

Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare

Report

Sharing Social Responsibility – a position statement in response to the Victorian agenda for vulnerable children and their families

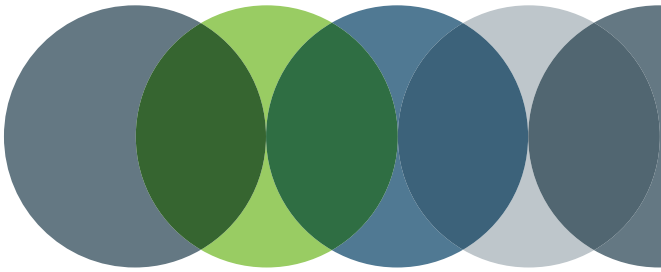
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100 Years
1912–2012

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Executive summary

The Centre's key priorities in responding to the Victorian Governments reform agenda

The Board of the Centre has identified eight key priority areas for action. These have been developed over two strategic planning days, and included consultation with key stakeholders.

These eight key priority areas will guide the Centre's actions during the coming years on behalf of the membership. They are:

1. The co-construction, implementation and accountability mechanisms of the *Victoria's Vulnerable Children – Our Shared Responsibility Strategy*
2. Introducing monitoring approaches to the inter-agency development and accountability for addressing need
3. Aboriginal children and the supported progression towards self-determination by Aboriginal communities
4. Local area based service integration, network development, governance, planning and funding
5. Strengthening community service organisations through their capability, capacity, governance, regulatory requirements and impacts
6. Court and legal reform, its impact on children, young people and their families
7. Co-construction of transparent evidence based systems to improve outcomes and facilitate improvement
8. A systems approach to workforce development, which recognises the interdependencies of the sectors of the workforce.

The Centre acknowledges that these priority areas will require time for development and implementation.

In developing new shared responsibilities and ways of doing business the Centre has identified the following principles as fundamental to systemic and lasting change. They are:

- Outcomes for vulnerable children and young people are the fundamental focus.
- Strength and capability across sectors and organisations is necessary to ensure the whole of community strategy is a dynamic source of change.
- CSOs are individual entities which will lead to varying layered sector response
- Transitions associated with systemic change are best negotiated with clear intent, engagement of the parties involved, clarity of steps and discussion of desired outcomes (ideally transitions are stepped changes, but this should not be the basis for delay in responding to current and urgent needs).

The Centre acknowledges that the recommendations of the PVVC report and development of *Victoria's Vulnerable Children – Our Shared Responsibility Strategy* are made at a time of significant budgetary constraint. However, improved funding of existing programmes, services and continued investment in new programmes must be the highest priority if outcomes for children and their families are to improve.

The Centre recommends:

- An immediate increase in funding for client services in out-of-home care, family services, and child protection, to bring Victoria into line with the Australian average per capita funding. (Victoria has had the lowest per capita funding of any state for each of the past five years.)
- A transition to full cost funding, established by the Essential Services Commission be made over the forward estimate cycle.
- Preferential allocations to Aboriginal services as recommended in the PVVC report. Allocations should be at least proportional to representation of Aboriginal children and young people in the services system. Dual funding for transitions of responsibility for care for Aboriginal children and young people should be considered. Precedents can be found within Victoria for dual funding arrangements to underpin system change.

About the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare (the Centre)

The Centre and its members share social responsibility with government and the broader community for addressing disadvantage and eliminating vulnerability in Victoria. Established in 1912, as the state peak body for child and family welfare we provide independent analysis,

dialogue and cross-sectoral engagement to break down multi-causal factors that perpetuate vulnerability. With our members, our role is to build capacity through research, evidence and innovation to influence change.

Reflecting our purpose the strategic priorities for the Centre across 2012-2015 are to:

- influence through engagement
- build evidence and innovation
- strengthen capacity through analysis.

The Centre is an incorporated association, guided by a Board of 12 directors. The Board is comprised of individuals drawn from our 90 member organisations, together with our chief executive officer and an expert academic member.

Overview response

This position statement considers a decade of change in Victoria in approaches to supporting and protecting vulnerable children and assisting their families. Changes included:

- New legislation (Children, Youth & Families Act 2005), which gave a legal basis for considering paramount the best interest of children; acknowledging cumulative harm and the need for stability in young lives; and providing a legal basis for sharing information when child wellbeing is at risk.
- Significant funding boosts to create an integrated family services system, with Child FIRST as an area-based central entry point.
- High levels of collaboration between statutory and non-government agencies.
- Successive reports from the Ombudsman highlighting serious service system deficiencies followed by subsequent government responses to address these issues.
- The Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry (Cummins) report, 2012, which has provided a long term overview and vision to guide future system changes.
- The May 2012 Victorian State Budget which included a Directions Paper *Victoria's Vulnerable Children: our shared responsibility* setting out the Government's initial response to the Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry report.

The Victorian context in 2012

The nature and incidence of child and family vulnerability in Victoria is becoming more challenging. Key features of vulnerability are:

- Locational patterns of disadvantage and vulnerability associated with high child protection reports (Vinson, 2007).
- Referrals to family support services have increased and the needs of families are more complex leading to demand pressures (PVVC 2012, 172).
- Child Protection reports have increased by 49% between 2000 and 2011 with dramatic increases coinciding with reviews and media coverage.
- Numbers of reports are increasing but substantiations of those reports and admission to care and protection orders are relatively steady (PVVC: xxxvi).
- Increasing numbers of children and young people are in out-of-home care: children are generally staying longer in care and experiencing more placements (PVVC 2012, 243).
- Increasing numbers of Aboriginal children are entering out-of-home care (PVVC 2012, 81).
- The care provided to children and young people when they cannot live at home is changing; foster care options are declining and increasingly kin and kith are providing care (PVVC 2012, 246) (Appendix 1).

The Report of the Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry (the Cummins report)

The PVVC report has brought conceptual clarity to the purpose, structure and processes of support for vulnerable children and families in Victoria. This is a significant achievement of the Inquiry panel, and confirms the decision of the Government to initiate the Inquiry. Community understanding of the impact of vulnerability is critical if essential resources are to be made available to meet the basic needs of children, young people and their families.

The Inquiry Report addressed several key themes which are likely to inform the long term *Victoria's Vulnerable Children – Our Shared Responsibility strategy* to be released in 2013.

A whole-of-government approach

The report placed a systems approach at the centre of its response. The approach recognises that there is not one single entity responsible for responding to vulnerable children, young people and their families but that responsibility is shared across government departments and indeed across government, non-government and possibly the for-profit sector. The whole of Government approach requires whole-of-government objectives and attention to the governance of cross departmental action – a suitable authorising environment.

Recognition of a service continuum with a focus on the early years as the primary target group for early intervention

An early intervention approach keeps families intact and avoids costly, more intrusive options when a child or young person is harmed. The various components of services and supports are seen as interacting to 'wrap around' the child, young person and their family.

Local area based service networks which recognise that vulnerability has a locational element

The report identifies that it is at the local area that service integration through collaboration is best achieved. Integration of primary, universal services and the child and family support services and the 'wrap around' approach is possible when services are planned and delivered at the local level. The report envisaged that the Child FIRST and Integrated Family Services networks might be the appropriate platform for expanded networks. Participation in the governance of local area networks is resource intensive and requires consultation and co-production with service users and service providers on how this may best be achieved. There are additional needs in rural and regional areas to ensure adequate service coverage - especially prioritising areas of high vulnerability.

Greater accountability for quality of service and outcomes

Registration processes are already required for funded community services organisations seeking to provide services for vulnerable children and their families. The report envisages a wider ranging accountability encompassing inspections, public reports on quality, audits and service reviews. The regulatory review role of the Commission for Children and Young People is strengthened – an approach which the Centre supports, while at the same time emphasising the importance of maintaining a strong child and young person advocacy role.

Community sector capacity and the capacity of the community sector organisations

The organisations which make up the community services sector received significant attention in the report—the sector is acknowledged as being an essential part of the service system but is expected to perform better and should be funded better to do so. The report commented on the number of funded CSOs and their viability, especially as they are required to meet higher standards of care. Organisations will be required to address their capability in governance and service quality and be able to demonstrate evidence of impact of programmes and interventions. Most community service organisations have begun programmes of improvement in these areas but there will be a need for cross sector collaboration to achieve these goals. This is particularly the case in the context of the yet to be released Vertigan Report on State Government Finances and a subsequent review of government service provision which may see new approaches to Government contracting for community services (State Government of Victoria, 2012).

