

The Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare

**Tasmania State Budget Submission 2025-26**

A close-up photograph of a woman and a young child. The woman is on the left, smiling broadly, showing her teeth. The child is on the right, also smiling. They are both holding a large, white, fluffy teddy bear. The background is blurred, suggesting an indoor setting.

 Centre for Excellence in  
Child and Family Welfare

## The Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare

The Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare (the Centre) is the peak body for child and family services in Tasmania and Victoria representing more than 180 community service organisations, students, and individuals. The Centre advocates for the rights of children and young people to be heard, to be safe, to access education, and to remain connected to family, community, and culture. Our vision is to see a community that is fair and equitable and creates opportunities for children and their families to live happy and healthy lives. We thank our members and individuals with lived experience of the service system for their insights and suggestions which have helped inform the content of the Centre's 2025-26 Tasmanian State Budget Submission.

## Acknowledgement of Country

The Centre would like to acknowledge and pay respect to the past and present traditional custodians and Elders across Lutruwita. 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 Tasmanian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in the face of this trauma and respect their right to, and aspiration for, self-determination and empowerment.



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## Introduction

The Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare (the Centre) is pleased to submit its first pre-budget submission to the Rockliff Government, having been welcomed in 2024 as the peak body for children and families in Tasmania.

This Tasmanian Government's commitment to addressing the findings of the Commission of Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government's Response to Child Sexual Abuse in Institutional Settings (COI) has created an unprecedented opportunity for meaningful change in the child and family system.

In this context, the need for a strong peak for organisations working with children and families has never been more important. So too is the need for increased investment in organisations working with children and families.

In October 2024, in a room filled with organisations working with children and families across the state, the Minister for Children and Youth, Roger Jaensch, officially launched the Centre in Tasmania. There was a palpable sense of optimism in the room as attendees spoke of Tasmania's unique place-based strengths and community spirit in supporting children, young people, and their families, and the aspirations they have for making Tasmania a more inclusive, equitable, and safe place to live.

Like all our work as a member organisation, this submission is grounded in the voices of those we represent. Many recommendations stem from the Centre's Connecting Tasmanian Communities Tour, undertaken between July and October 2024, before the Centre's launch. During the tour, we travelled across the state, engaging directly with Tasmanians working with children and families in their communities. We met with 210 people from 80 organisations and covered over 1,620 kilometers to hear firsthand about the unique strengths of Tasmanian organisations supporting children, young people, families, and carers.

Tasmania's child and family services professionals highlighted that children and families across the state are struggling with cost-of-living pressures. These statements are backed by the Australian Council of Social Service's (ACOSS) Poverty in Australia report, which shows that 21% of Tasmanians are living on an inadequate income and approximately 120,000 Tasmanians are currently living in poverty.<sup>1</sup> More double-income families and people with mortgages are struggling with cost-of-living pressures, as people who may have been insulated from this crisis before are now feeling the toll.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Davidson, P, Saunders, P, Bradbury, P & Wong, M 2018, *Poverty in Australia 2018*, ACOSS/UNSW Poverty and Inequality Partnering Report No. 2, Sydney

<sup>2</sup> Anglicare 2024, *Stretched Too Far: Children and Families Surviving the Cost-of-Living Crisis in Tasmania*.

We know that financial instability places significant stress on parents and caregivers, impacting their physical and mental health and reducing their capacity to provide consistent and responsive care.<sup>3</sup> In a cost-of-living crisis, a strong child and family system becomes even more critical to supporting families, reducing stress, and changing life trajectories.

The Centre's Connecting Tasmanian Communities Tour showed us that the Tasmanian child and family services sector - including our carers - are a passionate, committed workforce. We need to strengthen and build the capability of our dedicated child and family professionals.

Above all, our consultations underscored the importance of investing in two key areas:

- **The Family Services Platform:** This platform provides early support to families, helping prevent escalation into extreme vulnerability. Family support services offer targeted, specialist support throughout the family's journey so they are connected to the services they need when they need them. It also helps families develop the skills to be the best parents they can be, reducing child maltreatment and demand on child safety.
- **The Out-of-Home Care (OOHC) System:** This system supports children, young people, and families who can no longer live with their birth parents and who have often experienced significant trauma. Now, more than ever, with the COI's recommended reforms, we need a well-resourced OOHC system that not only protects children but also facilitates family reunification whenever possible.

