ChildProtectionPeak

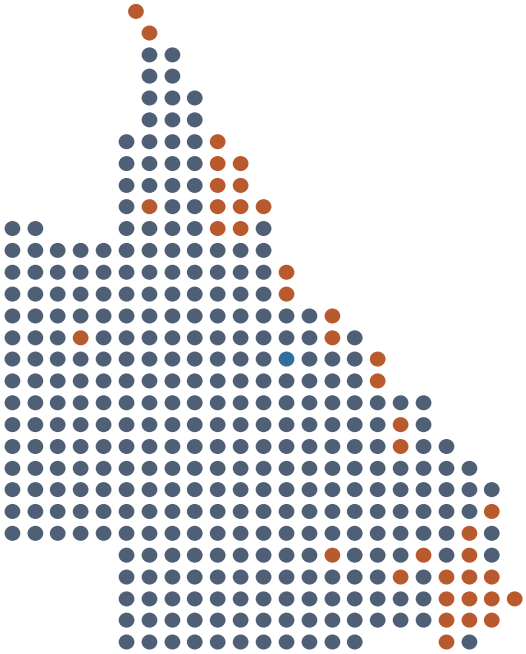
Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak (QATSICPP)

POSITIVE FUTURES FOR OUR CHILDREN

2024 Queensland Election Recommendations

QATSICPP is the peak body representing 38 Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled child and family organisations in Queensland. We work closely with our members, our communities, practitioners and policymakers to protect our children, young people and families. QATSICPP's 2024 State Election platform builds on our 15 years of advocacy and service provision for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in Queensland. QATSICPP and our members look forward to working with the government elect to address key issues facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, youth and families, and create positive outcomes for Queensland children involved with the criminal justice system as the new Youth Justice Peak.

The upcoming State Election represents an opportunity for all political parties to learn about what works from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and commit to the changes our communities are calling for. We are calling for commitment from political leaders to the following:



ISSUE	SOLUTION	INVESTMENT
There is an urgent need for investment of new models of caring for Aboriginal and Torres Strait children who are not able to be cared for by their parents. Pressures on Queensland's current out-of-home care system (OOHC) have resulted in a dramatic increase in the use of residential care over the past five years, which are costly and show little evidence of producing long-term positive outcomes for children.	**Family Caring for Family** **Implement the *Family Caring for Family* program** statewide to support families in caring for their own children, reducing reliance on formal child protection systems.	$179.9 million of the current investment in residential care be repurposed to roll out the *Family Caring for Family* Model: 2025/2026: 6 sites - $18.9 million 2026/2027: 12 sites - $37.8 million 2027/2028: 18 sites - $56.8 million
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Queensland are **nine times** more likely to be in out-of-home care (OOHC) than non-Indigenous children and comprise 47 percent of Queensland's 6087 children living in long term (over two years) out-of-home care (OOHC). The Queensland Government has committed to a significant reduction of overrepresentation by 2031; Delegated Authority is a critical pathway to achieving this success.	**Delegated Authority** **Continue with the Delegated Authority reforms** which enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to have greater control over child protection decisions.	Queensland Government has already committed $107.8 million over 4 years to the rollout of Delegated Authority.

ISSUE	SOLUTION	INVESTMENT
Too many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are entering the out-of-home care system due to a lack of timely and sufficient support. If the rate of First Nations children and young people entering out-of-home care does not start to significantly decline within the next five years, there is very little chance of Queensland meeting Close the Gap target 12: *By 2031, reduce the rate of over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care by 45 per cent.*	**Family Wellbeing Services** **Boost funding for Family Wellbeing Services (FWS)** to lower caseloads and enhance support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.	Additional $67.9 million in funding to reduce caseloads from 30 child concern reports per worker per year, to 20 reports per worker per year.
Research and evidence demonstrates that domestic and family violence is a major driver for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families' involvement in the child protection system. Despite this, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander DFV-specific services are funded to work with adults and are largely focused on justice-related responses. The Queensland government has made a relatively small investment in specialist DFV positions in FWS services.	**Domestic and Family Violence** **Enhance funding for Domestic and Family Violence Specialist programs** within FWS to address domestic violence and reduce its impact on child safety.	Increased investment of $13.2 million over four years to enable FWS services to have specialist children's, women's and men's workers to respond to DFV in communities.
There is a small cohort of approximately 400 young people in Queensland who are committing up to 50% of all youth crimes each year.1 The community is rightly concerned and calling for urgent solutions to these issues. Our communities have the solutions and have repeatedly called for increased resourcing to see Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people better supported through programs that focus on socialisation, inclusion and connection.	**Prevent youth offending** **Invest in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander designed programs to prevent youth offending** including expanding On Country and Family Led Decision Making programs and establishing intensive case management program for First Nations young people at risk of becoming serious repeat offenders.	a) $11.8 million over four years to expand of the current Youth Justice Family Led Decision (YJFLDM) program. b) $18.2 million over four years for establishment of a First Nations intensive case management at six locations across Queensland. c) $28.8 million over four years for enhancement of the On Country program and expansion from three to six sites. d) Expand number of Youth Murri Court Locations across Queensland.