Reform of various aspects of the legal system

Reforms aimed at bringing the processes of decision making closer to the child, young person and the family were proposed in the Report. Mandatory Child Safety Conferences, increased family decision making processes and decentralisation of the Family Division of the Children's Court is proposed. The extension of mandatory reporting by professionals is recommended in the report. The Centre expresses great caution about the extension of mandatory reporting given the current inability of the system in responding to the volume of reports. The Government has already moved to introduce amendments relating to serious sexual offending and has charged the Family and Community Development Committee of Parliament to undertake a review of the processes by which religious and other organisations respond to the criminal abuse of children within their organisations.

The critical needs of Aboriginal children and young people and their families

The report recognised the impact on families and community of the disproportionate number of Aboriginal children in care. The report names self-determination as the critical pathway to addressing this issue. The approach requires more resourcing for Aboriginal services and greater cooperation and support from the service system generally. Considerable emphasis was given to the issue of cultural competency in services. These are challenges for Aboriginal services and the community service sector generally. These efforts will be aided by the proposed Aboriginal Children's Commissioner to be part of the redeveloped Commission for Children and Young People.

The Directions Paper Victoria's Vulnerable Children: Our Shared Responsibility

1. Themes of the PVVC report were taken up by the Government in a Directions Paper released during the Victorian State Budget 2012–2013. This set out the Government's initial response to the PVVC Inquiry Report. The Government emphasised a shared social responsibility approach and identified five key action areas arising out of the PVVC report. These are:
2. Building effective and connected services
3. Enhancing education and building capacity
4. Making a child-friendly legal system
5. Providing safe, stable and supportive out-of-home care
6. Introducing accountability and transparency (Government of Victoria: 2012: 4)

These action areas align closely with the Centre's key priority areas set out below. The action areas will also frame the Government's Vulnerable Children and Families Strategy to be released in 2013.

The Government made immediate commitments. These commitments included:

- allocation of new resources to high priority areas, including out of home care and extending Child FIRST
- Aboriginal service strengthening in the three key areas identified by the Panel – guardianship, cultural connection and out of home care services
- immediate removal of the requirement for children to attend the Children's Court
- support for play groups in areas of high need
- health assessments for every child coming into care, and immediate service where health needs are identified
- education engagement plans for every child and young person coming into care

The Directions Paper emphasised the need for unified intake assessment and case management processes to ensure children, young people and families are able to locate necessary support. The DHS Services Connect model will inform approaches to child and family services provision as an example. This model is predicated on a 'no wrong door' entry to service, standardised intake and assessment frameworks, unified case records and the networking of local area services.

The Directions Paper identified a "prescriptive, siloed and overly bureaucratic "community services sector and referred to shortcomings in the capacity and structures of some community service organisations. The capacity question raised by the PVVC report was taken up by the Government in its Directions paper and referred to deficits in skills, knowledge and governance in community service organisations. The Directions paper stated that the community sector needed to examine how it operated and foreshadowed community sector reform across government funded services. The approach parallels systems redevelopment underway in education, health, mental health and alcohol and drug services (incorporating both government and CSOs) (Government of Victoria: 2012, 8, 12). While such an approach recognises that vulnerability of children, young people and their families is both multi-faceted and multi-causal, the Centre believes that the next critical step is to link these various systems redevelopment processes through the *Victoria's Vulnerable Children – Our Shared Responsibility Strategy* (the *Strategy*).

The Directions paper has also been significant in emphasising a concept of shared responsibility. The Centre's endorsement of this concept is based on a belief that a true shared social responsibility has great potential for underpinning a systems-wide approach to vulnerability through recognition of the unique contribution and capabilities of the people and organisations surrounding the child (CFECFW: 2011, 7). In developing a shared social responsibility approach, we

believe that we must also ensure the obligation to act must be equal to the capacity to do so. Capacity which reflects resourcing, power and position: powers that confirm the State's special obligations impacting on the personal freedoms of vulnerable people, and the position of CSOs in their role as civic contributors with the greater capacity for engaging people in their communities, ensuring that they are linked to the range of services and supports, and driving community informed responses. The Centre acknowledges Government's commitment to a strategy to address Victoria's vulnerable children and families, including $61 million in funding (over four years) to respond to the findings of the PVVC Inquiry on its initial release and the 2012-2013 Victorian State Budget allocation of $336 million (over four years) for vulnerable children and their families.

Acknowledging the long term ambitions of the PVVC report, the Centre's submission for the 2013-2014 Victorian State Budget will set out urgent priorities while the longer term strategy is being rolled out.

The process of developing the Centre's statement

Development of this position statement began through intensive consultation undertaken during the Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children (PVVC) process, and preparation of the Centre's submission, *"Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry 2011... It's their outcomes that matter"*. Following the release of the PVVC report, the Centre provided an initial response, and welcomed the Government's commitment to the development of a state-wide strategy for vulnerable children and their families. In addition, the Centre conducted a high-level forum for our organisational members to discuss the implications of the PVVC report. Over 150 people attended the forum, which was followed-up by a web-based questionnaire to canvass key issues. Consultations were also held with 12 peak bodies and a range of key organisations within the vulnerable children and family system, whose work impacts on that of our members. The organisations consulted included the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency, early childhood and youth organisations, and legal bodies including Legal Aid and the Law Institute. Consultations have also been held with the Centre's sector support groups and individual member organisations.

Our eight priorities



Priority One: The development of the *Victoria's Vulnerable Children – Our Shared Responsibility Strategy*

> *We are seeking that the Government of Victoria commit to the development of a Vulnerable Children, Young Peron's and Families Strategy to be led by the Department of Premier and Cabinet and developed by a committee comprising multi-party political membership, all government agencies and community sector representatives. The committee could be chaired by an independent expert academic.*
>
> *Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry 2011… it's their outcomes that matter* (CFECFW: 2011, 17–18)

The Centre is delighted to see that Government has committed to development of the *Victoria's Vulnerable Children – Our Shared Responsibility Strategy*, including the four essential components identified by the PVVC Panel: These are the need to:"

- identify a definition of vulnerable children and young people
- identify whole-of–government objectives, including specific roles and responsibility for departments, both individually and collectively, in addressing vulnerability in children and young people
- develop a performance framework of the accountabilities, performance measures or indicators to be used by government to measure the efficiency and effectiveness of the strategy
- assure accountability structures that set appropriate oversight for monitoring the implementation of the Strategy by departments and agencies, including reporting on implementation to government and the public (2012:17)"

The Strategy is described as 'whole-of-government', but the Centre is advocating a 'whole-of-community' approach. The role of government is central to the creation and impact of the *Strategy*, but contrary to PVVC report recommendations, the capacities of community service organisations in planning and monitoring should not be confined to local and regional activities alone. The Centre believes that there is a critical role for the community sector in the planning and development of the Strategy.

The *Strategy* will require vertical and horizontal integration if the outcomes for vulnerable children and families are to improve:

- vertical – to integrate service networks at all levels of decision making
- horizontal – to involve multiple Ministerial and departmental responsibilities, and cross sectoral initiatives

The PVVC report recommended that the Victorian Children's Committee (VCC) be strengthened procedurally, and anticipated a role for the committee in advising Government of the policies to be included in the Strategy (PVVC: 2012, 497). The Centre agrees with this recommendation, but also believes that a stronger link should be forged between the VCC and Children's Services Coordination Board around the *Victoria's Vulnerable Children – Our Shared Responsibility Strategy*, with the entities working jointly and equally on an ongoing basis. This inclusion of community and sector representation at the highest levels of government would represent a departure from traditional ways of developing and implementing policy, and introduce a new method which sees both Government and sector collaborating on policy development.

Public administration precedent exists for joint strategic approaches to system change. The National Mental Health Strategy (in its various iterations) had a strong presence guiding components of the *Strategy*, both though input on development and policy, and sitting on subcommittees. The Centre is well placed to provide expert information during the processes of the *Strategy*, particularly relating to out-of-home care and the family support services sector.