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<sup>3</sup> Neppl, T, Senia, J & Donnellan, M 2016, The Effects of Economic Hardship: Testing the Family Stress Model over Time. *J Fam Psychol*, no. 12-21 doi: 10.1037/fam0000168

### **Recommendation 1:**

## **Support the Centre to strengthen services for children and families across Tasmania**

The Centre seeks recurrent funding over four years to strengthen the child and family services sector across Tasmania. This investment will help the sector meet growing demand, allow us to work alongside the sector and government to implement reforms following the COI, and support continuous improvement so that Tasmania's children and families have access to the best possible services.

A strong, well-resourced peak body is key to guiding the child and family services sector through this period of change and delivering long-term systemic improvements for Tasmania's children and families.

The Centre has been specifically asked by organisations working with children and families in Tasmania to represent their voice, based on our proven expertise in:

- Successfully delivering capacity-building initiatives that improve service delivery.
- Driving evidence-building infrastructure to support sector-wide improvements.
- Supporting organisations in adapting to reforms and change.

The post-COI period presents an opportunity to create lasting change for Tasmania's children, young people, carers, and families - and the Centre has the track record to be a trusted leader in this work. Securing core funding will help us provide sustainable support to the child and family services sector, who have called on us to represent them during this period of reform and beyond.

### **Recommendation 2:**

## **Expand investment in family service provision which prevents escalation into statutory services and changes life trajectories**

Tasmania's family support services are at the heart of strong, thriving communities. The Centre's members deliver family support services that work with families at the earliest signs of risk, helping to ease pressure on child safety and prevent children and young people from entering care and/or the youth justice systems.

The Centre has long recognised the critical importance of early intervention in a child safety system already overwhelmed by acute demand. By providing families with support when challenges first

arise, we can reduce the likelihood of statutory intervention. This approach is not only more cost-effective but also has the power to change life trajectories for Tasmania's most disadvantaged children and families.<sup>4,5</sup>

The COI highlights the need for both timely responses to abuse and proactive measures to prevent it, intervening early when risks emerge. The Australian Child Maltreatment Study (ACMS) shows that child maltreatment is widespread and has devastating long-term impacts on both children's mental health and health behaviours, now and into the future.<sup>6</sup> Tasmania's family support services play a crucial role in preventing maltreatment and its lifelong harms.

The Strong Families Safe Kids reforms have laid the foundation for an integrated approach to family support that prioritises early intervention. However, there are still more Tasmanian families who need support, and they need it earlier. We ask the Tasmanian Government to increase funding across the family services platform—from universal and local family support services to more intensive supports for children and families already engaged with statutory systems.

Family support services across the family services platform in Tasmania already provide essential, wrap-around support to children, young people, and families—helping them connect into employment, housing, drug and alcohol support, therapeutic supports, and a range of other services. We ask the Tasmanian Government to strengthen its investment in the family services platform so that Tasmanian families receive the support they need at the right time.

Such an investment would help keep children at home, engaged in school, and connected to their families and communities, building a model of child support rather than child removal.

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4 Valentine, K 2015, How Early is Early Intervention and Who Should Get It? Contested Meanings in Determining Thresholds for Intervention, Children and Youth Services Review, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chidyouth.2015.05.014>

5 Teager, W, Fox, S and Stafford, N 2019, How Australia can invest early and return more: A new look at the \$15b cost and opportunity. Early Intervention Foundation, The Front Project and CoLab at the Telethon Kids Institute, Australia

6 Lawrence, D, Hunt, A, Mathews, B, Haslam, D, Malacova, E, Dunne, M, Erskine, H, Higgins, D, Finkelhor, D, Pacella, R, Meinck, F, Thomas, H & Scott, J. 2023, The Association Between Child Maltreatment and Health Risk Behaviours and Conditions Throughout Life in the Australian Maltreatment Study, The Medical Journal of Australia, <https://doi.org/10.5694/mja2.51877>

### **Recommendation 3:**

## **Support organisations to sustainably deliver services to children, young people, families, and carers, wherever in Tasmania they may live**

Organisations working with children and families are under immense pressure yet continue to deliver their life-changing services in their communities, often beyond what they are funded and resourced to do.

During the Connecting Tasmanian Communities Tour, organisations across the state called for flexible, long-term funding models that focus on outcomes for children and families, rather than outputs. These funding models would provide enough flexibility to support a sustainable and skilled workforce, facilitate forward planning, and allow for the evaluation of services over time—helping the sector collectively build our knowledge of what works for Tasmania's children and families.

