Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare

Election Priorities 2026



Therapeutic services for children

Updated 4 August 2026

The Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare is the peak body for children and families in Victoria and Tasmania. For more than 100 years, the Centre has advocated for the rights and wellbeing of children, young people and families.

Election Priority

Urgently expand access to specialist therapeutic services and early intervention for children and young people who have experienced any form of maltreatment including physical, sexual, emotional abuse, neglect and family violence.

What this looks like:

- The views and perspectives of children and young people must be central to all policy development and service design.
- Fund specialist services designed specifically for children and young people who have experienced abuse (physical, emotional and/or sexual), family violence, and/or neglect.
- Recognise and respond to children and young people as victim-survivors of family violence in their own right, not solely as dependents of adult victim-survivors.
- Strengthen prevention, early intervention, child-safety and community awareness initiatives.
- Strengthening systems and responses by investing in building a stable, skilled and sustainable workforce to support interventions designed specifically for children

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Background

Child maltreatment includes physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, and exposure to domestic violence in childhood. People who have experienced child maltreatment have endured at least one of these five types of harm; most (two in three) have suffered a combination.

Child maltreatment is endemic in Australia. According to the Australian Child Maltreatment Study (ACMS) almost two-thirds of the population (62.2%) has experienced at least one type of maltreatment in childhood. Exposure to domestic violence is the most common form of maltreatment, experienced by almost 40% of Australians.

Specialist services for children and young people experiencing maltreatment are often inaccessible or not designed around their needs and circumstances. Despite significant need for dedicated, specialist programs and services, change is needed to ensure children and young people are recognised and supported as victim-survivors in their own right.

This unmet need is costing children, young people, families, and communities. Child maltreatment is a systemic issue that severely impacts individuals and communities, with harms that persist across generations. Experiences of child maltreatment significantly increase the likelihood of mental health and health challenges, and heightened risk of suicide and self-harm. Childhood maltreatment also comes at an economic cost to the nation, with annual health service use costs estimated at $21.6 billion and productivity losses around $24.1 billion (ACMS, 2026). The ACMS reinforced that children's safety, health and wellbeing had not been taken seriously as a matter of national policy, "to our immense cost."

Child maltreatment is an issue of growing prevalence and concern, reflected in the rise of online child sexual abuse and exploitation, increases in harmful sexual behaviours among children and young people, reports of child sexual abuse in early childhood education and care settings, and the continued national crisis that is gender-based violence.

Key data points

62.2%
of Australians have experienced maltreatment during childhood.

2 in 3
children who are maltreated experience more than one type of harm.

5x more
likely to have attempted suicide in the past 12 months.

3x more
likely to have experienced a mental health disorder.

$21.6 billion
annual health service use costs associated with child maltreatment and an estimated $24.1 billion associated with productivity losses.

- More than one in four Australians (25.7%) are victim-survivors of child sexual abuse (ACMS, 2023).
- Girls are twice as likely to experience child sexual abuse as boys, according to the ACMS (2023).
- When a child experiences sexual abuse, it's rarely an isolated event, with 78% of ACMS participants saying it happened more than once (2023).
- More than one in four girls (26.3%) aged 16 – 24 have experienced online sexual solicitation, and more than one in 10 girls (10.9%) have experienced non-consensual sharing of a sexual image of themselves (ACMS, 2025).

Key Programs

Preventing and responding to childhood maltreatment and all harms against children, young people and families underpins all the Centre's work and that of our sector.

Berry Street Take Two

Berry Street's Take Two program is a Victoria-wide therapeutic service helping to address the mental health impacts on children of the trauma they have experienced from abuse, neglect or adverse experiences.

EACH, Uniting, ACF – Pathways to Resilience

Pathways to Resilience provides a range of integrated therapeutic responses to

support adults, young people and children who have experienced family violence.

These are our kids

Raising community awareness about the prevalence and impact of family violence on children is crucial. These Are Our Kids is a collaboration between the not-for-profit and philanthropic sectors with a focus on how we can advocate for the best support for children who have experienced, or are experiencing, family violence.

Key research

- Australian Child Maltreatment Study (2023)
- Impact of child maltreatment on the costs of health service use and productivity loss: Findings from the Australian child maltreatment study - ScienceDirect
- Deloitte Access Economics (2019). The economic cost of violence against children and young people. Advocate for Children and Young People. p. 50.
- Six priorities for improving responses to children and young people experiencing violence – ANROWS Children and Young People Roundtable