The Centre supports:

1. development of the *Victoria's Vulnerable Children – Our Shared Responsibility Strategy*
2. a collaborative approach to development of the *Strategy*
3. a more active role for the Victorian Children's Committee in overseeing development of the *Strategy*.

The Centre will seek to:

1. work to ensure the voice of the CSO's are recognised as critical contributors in the creation of a robust system
2. develop a score card for monitoring implementation and outcomes of the *Strategy*
3. provide information about the development and impact of the *Strategy* through our sector network support groups

Priority Two: A new approach to inter-agency development and accountability for addressing need

> *Effective governance arrangements must address system governance and requires clarity of roles for each participant in the service system.*
>
> *Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry 2011… it's their outcomes that matter* (CFECFW: 2011, 25)

An understanding of the role shared responsibility plays in shaping the *Strategy* will be reflected in the degree of inter-agency development and accountabilities within the whole-of-government approach. The Directions Paper has set out a number of commitments to monitoring outcomes for vulnerable children and young people, but the Centre remains concerned as to how we will know whether the new governance arrangements will advance current arrangements beyond existing protocols.

Whole-of-government approaches have their own challenges. Performance measures for government agencies involved in the *Strategy* must build trust between the agencies involved and the community. The Directions Paper referred to a performance framework covering "all relevant Victorian government departments and services" however it is not clear which government body will have central authority for the development and maintenance of the *Strategy*.

Key bodies identified for shaping transparency in the Directions Paper are the Commission for Children and Young People (which would oversee and monitor the implementation of the *Strategy*), the Children's Services Coordination Board (which would assist Ministers in preparing the *Strategy*, oversee its implementation at the department level and produce biennial strategies to target responses to the needs of vulnerable children and young people), and the Victorian Children's Council which would provide regular advice (Government of Victoria 2012, 28). While coordination of these various responsibilities is important the Centre believes accountability requires a communications plan built around the *Strategy* to ensure that it is widely known and understood in the community. It is also important that these bodies report annually on their responsibilities in implementing the *Strategy*, in addition to the performance framework.

The Centre supports:

1. a shared social responsibility approach to development of the *Strategy*, and provision of services and supports for vulnerable children, young people and their families
2. development of a performance framework underpinning the whole of Government approach
3. annual reports from the various bodies responsible specifically reporting on the design and implementation of the *Strategy*

The Centre will seek to:

1. facilitate forums and dialogue among our members and cross sector organisations to establish collaborative approaches to engagement with government in the development of the *Strategy* and accountability frameworks

Priority three: Progression towards self-determination by Aboriginal communities for their children, young people and their families

> *Barriers to the involvement of Aboriginal people in decisions about themselves and their young people include inadequate resourcing as well as the necessary sector competencies about involving Aboriginal people in decision making.*
>
> *Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry 2011… it's their outcomes that matter* (CFECFW: 2011, 52)

The force of the PVVC report's call for urgency in improving outcomes for Aboriginal children, young people and their families provides a template for the whole of the vulnerable children and family system.

The PVVC report strongly favours self-determination in both responding to vulnerable children and families within Aboriginal communities, and improving their outcomes (PVVC: 2012, 273). Information brought to the PVVC report suggests that self-determination also strengthens the capabilities of the institutions, and reinforces processes within the service system itself. The Centre welcomes this approach having been a party to the joint CSO submission, which proposed a 10 year plan to support capacity development in Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs). The Centre recognises that this approach will require a considered strategy addressing transition and capability, and may require a redistribution of resources in the family support, child protection and out of home care area.

The Government (in its Directions Paper) has already made a number of significant statements around the needs of Aboriginal children and their families. It has committed to a five year plan for Aboriginal Children in out-of-home care, and provided for the appointment of an Aboriginal Children's Commissioner. Government has also announced that Aboriginal Family Decision Making will be expanded as a regular practice of Child Protection, and the capacity of Aboriginal permanent care programs will be increased. These initiatives should be welcomed.

A core component of the *Strategy* should be providing increased training opportunities to ACCOs to improve skills in Aboriginal child and family welfare. The Centre has significant experience in this area, and could support Aboriginal training organisations to develop local and tailored training programs and believes an in-service approach could run alongside programs to support Aboriginal people into post-secondary education.

Additional training opportunities for non-Aboriginal organisations would also address the Panel's observation that the current cultural competency requirements under the *Children Youth and Families Act 2005* – and current registration requirements for CSOs – have not been sufficient in bringing sustained changes in practice (PVVC: 2011, 295).

Following the Woodward Inquiry into Child Protection in New South Wales, a policy was developed by SNAIC and coordinated by the Association of Child Welfare Agencies (ACWA) to assist community service organisations collaborate in transferring services to ACOs (SNAIC: 2008). The Centre is in a strong position to take a leadership role in developing a similar approach in Victoria.

The Centre supports:

1. the commitment to self-determination by Aboriginal communities
2. the five year out-of-home care plan for Aboriginal children
3. the appointment of an Aboriginal Children's Commissioner

The Centre will seek to:

1. work with VACCA and other Aboriginal community controlled organisations to develop a protocol, which will set out principles of cooperation to assist with the transfer of responsibility for Aboriginal children to ACO's (as developed by SNAIC and coordinated by the Association of Child Welfare Agencies (ACWA) in New South Wales)
2. provide training and professional development in cultural competence
3. continue collaboration with Aboriginal training organisations to develop local and tailored training programs in regional areas
4. lead collection of evidence specifically focusing on whether the changes lead to improved outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people

Priority Four: The development of local area based service integration and network development encompassing network governance, planning and funding

> *This role may transition to include the allocation and management of funding and may need to be mandated in the future to ensure the resources of all government agencies are allocated transparently.*
>
> *Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry 2011… it's their outcomes that matter* (CFECFW: 2011, 30)

The PVVC Panel prioritised early intervention in addressing potentially harmful situations for vulnerable children and families. Child FIRST and associated family support services were examined closely in the PVVC report, particularly the performance of the associated networked arrangements as the point of entry for government funded provision of early intervention. While the PVVC report found that it was not possible to conclude that Child FIRST and family support services were meeting the objectives of the program redevelopment of 2006-2009, the report proposed building an integrated comprehensive service response on the Child FIRST platform. This area based approach was referred to as the Vulnerable Child and Family Networks. This proposal is consistent with the recommendation made by the Centre in its submission to the Inquiry, and was further explored in our 2012 monograph Their Outcomes: local governance and outcomes frameworks for vulnerable children, young people and their families. This monograph examined various governance models for local areas associated with government programming, both in Australia and overseas in the human services field.

While the Centre supports the Vulnerable Child and Family Networks as a concept, we seek to emphasise the need to clarify governance arrangements for all involved including nominated Lead Agencies, and adequate funding for all organisations in networked service arrangements. As part of the existing Child FIRST arrangements, the PVVC report critiqued the current inadequacy of uniform governance mechanisms and performance of networked service system arrangements – issues exacerbated through lack of resourcing. If not resourced, participation in networked arrangements takes organisational resources away from direct service provision or quality assurance. The Centre believes these are crucial elements for consideration in the development of broader local area networks, and also proposed to incorporate services from other sectors (such as mental health and drug and alcohol services).

The PVVC report identified the proposed governance structure of the Vulnerable Child and Family Networks to be overseen by Area Reference Committees and to include:

- overseeing the monitoring and planning of services
- coordination of services, and
- management of operational issues for the catchment (PVVC 2012:180)

These functions will require careful development. The Centre believes it is appropriate for the Department of Human Services and a lead agency to co-chair Area Reference Committees (PVVC: 2012, 180). However, it is unclear how these Area Reference Committees and their responsibilities will relate to the existing governance arrangements of Child FIRST and Family Services, or what the transition arrangements to a more uniform model will comprise.