A move away from 'drip funding' will enable organisations to offer longer-term contracts to our dedicated child and family professionals, addressing workforce shortages. In Tasmania, as in other jurisdictions, the demand for highly skilled and qualified workers in child and family services continues to outstrip workforce capacity. Short-term contracts offering little job security, combined with high-pressure working conditions, are significant barriers to workforce retention.

The Centre is committed to working alongside the Tasmanian Government to explore sustainable funding approaches and innovative solutions to our workforce challenges.

These solutions must not only improve workforce retention but also support our sector to reach children and families who need our support in rural and remote communities. In rural and remote Tasmania, long waitlists and limited access to services are becoming more acute. While organisations want to deliver targeted outreach to Tasmania's most isolated communities, this can only be achieved with funding that reflects the higher costs of service provision in these areas. The remote Tasmanian communities we visited want to see services for children and families that are meaningfully embedded in their communities, which requires sustained and appropriate funding.



#### Recommendation 4:

## Invest in Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) to design and deliver a suite of child and family services to meet the needs of communities across Tasmania

The Centre has long recognised that Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) are best placed to understand and meet the needs of Aboriginal children, families, and communities, as they possess the cultural knowledge, expertise, and community connections necessary to support them.

It is critical that the development and implementation of services for Aboriginal children and families is led by Tasmanian ACCOs and Aboriginal communities.

Aboriginal children remain vastly overrepresented in both the OOHC and youth justice systems.<sup>7</sup> With the right supports and investment, particularly in early intervention and prevention programs, the number of Aboriginal children entering OOHC could be significantly reduced. However, this change requires more than just policy commitment—it demands formal mechanisms to transfer funding and decision-making authority to ACCOs so they have the resources to keep children safe and connected to culture and communities.

The Centre strongly calls on the Tasmanian Government to fully implement the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle in line with COI recommendation 9.15<sup>8</sup> and supports investment in Tasmania's ACCOs to design and deliver a suite of child welfare services for Tasmania's Aboriginal children and families so that care and support for Aboriginal children and families remains culturally informed and community-led.

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<sup>7</sup> Lima, F, O'Donnell, M, Gibberd, A, Falster, K, Banks, E, Jones, J, ... Eades, S 2024, Aboriginal Children Placed in Out-of-Home Care: Pathways Through the Child Protection System, *Australian Social Work*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0312407X.2024.2326505>

<sup>8</sup> Commission of Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government's Responses to Child Sexual Abuse 2023, *Volume 4: Children in Out of Home Care*.

## Recommendation 5:

# Strengthen the child and family workforce capability to support children, young people, and families with complex needs

## A Learning and Development Strategy for Tasmanian Organisations Working with Children and Families

The resilience of Tasmania's child and family services system relies on a skilled and capable workforce equipped to respond to the increasingly complex needs of children and families.

The Centre's members work with families facing a range of challenges—from supporting new parents to helping children and families dealing with complex and co-occurring vulnerabilities, such as child abuse and neglect, poverty, family violence, mental health issues, substance dependencies, and disabilities. Rising cost-of-living pressures have intensified these challenges, pushing many Tasmanians—who may not have previously needed support—into hardship and vulnerability.<sup>9</sup> This has significantly increased demand for child and family services.

To meet this growing demand, organisations working with children and families have highlighted the need for greater investment in building the skills and capacity of the child and family workforce. A recent learning and development survey conducted with our members revealed an urgent need for training across key areas of practice. Strengthening workforce capability not only improves the quality and responsiveness of support provided to children and families with increasingly complex needs, but it also improves job satisfaction and motivation. This, in turn, helps retain the skilled and dedicated professionals that keep Tasmanian children and families safe and well in our communities.

The Centre asks to lead in the development of a sector-led and owned Learning and Development Strategy for the whole child and family services workforce. Training will be a key priority within this strategy, alongside other initiatives such as forums, conferences, seminars, and scholarships. This aligns with the COI's recommendation 9.10 for the development of a workforce strategy for the child and family sector aimed at increasing staff numbers and retention, reducing vacancies, improving workplace conditions, promoting staff wellbeing, and ensuring that staff are equipped with the skills and knowledge to effectively perform their roles.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Anglicare 2024, *Stretched Too Far: Children and Families Surviving the Cost-of-Living Crisis in Tasmania*.

<sup>10</sup> Commission of Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government's Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. 2023. Volume 4: Children in Out of Home Care.