The Evidence

QATSICPP's proposed solutions are based on available evidence as well as the knowledge we have developed over the past 15 years as a peak body working with a network of community controlled Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations across the state to deliver child, youth and family support. What we know is:

1. **Our services are effective.** A range of evaluations and economic modelling has demonstrated that services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are best delivered by Aboriginal and Torres Islander community controlled services.[1] For example, research has shown that Aboriginal and Torres Islander medical services are more effective in improving life outcomes for their clients than mainstream services.[2] Many of these same services are already delivering some child and family services in Queensland and their potential to create positive change through wraparound support and holistic care is a major investment opportunity for an incoming government. An independent evaluation conducted in 2021 found that Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Wellbeing Services (FWS), were effective in preventing children escalating through the child protection system.[3] The evaluation found that 91% of families stay out of the child protection system within the following six month after having their needs met through a FWS.

2. Our services build regional economies. Investment in community controlled organisations has the added benefit of supporting the state's productivity and economic future. Every dollar invested in building the community controlled system to support our children and families increases First Nations employment and contributes to the economic base of regional and remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

3. Early intervention, when done well, is cheaper and more effective. QATSICPP acknowledges successive Queensland governments have increased investment in early intervention and support in child protection since the Carmody Inquiry. However, this increased investment has not been large enough to keep pace with increasing demand and need. Currently 12.3 percent of Queensland's child protection expenditure is directed to family support and intensive family support services. This represents a decrease of 3.9 percent over the past five years, whilst there has been an increase of 91 percent in out-of-home care investment during the same time period. This is both bad for the budget and bad for Queensland families.[4]

Research on effective early intervention programs gives a glimpse of what's possible with a different approach. In 2019 Social Ventures Australia published a cost-benefit analysis showing that additional investment in targeted early intervention programs over a 10-year period can deliver significant savings for government while preventing a substantial number of children from entering out-of-home care. An investment of approximately $150 million per year (indexed) over a 10-year period delivers cumulative net savings (after deducting program establishment and delivery costs) of $1.6 billion with breakeven occurring during the fifth year of implementation.[1]

4. To reduce youth offending, we need effective programs to reduce young people's dangerous, high-risk behaviours. This includes supporting children and young people to overcome the impacts of trauma and change how they think, act and behave. Most of the current approaches to prevent and respond to youth offending in Queensland are not working, as evidenced by high rates of serious and repeat offending. QATSICPP is proposing a new approach which is focused on timely, culturally grounded and effective support. There is significant evidence about the cost benefit of investing in such support. For example, Deloitte Economics found that a men's healing program run by an Aboriginal organisation in Victoria resulted in significantly reduced incarceration rates, at a return of 50%-190% per dollar invested.[5]

5. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children grow up stronger in culture. Significant pressures on Queensland's current OOHC system have resulted in a dramatic increase in the use of non-family-based care options, such as residential care, that are costly and increase children's chances of contact with the youth justice system. The *Family Caring for Family* model proposed by QATSICPP is focused on investing in families instead of the child protection statutory system to ensure children grow up strong and safe. This approach is supported by the findings of Australia's largest longitudinal study into the life trajectories of children and families involved with the child protection system, which found that children raised by their family (including extended family) experienced significantly better outcomes across a range of life domains.[6]

6. Investing in family solutions is more cost effective. A key advantage of the *Family Caring for Family* model is that it gives government an immediate opportunity to start transitioning children out of the ineffective and costly OOHC system rather than waiting for the medium to long impacts of investing in family support services to reduce demand on OOHC. In one region, QATSICPP's modelling shows the program cost four times less than the current cost of accommodating children over 119 children in residential care in the region but was likely to achieve significantly improved outcomes, as it focused on children remaining safely connected to their family network and community.

7. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are the answer to making real change. After over 30 years of a child protection system administered by the State Government, the rates of our children in out-of-home care are still high and their outcomes in the system still generally poor.[7] The urgent need for a different way of doing things has resulted in the Delegated Authority reforms, which involve transitioning decision making about our families and children from the public service to our leaders and organisations.

The Delegated Authority reform enables Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to have responsibility for decisions made about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and is already achieving real change. Early evaluations indicate that Delegated Authority has resulted in a 46% increase in family contact for children in care. As of 10th July 2024, Delegated Authority has expanded to 13 locations across Queensland and 37 children in the program have been reunified with family; this is a much higher rate than for those children in the same locations not included in the program.

Endnotes

[1] https://www.berrystreet.org.au/uploads/main/Files/SVA-ReportSummary-TheEconomicCaseForEarlyIntervention-2019.pdf.pdf

[1] https://www.mja.com.au/journal/2014/200/11/aboriginal-community-controlled-health-services-leading-way-primary-care

[2] https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5394990/; https://equityhealthj.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1475-9276-13-56

[3] ABT Associates, 2021, Unpublished

[4] ROGS Child Protection Data, 20219-2024

[5] https://healingfoundation.org.au/community-healing/mens-healing/

[6] https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/resources/research/pathways-of-care/pocls-publication

[7] https://www.snaicc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Family-Matters-Report-2023.pdf