It is clear that the Lead Agency – if it has responsibilities for enforcing performance of organisations in the networks – will be sub-contracting to the network organisations. Legal and administration resources will be required to support more formalised governance arrangements. Contractual arrangements will replace memorandums and moral suasion as means of ensuring participation in networked arrangements. This development has the potential of the Lead Agency becoming a significant contract manager, displacing the role of contract management from the Department of Human Services to CSOs. To ensure long term success, it is the view of the Centre that the role of the Lead Agency must be approached through the lens of community development to ensure the existing collaborative service provision continues. The Centre believes that this approach must be enshrined within the *Victoria's Vulnerable Children-Our Shared Responsibility Strategy* (the *Strategy*).

The PVVC report recommends one-off financial support to assist organisational and sector transition (PVVC: 2012, 440-441). This recommendation was taken up in

the Directions Paper, with an allocation of $3 million to work with peak groups and community organisations to ensure better management and more effective regulation. This resourcing is sufficient to enable one or two initiatives across the community service sector, but will not address the wider systems impacts of comprehensive reconfiguration of local area service networks.

The Centre, through its training and organisational support arm, is able to assist small providers plan for these changes. The Centre is able to develop and deliver both governance and management training for those organisations not readily able to develop their own initiatives in these areas. The Centre also recommends that the sector be resourced with independent legal and financial consultation, which can be shared across CSOs. This is one way Government can initiate a response to the recommendation for one-off support to assist organisational and sector transition. The Centre is well placed support CSOs transition to local and flexible responses, and the *Strategy* needs to make provision for these transitional supports.

The Centre supports:

1. further development of local area service networks for vulnerable children, young people and their families
2. strengthening of the Child FIRST governance arrangements
3. development of community sector participation strategies that are not confined by contracted service requirements alone

The Centre will seek to:

1. assist providers plan for sector changes
2. with government, provide state-wide training to ensure initial implementation and ongoing functioning is guided through consistent frameworks
3. Monitor development and make recommendations regarding governance in networked arrangements.

Priority Five: The community sector: capability, capacity and governance

> *Outsourcing of service provision has been a feature of Governments seeking to maximise efficiencies as well as seeking to capitalise on the communitarian characteristics of mutuality, reciprocity and voluntariness which are features of the community service organisations.*
>
> *Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry… it's their outcomes that matter* (CFECFW: 2011, 48)

The PVVC report recognised the important historical role of the community services sector in providing services for vulnerable children and young people. However, significant challenges for CSOs were identified in the report, and the response has implications for both government and the community sector.

The PVVC report described the relationship between government and the community sector as one of collaboration (PVVC: 2012, 441).

The Centre supports the concept of collaboration. Notions of partnership have underpinned expectations between government and the community sector for 20 years. While supported by formal partnership agreements, the reality and outcomes have disappointed both government and the community sector. While notions of partnership are based on mutuality of power and reciprocity of resources, a collaborative approach recognises the differences, independence and responsibilities of each sector, while allowing both to contribute to the work of responding to vulnerable children and their families.

Acknowledging it is not possible for government to provide all resources, planning, and engagement with the community to address the needs of vulnerable children and families, the Centre welcomes the Directions Paper's emphasis on a shared responsibility approach. On this basis, the Centre believes to successfully implement system change of the scale contemplated by the PVVC report and Directions Paper, involvement of the community sector in upstream planning activities is required. The Centre believes that there is a legitimate role for the community sector across all areas of policy development, planning, service provision, monitoring, evaluation and research.

Mistakenly, during periods of multi-service system development, CSOs are often viewed as single service providers, and not the multifaceted organisations they often are. The Centre believes this critical issue must be addressed in all next steps, and government must have clear priorities for the way it wishes to engage with the sector. The systems redevelopments proposed in the PVVC report will have an impact on many communities. Understanding and simplifying a complex service system should enhance engagement of community service organisations in local areas. Social capital and development comes from having local services, and is crucial to the building of local area responses and knowledge.

The capability of community service organisations is essential to social capital. The PVVC report made significant observations about the capacity of community service organisations:

> *The Inquiry considers that the structure and capacity of community service organisations needs to be strengthened if Victoria's approach to vulnerable children and families is to be improved and the broad strategic directions outlined in this Report are to be effectively implemented (PVVC: 2012, 430).*

> *The Inquiry considers, therefore, there is a strong case for government to take a more proactive role than it has to date, aimed at improving the overall structure and capacity of CSO's. A focus for these activities would be the governance, quality, financial viability and the number and capacities of these small service providers (PVVC: 2012, 442).*

The External Reviews of CSOs (undertaken by the Department of Human Services) observed that, "it is interesting to note that the size of the organisation did not seem to impact upon the performance of the CSO against the registration standards" (DHS: 2011, 44), so the Centre would caution against causal assumptions linking organisational size and capacity.

The Centre would therefore recommend further research and an intensive examination of existing data before

conclusions are drawn about the capability of small community service organisations to deliver services for vulnerable children and their families.

The PVVC report also argued that government should not fund large numbers of organisations for service delivery, stating:

> *A legitimate issue for consideration by government is whether the separate funding of a large number of organisations represents or will continue to represent the most effective structure of service provision for Victorian vulnerable children and families (PVVC: 2012, 438).*

The parameters on a decision to simplify funding should be developed in discussion with the community sector. The Centre is well placed to assist with the development support and consultation around these issues.

The Centre supports:

1. a collaborative relationship between Government and the sector
2. strategies to ensure ongoing contribution from CSOs to their local communities, particularly in rural and regional areas

The Centre will seek to:

1. develop an information, advice and skills development strategy for its members around governance of community service organisations. The strategy will focus on specific governance issues arising for organisations working with vulnerable children and their families, including risk management and preparation for registration under the One DHS standards. Activities will include a governance series, preparation of tools for management and workers, and the provision of roundtables for sharing knowledge and expertise built up in CSOs
2. develop and deliver sector identified governance and management training to support capacity and capability
3. seek resources to support capacity innovation, such as back-office operations, legal and financial supports
4. auspice opportunities for community and sector discussion on a range of funding and price setting mechanisms within child and family community services
5. support research into cost structures in child and family service delivery
6. engage with the other peaks – in accordance with the principles of reciprocity and diversity – in ensuring a cross sectoral project of genuine usefulness to child and family service organisations
7. develop a framework to monitor impact on the community sector through the redevelopment proposed in the *Strategy* and other sector redevelopment initiatives
8. continue working with Melbourne University and Professor Ian Williamson of the Melbourne Business School Social Impact Leadership Centre and Centre for Ethical Leadership in the development and funding of a sector Future Leaders program

Priority Six: Court and Legal Reform

> *The centralisation of the Court has reduced access to local area supports for children and families attending Court. The Children's Court Family Division should re-establish a metropolitan and regional presence.*
>
> *Family group conferencing should be mandated and appropriately resourced.*
>
> *Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry 2011… it's their outcomes that matter* (CFECFW: 2011, 29, 58)

The PVVC report identified three primary areas of the Children's Court operations requiring reform. These were:

- accessibility of the Court for children, young people and their families
- adversarialism and the court environment
- structural and statutory reforms (PVVC: 2012:371)

The Centre supports recommendations to ensure that processes serve the needs and interests of children and young people. Past attempts at court and legal reform have not produced significant changes to outcomes for children, young people and their families. It is imperative that changes are made to address concerns now. The Centre welcomes the care and analysis undertaken in making recommendations for the Children's Court and other legal reforms, particularly:

- the proposal to decentralise sittings of the Family Division of the Children's Court in the metropolitan area, and ensure that facilities meet the needs of children and their families (PVVC: 2012, 380)
- the trial 'docketing' of cases to enable continued oversight by the same judicial officer (PVVC: 2012, 384)
- the move to a Less Adversarial Trial model (PVVC: 2012, 384)
- specific education programmes around child development, child abuse, neglect trauma and child interviewing techniques (PVVC: 2012, 387)

The Centre is currently performing cross-disciplinary training for the Department of Justice and Department of Human Services around the understanding and application of the Best Interests of the Child. The demand for this training has been overwhelming from several different disciplines. The joint training develops mutual understanding, but also enhances understanding of the role and approach of the different disciplines. In 2012, 1,400 professionals will have received this multi-disciplinary cross sector training as a significant contribution to cross-sectoral engagement and the reduction of agency silos.

The various forms of group conference decision making – especially the strengthening of the family group conferencing model – are also considered necessary by the Centre, and will hopefully improve timeliness and appropriateness of decision making for children and their families.