As a registered training organisation with expertise in leading on strategies for sector-wide workforce uplift, the Centre is well-equipped to lead this work. We ask to work with child and family service organisations and the Tasmanian Government in the development and delivery of this strategy.

## AVITH Practice Leadership

In the Centre's recent learning and development survey, our members highlighted a strong need for greater practice leadership to improve support for adolescent and young people using violence in the home (AVITH), and their families.

AVITH is a pattern of violent or abusive behaviour used by an adolescent in a family context, which is commonly the result of adverse childhood events and trauma<sup>11</sup>. This form of violence is used by young people of all genders. It is a distinct and underreported form of violence, and one that requires a specialised approach and earlier intervention.<sup>12</sup>

The under-reporting of AVITH is a national issue, and this is further compounded in Tasmania by the current legislative context. At present, Tasmanian legislation only recognises intimate partner violence perpetrated by individuals aged 16 years or older, meaning AVITH is not formally acknowledged in policy responses to violence.<sup>13</sup> Tasmanian legislation recognises violence that is used by young people in intimate partner relationships, but only in cases where individuals are aged 16 years or older. There is currently no recognition of young people using violence against parents, carers, and siblings.

Whilst service responses are growing, families experiencing AVITH need specialist service support - including therapeutic and whole-of-family interventions to address trauma and rebuild relationships. AVITH sits at the nexus of all service sectors, including police and courts, all of which require additional training and support to deliver meaningful responses to young people and their families.

Most often in Tasmania, and nationally, service responses are not fit for the unique situation and vulnerabilities of children and young people who are using violence in the home.<sup>14</sup> Most cases that reach the legal systems are severe in nature, as those affected by the violence (mostly parents), have been reluctant to report it, until they seriously feared for their safety, or the safety of children in their care.<sup>15</sup>

Practitioners in Tasmania, and other jurisdictions, require more and earlier, strengths-based support before families reach crisis points.

The Centre can deliver a suite of practice leadership activities to increase professional knowledge and skills for the Tasmanian child and family workforce on AVITH, including coordination and

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<sup>11</sup> Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) 2020, *The PIPA project: Positive Interventions for Perpetrators of Adolescent Violence in the Home*, Sydney, NSW

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

service mapping, facilitation of communities of practice, locally collected practice data and case studies, place-specific practice guides, and online resources.

#### **Recommendation 6:**

### **Work with the Centre to support organisations delivering Out-of-Home Care (OOHC) to see through landmark reforms arising from the Commission of Inquiry**

In recommendation 9.1, the COI called for an injection of resources into the OOHC system to implement reforms for children in care and to outsource OOHC to Tasmanian organisations delivering these services.<sup>16</sup> In line with the COI Recommendation 9.2,<sup>17</sup> the Centre strongly supports the full transition of OOHC services to the child and family services sector and asks the government to allocate the necessary resources to complete this process successfully.

The COI made it clear that “improved experiences for children in care must be the benchmark for success, and a system that is enabled to create and sustain change is urgently required to achieve this outcome”.<sup>18</sup>

The Centre is already working closely with the Department for Education, Children and Young People, and organisations delivering OOHC in Tasmania to support this transition. We know that the needs of children, young people, families, and carers must be at the heart of the process.

The COI highlighted that past efforts to reform Tasmania's OOHC system have not been fully realised,<sup>19</sup> highlighting the need for a strong partner to walk alongside both the Tasmanian Government and our sector as we navigate this outsourcing environment. The Centre is well-placed to provide this support, with extensive experience working with child and family organisations and government to adapt to reform.

We request ongoing support from the government to enable the Centre to continue working with organisations delivering OOHC and the Tasmanian Government in implementing the COI's OOHC reform recommendations.

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<sup>16</sup> Commission of Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government's Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. 2023. *Volume 4: Children in Out of Home Care*.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Commission of Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government's Responses to Child Sexual Abuse 2023, *Commission of Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government's Responses to Child Sexual Abuse website*, accessed 19 December 2024, [https://www.commissionofinquiry.tas.gov.au/report/listing/volume-4/chapter-9/\\_nocache](https://www.commissionofinquiry.tas.gov.au/report/listing/volume-4/chapter-9/_nocache)

<sup>19</sup> Commission of Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government's Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. 2023. *Volume 4: Children in Out of Home Care*. P. 32

#### **Recommendation 7:**

### **Create a child and family services system underpinned by robust evidence to improve practice and leadership**

To improve outcomes for Tasmanian children and families, we need to bring the best available evidence on what works to practitioners and decision-makers in our state.

