proactive and transformative peak for the child and family sector

The Centre's board have identified three key focal activities which will shape our work to enable us to achieve these strategic priorities over this period.

Our Focal Activities

1: Supporting the design of a contemporary foster care system

(Strategic Priorities 1, 2, 3, 4, & 5)

We are observing a decline in available foster carers, not only in Victoria but globally. The evidence indicates that several factors are contributing to this trend, including increasing cost-of-living pressures, shifting dynamics within families, and the enduring financial strain of providing care.

The Centre will work together with our members, children and young people in care, carers, and government to reimagine a home-based care system that reflects changes in our communities and families and acknowledges the incredible work of carers. This system must be flexible and able to adjust to changes in the external environment to guarantee the sustainability of home-based care options for children and young people whenever they are required.

2: Driving a response to the Australian Childhood Maltreatment Study

(Strategic Priorities 2, 4 & 5)

The Australian Childhood Maltreatment Study (ACMS) released in 2023 highlighted the unacceptably high prevalence of childhood abuse and neglect across Australia. The study's call to action speaks to opportunities for more holistic and integrated early prevention and intervention activities across sectors.

As a leader in the child and family sector, the Centre is well positioned to drive integration and investment in early intervention across the service continuum. The Centre is also committed to tailoring its existing work so that our work activities address the ACMS findings.

3: Providing meaningful support to the Tasmanian child and family services sector as the peak body for children and families in Tasmania

(Strategic Priorities 1, 4 & 5)

The merger between Families and Children Tasmania and the Centre, effective April 2024, presents an opportunity to create broader and lasting change for children, young people, and their families. The Centre and its team feel privileged to extend their expertise and support to children, young people, families, and our member organisations working with them in Tasmania.

The Centre's entry into Tasmania comes at a moment of system transformation with the Tasmanian government's commitment to implementing all recommendations outlined by the Commission of Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government's responses to child sexual abuse in institutional settings.

During this time of change, the Centre will strive to provide meaningful support to our Tasmanian member organisations so they can continue to deliver and expand their life-changing services for children and families.

Our Strategic Priorities and Actions

Strategic Priority: Empowering children, young people, carers and families across the jurisdictions in which we operate.

We will advocate for change – on the macro and micro level – to improve the accessibility, effectiveness, and sustainability of the system for Victoria and Tasmania's vulnerable children, young people, carers, and families.

Our actions:

- Develop and advocate for a compelling position for family services, as a platform for children and families.
- Collaborate with the child and family services sector, sector partners, and academia to influence child protection system change.
- Advocate on behalf of the child and family services sector for improved funding and financial sustainability.
- Identify opportunities to build awareness of regulatory impacts on the child and family services sector.

Strategic Priority: Enabling collaboration within and across systems, sectors, and workforces to achieve the best outcomes for children, young people and families.

We will build trusted networks, relationships, and partnerships within and across sectors and workforces, to share expertise, knowledge and resources, and strengthen collective impact. This includes engaging in meaningful dialogue with government, non-government, ACCO, academic, lived experience representative groups and other key stakeholders.

Our actions:

- Advocate for a continued focus on sector-wide workforce attraction and retention to build the pipeline of workers at all levels in the child and family services sector.
- Support networks and communities of practice within and across sector agencies.
- Facilitate meaningful professional development opportunities for child and family services sector leadership.
- Develop new ways of harnessing the collective data and information resources of the child and family services sector and partner sectors, to improve system intelligence.
- Continue to walk alongside Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and support self-determination.
- Identify cross-sectoral groups and campaigns to partner with where we see a growing need for collaboration.

Strategic Priority: Promoting and embedding lived experience and the voices and rights of children, young people, carers, and families.

We will create new and stronger mechanisms to listen to and amplify the voices of children, young people, carers and families and heighten their influence on the sector, the service system and our stakeholders.

Our actions:

- Work with our members to support the integration of the lived experience voice of children and families.
- Provide training and mentorship to empower lived experience experts to share their experiences, contribute to policy development, and participate in decision-making processes.
- Increase opportunities for children, young people, families, and carers to influence, policy and services.
- Position the Centre and its membership as a key influencer in listening, elevating, and embedding the voice of people with lived experience.

Strategic Priority: Supporting the sector in drawing on evidence, knowledge, and insights to enable innovation in practice, and policy.

We will share data, evidence and knowledge and position the sector as a leader in understanding thriving children, young people, and families.

Our actions:

- Undertake evidence reviews on critical issues for the sector.
- Use sector networks to improve the sharing, use, and communication of insights from analysis of data collected in agency systems.
- Continue to build the Centre's position as a leading expert on thriving children, young people, and families.
- Translate and share knowledge in ways that are accessible to the workforce, children, and families.
- Support the child and family services sector to implement and expand the use of evidence-based programs and models.

Strategic Priority: Continuing our role as a responsive, proactive and transformative peak for the child and family sector.

We will continue to build and sustain our capability and expand our capacity to lead, influence, connect and build capacity within the child and family services sector and across connected systems.

Our actions:

- Continue to raise the profile of the Centre with government, philanthropy and lived experience experts as a reliable, trusted, and influential peak body.Identify opportunities to extend knowledge and evidence capability development across the sector and beyond Victoria and Tasmania.
- Mobilise individuals and communities to play an active role in supporting children, young people, carers, and families.



Our Next Steps

- The Centre will continue to progress the three focal activities under our strategic priorities, as well as the existing and updated actions from the Organisational Forward Plan 2022-2026.
- The Centre's broader Strategic Plan Redesign process will commence in 2025 to develop an updated Vision, Purpose and Strategic Plan informed by our Board, our members across Tasmania and Victoria, and the views and aspirations of the children, young people and families they work with.
- The Centre's Board will monitor the implementation of this Organisational Forward Plan 2024-2026 to assess our progress, impact, and any adaptations required to our focus and approach.