Further, the Centre supports simplification of orders, but the downstream impacts for practice with children and families requires further consideration, and the Centre retains its significant concerns about the proposed extension of mandatory reporting (as noted in the PVVC report). The Centre fact sheet, *Mandatory Reporting*, outlines the drivers for mandatory reporting and the constraints on its effectiveness, and we propose that ongoing consideration be given to this issue (CFECFW, 2012, Fact Sheet).

The Centre supports:

1. the Court reforms announced by Government
2. simplification of orders in the Children's Court
3. amendments to the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 to clarify responsibilities and embed family conferencing and decision making
4. amendments to the statutory responsibilities of key sectors to ensure family-centred practice in adult service delivery

The Centre will seek to:

1. advocate for child and family service involvement in the design and implementation of the Court's new procedures and processes
2. seek to inform legislators of the potential impacts on both vulnerable children and families and child and family services of the revisions to the *Children Youth and Families Act 2005*

3. provide information, advice and consult with our members on the legislative changes
4. establish a working group on the *Voice of the Child* to develop initiatives aimed at improving sectoral practice
5. engage in the discussion around the extension of mandatory reporting at both state and federal level

Priority Seven: Evidence base and systems transparency

> *The community should have access to information that enables an understanding of the decisions taken by governments and the status and performance of services for vulnerable children and young people in Victoria.*
>
> *Community service organisations should have reliable, rich data on children and young people in their care.*
>
> *Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry 2011… it's their outcomes that matter* (CFECFW: 2011, 43)

The PVVC report placed evidence at the centre of policy and programs for vulnerable children and young people. The report identified poor data and data systems across government agencies and community service organisations, and highlighted the importance of a performance indicator framework in the *Strategy* to ensure accountability for outcomes (PVVC: 2012, 33-34, 106,108).

The PVVC report also identified an absence of evidence based programs – especially in the early intervention area – and lack of outcomes information across all programs, agencies and organisations.

The PVVC report stated that, "*Government has a responsibility to report to the public on how it is performing in relation to its role to protect and address the needs of vulnerable children. In particular, Government must report on how it is performing with regards to the outcomes of children taken into State care*" (PVVC: 2012: 118).

The Directions Paper identifies two ways in which data and information will inform its response to the PVVC report. These are:

- trends in population growth and service use data
- clinical and rigorous evaluation of government and funded services

The Directions Paper also identified data sets for expansion or development in the following areas:

- the out-of-home Care Education Commitment Partnering Agreement
- monitoring and reporting on the enrolment and educational attainment of children and young people in out-of-home care
- a four year longitudinal research study on the life outcomes of young people transitioning from state care
- a framework for government departments and services which examines performance in relation to out-of-home care and vulnerable Aboriginal children and their families
- future State of Victoria's Children reports will include data collections on the health and wellbeing of refugee and new arrivals
- the adaption of the IT system used for clients of statutory child protection to:
  - improve knowledge and data on child protection clients from different backgrounds
  - record and provide better information to assist case workers, and
  - improve aggregate information and monitoring of the outcomes these children and families achieve
- VCAMS (Victorian Child and Adolescent Monitoring System) will have a specialist data collection on recent migrant and refugee children and areas of severe disadvantage
- a commitment to the continuation of the Child and family Services Outcomes Survey (CAFSOS)

The Centre and its members have long supported the need for systems that produce clear and transparent data. The sector has contributed many hours in the development of CRISSP and the input of data, often across multiple systems. The concerns of the sector have been well highlighted, including the recent benchmarking analysis identifying 50% time fraction for some workers in data input. The experience across the sector has been varied, resulting in some organisations operating dual systems for purposes of data management and access. Data is critical for the sector and government, and it is important that child and family service organisations be involved in the development of future innovations initiated by government.

In the interim – where existing data systems do not provide capacity for reporting on outcomes – the Centre believes the responsible government agency should implement an audit approach until the categories

required for routine reporting can be established in existing or new data collections.

Further to issues of data collection, there is significant capacity and preparedness within community service organisations to pursue research and evidence, as demonstrated through the participation in the Sector Research Partnership facilitated by the Centre and led by Professor Cathy Humphreys. Fourteen organisations make up this partnership, which aims to build evidence in practice, theory and program development. At the July 2012 Research and Evidence Symposium, the work of this group will be further focused on the development of a sector led research agenda.

The Centre does not believe that the confusion and conflicts of interest which have arisen from incidental growth and development of the vulnerable child and family system have been fully addressed. The Centre recognises the importance of ensuring clarity in the regulatory system and necessity for fewer regulatory entities.

The PVVC report states that:

> *"The Department of Human Services should retain responsibility for regulating out-of-home care services and family services. This function should be independent and structurally separated from those parts of the department responsible for child protection and family services policy and funding of community service organisations. The director of the unit should report directly to the Secretary" (PVVC: 2012, 507)*

The recent restructure of the Department of Human Services has already moved to this model. However, the Centre does not view this measure as an effective mechanism for separating the regulatory role from the department's other critically important activities – including contracting of services.

The PVVC report has made other recommendations about the establishment of a Commission for Children and Young People – a concept that the Centre unreservedly supports. The Commission is the correct body to assume regulatory functions in the child, youth and family support system. We support the transition of regulatory functions to the Commission over an appropriate period of time, ensuring continuity in a process that would involve considerable change of management for all stakeholders.

The Panel also recommended increased use of targeted risk analysis and unannounced inspections of CSOs. These transparency and accountability proposals are consistent with those used in other sectors (PVVC: 2012, 506).

The implementation of these processes will be crucial to success. The development of indicators and processes for identifying organisations of risk should involve the community sector. The Centre is in a position to provide information on the review processes, which would both meet the intentions of the Panel in making this recommendation, and the interest of government. It is crucial that the inspection of organisations at risk is undertaken by an independent body. Unannounced visits – particularly to residential care units – can have unanticipated consequences for children and young people. It is important that those conducting visits have experience of the relevant service area (such as family support services or out of home care). Processes must be clear, publicly available, and subject to review to ensure consistency with the principles of administrative law.

A body of data must be built up to benchmark the performance of organisations in relevant service areas before commencing this process. This is where the work of Melbourne University, Professors Connelly & Humphreys and the visiting Associate Professor Aron Shlonsky (Chair in Child Welfare from the University of Toronto) can be supportive and should be encouraged. This work has the capacity to both identify common data sets from existing data pools and systems, and provide new levels of understanding of performance and impact.

The Centre supports:

1. the commitment of the Government to develop data and information around vulnerable children and young people
2. further separation of service provision and regulatory oversight in the public sector
3. development of an outcomes indicator framework for the *Strategy*

The Centre will seek to:

1. build capacity and preparedness within CSOs to develop evidence based approaches through our sector development and training programmes
2. continue our support of the Sector Research Partnership (led by Professor Cathy Humphries of Melbourne University)
3. conduct an annual research and evidence symposium to showcase knowledge building within the sector
4. Support the work of Melbourne University, Professors Connelly & Humphreys, and visiting Associate Professor Aron Shlonsky (Chair in Child Welfare at the University of Toronto) in facilitating relevant forums on data systems in family and community services (to identify common data sets and improved data interpretation).

Priority Eight: Workforce Development, which recognises the interdependence of the sectors supporting vulnerable children and young people

Development of a system wide workforce strategy should be undertaken as part of a Vulnerable Children, Young Persons' and Families Strategy

Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry 2011… It's their outcomes that matter (CFECFW: 2011, 56-58)

The PVVC report identified a need for more professional development to address issues with recruitment, retention and service quality across the system. The report estimated that the child and family service organisation workforce comprises of 7,000 and is approximately 50% larger than that of the child protection workforce (PVVC 2012, p. 411). The workforce supporting vulnerable children and families within the community services sector is much larger. With a strong commitment to learning and development, the Centre is cognisant of the critical role that training – both accredited and non-accredited – plays within the sector. Providing training to approximately 2000 people per annum and conducting numerous forums, quality circles and know-how sessions, we view professional development, training and knowledge sharing as critical to building a strong and robust sector.