The Centre is a recognised expert in evidence. In 2017, we established the Outcomes, Practice, and Evidence Network (OPEN) to support child and family services in building and sharing evidence from research, evaluation, practice, and client experience. OPEN has played a pivotal role in driving better outcomes through an annual program of activities, resources, events, and partnerships. Our work fosters an outcomes-focused learning culture, embeds evaluation into practice, collaborates with research experts, and ensures that organisations working with children and families have access to the practice and research expertise they need.

During the Connecting Tasmanian Communities Tour, child and family service organisations across Tasmania highlighted their need for support in evaluating their services. They expressed a strong desire to build a shared understanding of what works locally and to connect their practice to the global evidence base. This approach would help both the sector and the Tasmanian Government allocate resources more effectively so that children and families receive the best possible support.

The Centre sees a clear opportunity to partner with the Tasmanian Government to build the sector's capacity to generate, apply, and share evidence.

#### **Recommendation 8:**

### **Collaborate with the Commonwealth to explore ways of improving the financial and other supports available to carers**

Tasmania's carers open their hearts and homes to children who cannot live with their birth parents for a variety of reasons. While the demand for loving homes for children who can't live with their parents is growing, the number of Tasmanian individuals or households willing and able to provide foster care is declining. Improving the retention of skilled and trained carers requires our urgent attention.

For Aboriginal children, the situation is even more critical due to the shortage of First Nations foster carers and the evidence that Aboriginal children thrive when placed with Aboriginal carers who are connected to community, culture, and Country.<sup>20</sup>

The Centre joins calls for the Tasmanian Government to improve financial support to carers, and highlights opportunities for cross-government collaboration to ease the burden on both carers and children in care. Specifically, we ask the Tasmanian Government to collaborate with the Commonwealth Government to introduce financial incentives that would help carers manage cost-of-living pressures and better support the children in their care. These incentives, identified by the National Foster Care Sustainability Group through the national peak body for children and families, Families Australia, include<sup>21</sup>:

1. **Access to Medical and Therapeutic Support:** A card system, similar to the Veterans' Health Card, would provide children in care with low-cost or free medical and therapeutic services until age 21, ensuring their complex needs are met.
2. **Reducing Financial Burden on Carers:** Increasing the tax-free threshold to \$100,000 and boosting the Low Income Superannuation Tax Offset (LISTO) to \$1,000 would provide significant financial relief, making it easier to attract and retain carers.
3. **Equitable Leave Entitlements:** Carers should have access to up to 16 weeks of paid leave when establishing new placements, bringing their entitlements in line with those of other parents under the National Employment Standards.

The Centre asks the Tasmanian Government to work with the Commonwealth to promote the implementation of these incentives, making foster care more financially viable and sustainable for our Tasmanian carers.

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<sup>20</sup> Fatima, Y, Cleary, A, King, S, Solomon, S, McDaid, L, Mehedi, M ... Baxter, J. 2022, Cultural Identity and Social and Emotional Wellbeing in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children. In Baxter, J. et al. eds. *Family Dynamics Over the Life Course*, Life Course Research and Social Policies, vol. 15, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-12224-8\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-12224-8_4)

<sup>21</sup> Families Australia 2024, *Every Child in Foster Care Deserves a Fair Go: Our Asks*, accessed 19 December 2024, <https://www.futureoffostercare.org.au/our-asks>.

## Appendix: Summary of Recommendations

**Recommendation 1:** Support the Centre to strengthen services for children and families across Tasmania

**Recommendation 2:** Expand investment in family service provision which prevents escalation into statutory services and changes life trajectories

**Recommendation 3:** Support organisations to sustainably deliver services to children, young people, families, and carers – wherever in Tasmania they may live

**Recommendation 4:** Invest in Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) to design and deliver a suite of child and family services to meet the needs of communities across Tasmania

**Recommendation 5:** Strengthen the child and family workforce capability to support children, young people, and families with complex needs

**Recommendation 6:** Work with the Centre to walk alongside organisations delivering Out-of-Home Care (OOHC) to see through landmark reforms arising from the Commission of Inquiry

**Recommendation 7:** Create a child and family services system underpinned by robust evidence to improve practice and leadership

**Recommendation 8:** Collaborate with the Commonwealth to explore ways of improving the financial and other supports available to carers