With this in mind the Centre welcomes the PVVC report recommendation for the establishment of an industry training body (PVVC: 2012, 422). The Centre supports the need for a body to ensure that training is relevant, coordinate work undertaken by TAFEs and RTOs and focus on integrated departmental and community sector training initiatives. We further believe that it is essential that this approach should be encompassed within the *Victoria's Vulnerable Children – Our Shared Responsibility Strategy*.

The Centre also believes that the Community Sector Workforce Knowledge project has great potential to provide immediate direction for an industry training body. The Centre has been pleased to participate in the design of this project and support our child and family services members in their participation. Beyond this initial step is the need to develop an overarching workforce strategy, which includes results of the workforce survey, a detailed training needs analysis, and a strategy to coordinate existing training initiatives. These components must address the specific issues raised for country and regional community service providers. Development of such a strategy should be undertaken by a steering group of current service providers and stakeholders. An independent body could then be established with this knowledge to ensure that the benefits of the existing training approach can be integrated with the new entity.

We further believe that the residential care workforce warrants particular support. The 5 year plan for out-of-home care (announced in the Directions Paper) must pay particular attention to strategies to strengthen this workforce. The Residential Care Learning and Development Strategy (RCLDS) (recognised nationally as a unique training consortium, supported by eight CSO's, the department and convened by the Centre), has recently surveyed 100% of the residential care workforce. This provides a unique set of data relating to the qualifications and general workforce data of the sector. The Centre strongly believes the RCLDS training model (which operates on a pooled funding model allowing for tailored responses to training needs) could effectively operate across the broader sector and deserves further exploration.

The Centre is also particularly concerned about the training needs of carers. Training is an integral component of the publicity, recruitment and assessment of carers. There is a risk under the PVVC report recommendation that training of foster carers may be disengaged from foster care providers. The relationship between carers and foster care providers is built through the training process, and is the basis on which good cooperation and trust is built. The Centre recognises that providing continuous training opportunities across the State is a challenge, and that there is a need for central coordination of this training.

The Centre's 2011-2012 State Budget Bid identified immediate strategies which should be adopted to address workforce issues. These included:

1. development of funded recruitment strategies for country and regional positions (including relocation packages and student placement support) as a vital part of the sector workforce strategy

2. initial funding for a scoping project to lay foundations for a child and family services sector-wide Learning and Development Strategy

The impact of the move to pay equity and modern award will be clear once the implementation process is complete. It is impossible to develop long term strategic responses to workforce without these two significant drivers of the workforce structure being finalised.

The Centre supports:

1. the progressive implementation of a sector wide training and development approach, including establishment of an industry training body

The Centre will seek to:

1. support creation of the five year plan for out-of-home care, particularly in the areas of workforce development and training
2. work with sector planning and working groups and the independent training authority (when established) to address the skills gaps in the sector
3. utilise knowledge (acquired through managing the Foster Care Communication and Recruitment Strategy) to develop a strategic approach to training carers
4. develop a proposal for working with the independent training body that will coordinate learning needs analysis and provide professional development (both accredited and skills based that would address the skills gaps in the sector)
5. seek initial funding for a scoping project to lay the groundwork for a child and family services sector-wide Learning and Development Strategy

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Appendix 1

Figure 1: Index of disadvantage including child protection reports (Vinson 2007

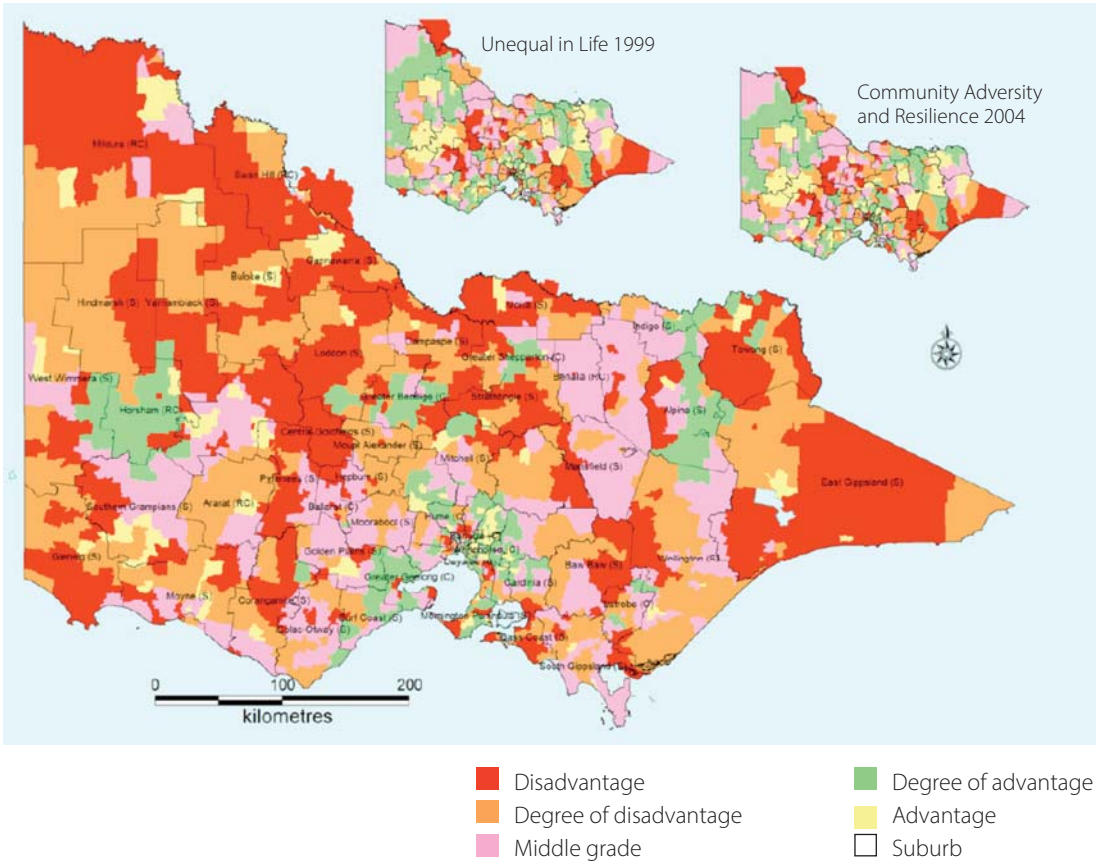
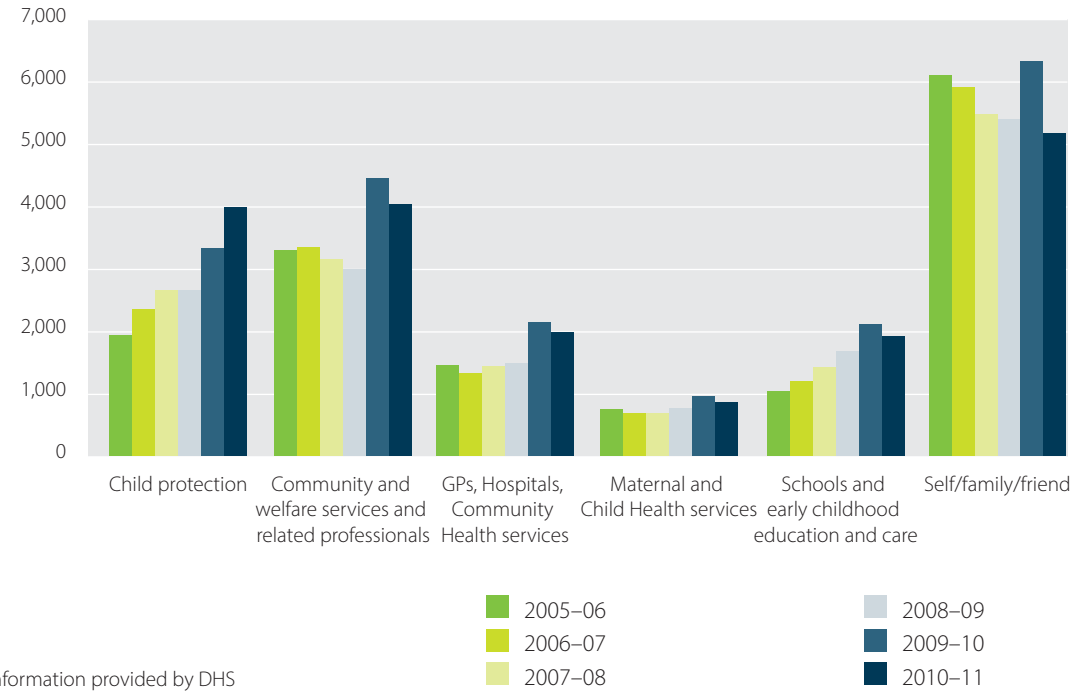
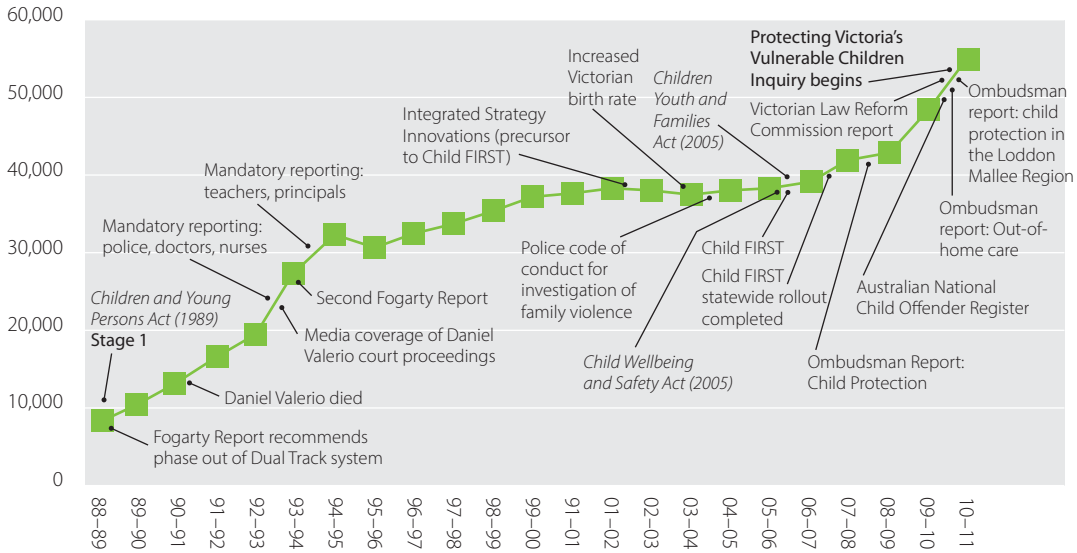


Figure 2: Referrals to family services and Child FIRST (PVVC 2012,172)



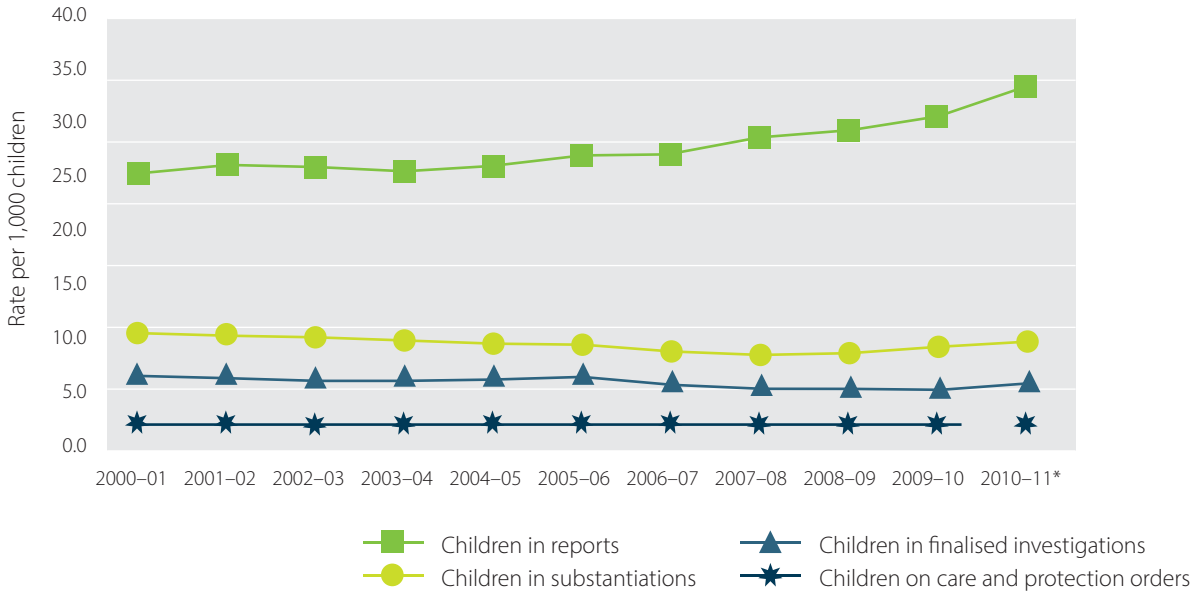
Source: Information provided by DHS

Figure 3: Child protection reports and significant events, Victoria, 1989 to 2011 (PVVC 2012, xxx)



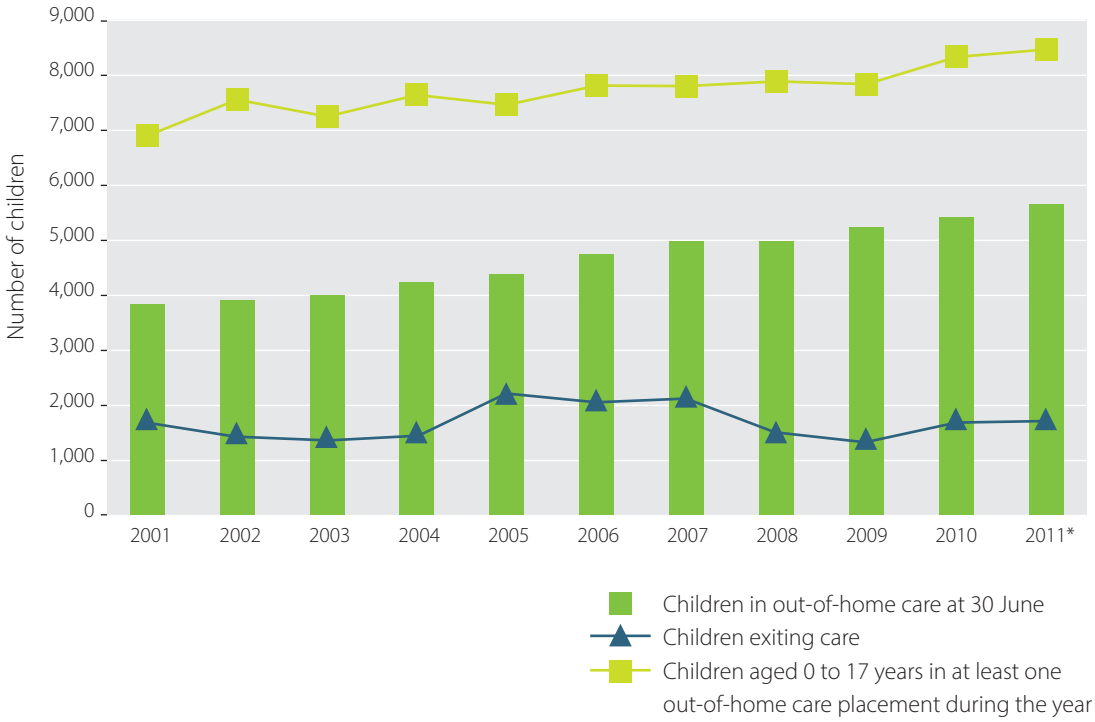
Source: Information provided to the Inquiry by Department of Human Services

Figure 4: Child protection reports, investigations, substantiations and children admitted to care and protection orders, rate per 1,000 children, Victoria, 2000–01 to 2010–11(PVVC 2012, xxxvi)



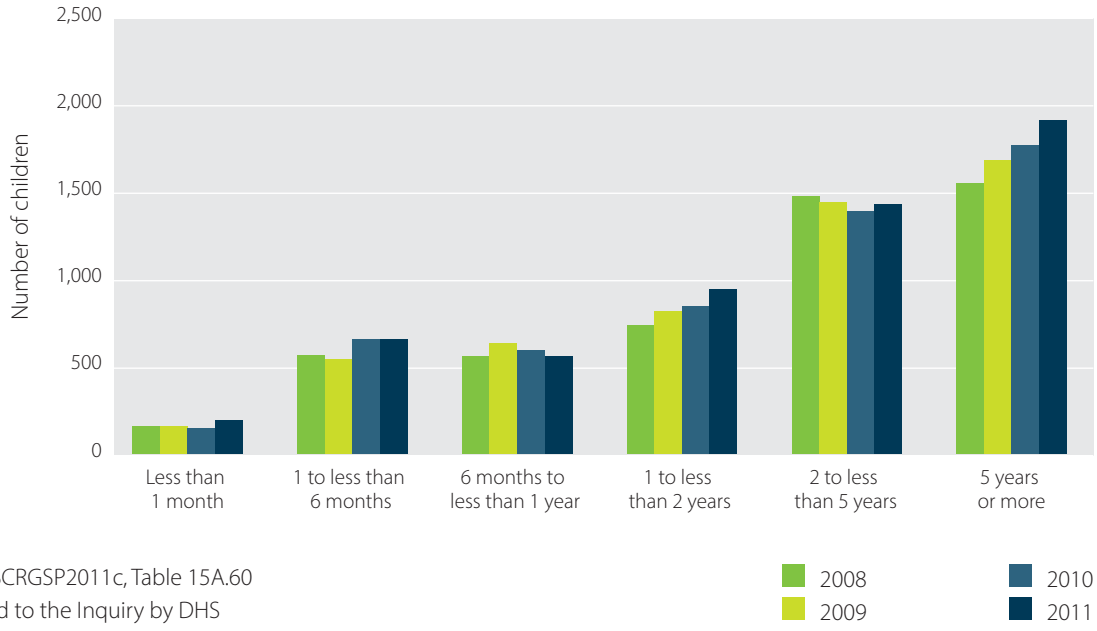
Source: Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision 2011, Report on Government Services 2011, Table 15A.53
*Provided to the Inquiry by the Department of Human Services

Figure 5: Children in out-of-home care, experiencing care and exiting care, Victoria, 2001–2011(PVVC 2012, 243)



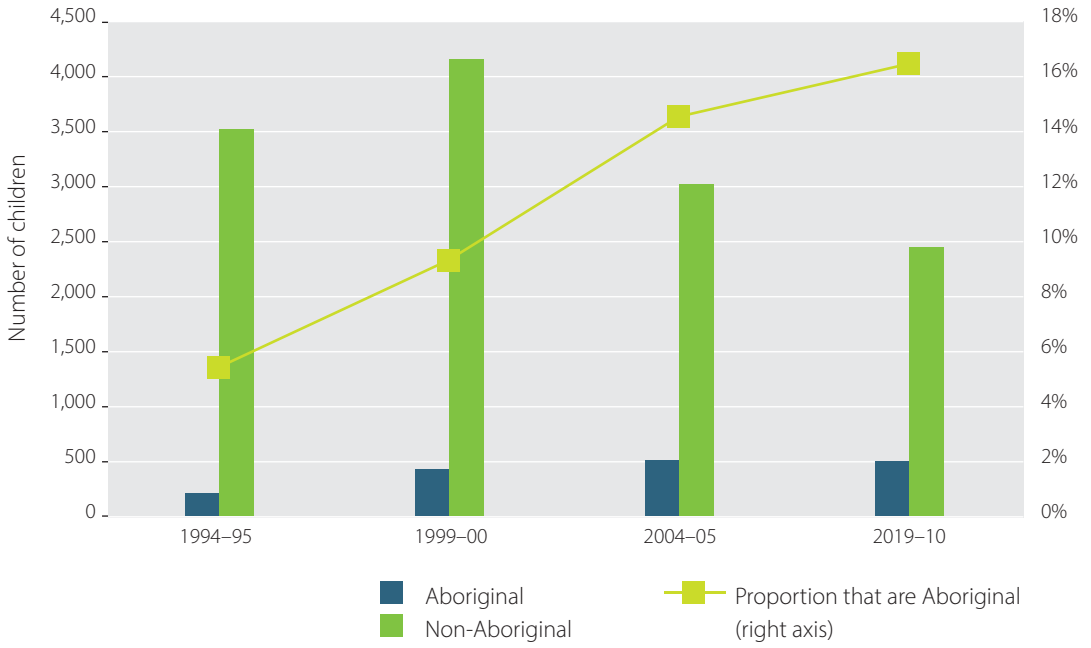
Source: Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision (SCRGSP) 2011c, Table 15A.57 and Table 15A.61,
*Provided to the Inquiry by DHS

Figure 6: Children in out-of-home care at 30 June, by length of time in continuous care, Victoria, 2008 to 2011 (PVVC 2012, 81).



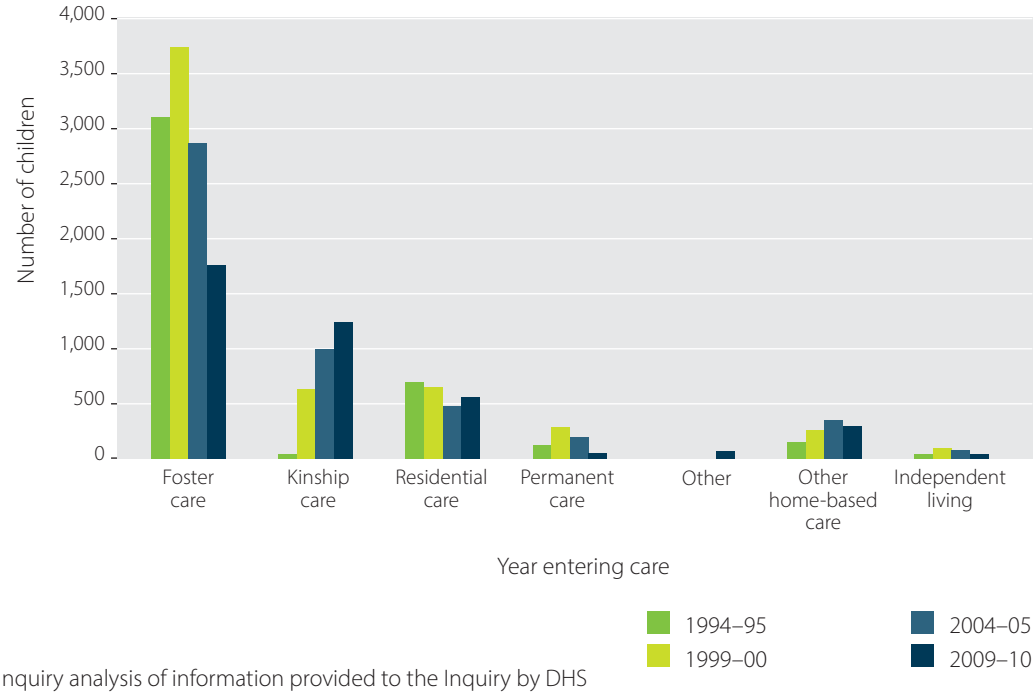
Source: SCRGSP2011c, Table 15A.60
*Provided to the Inquiry by DHS

Figure 7: Children entering out-of-home care, by Aboriginal status and proportion of Aboriginal children, Victoria, 1994-95 to 2009–10 (PVVC 2012, xxxiii)

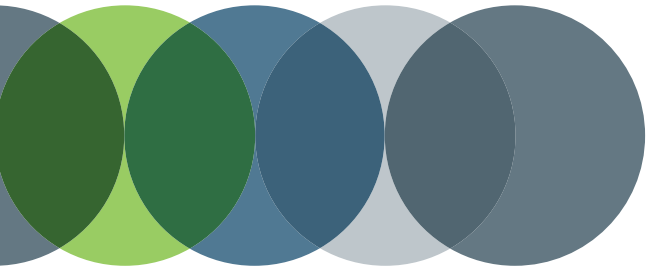


Source: Analysis of data provided by the Department of Human Services

Figure 8: Children admitted to out-of-home care, by type of care, Victoria, 1994-2010 (PVVC 2012, 246)



Source: Inquiry analysis of information provided to the Inquiry by DHS



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