

# QATSICPP Record of Advice: Family Participation Program



ChildProtectionPeak

Directive advice from QATSICPP to Child Family and Community Services Design and Commissioning, Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women.

## **Purpose:**

To ensure QATSICPP member organisations are informed about the position advocated by the sectors Peak body and to promote accountability and transparency in the decision-making process of Government.

## **Principles:**

The advice provided by QATSICPP is informed by our collective commitment to the following principles, as articulated in "Our Way: A generational strategy";

### Principle 1: Applying a child focused approach

We recognise that in all actions concerning children, their best interests should be the paramount consideration and that ensuring their safety is essential. Advancing the best interests of children requires the holistic realisation of their rights, including rights to safety, family, housing, health, education, culture and participation.

We understand that the best interests of an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander child can only be properly determined with the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Accordingly, we will:

- ensure that the best interests of the child, informed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, is the paramount consideration in all decisions about the care and protection of children
- promote the inclusion of children's voices in all decisions that affect them.

### Principle 2: Ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and organisations participate in and have control over decisions that affect their children

We believe that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have the strengths and the right to lead change for their own children. Governments and services should

provide mechanisms and supports for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families, communities and organisations to participate in and drive decision-making about the safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Accordingly, we will:

- build and transfer capacity to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations to provide services that respond to the needs of their communities
- ensure policies and mechanisms to facilitate the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families in all decisions that affect them
- recognise the role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to drive local solutions to local issues.

### Principle 3: Protecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's right to live in culture.

We recognise that for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, connections to their family, community and culture are critical to their wellbeing and positive self-identity. We also recognise the evidence that cultural and community networks support safety for children, and that continuity of cultural identity promotes healthy development. We believe that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have the right to practise their cultures with their families and communities.

Accordingly, we will:

- promote and enable the full implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle in line with its intent to maintain quality cultural connections for children throughout their involvement with child protection systems
- develop the capability of organisations and staff to work in culturally safe and competent ways to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

### Principle 4: Pursuing evidence-based responses

We believe that in responding to the issue of over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in child protection systems, our efforts should be based on the evidence of what works. This evidence base critically includes the knowledge, wisdom and experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Accordingly, we will:

- respect and practically apply research findings on what is effective to respond to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, recognising the critical importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in research to the quality of the evidence base
- listen to the knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples on how best to respond to the needs of their children and families, including by resourcing and supporting community-led program evaluation and research.

### Principle 5: Supporting, healing and strengthening families

We recognise that family is the foundation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's social, cultural and emotional wellbeing and is their most important lifelong support. We acknowledge the unique need for healing supports to address the impacts of intergenerational trauma on families that has resulted from experiences of colonisation, the Stolen Generations and other discriminatory government policies. We recognise and respect the evidence that shows that early intervention is critical to heal and strengthen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to care for their children and ensure they thrive.

Accordingly, we will:

- promote and drive increased early intervention supports for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and increased proportional investment in early intervention as compared to out-of-home care
- support and promote a priority to safely reunify Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children with their families wherever it is possible to do so.

### Principle 6: Challenging systemic racism and inequities

We acknowledge that the current challenges facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families result from a history of injustice and racism that remains embedded within the laws, policies and practices of our society, systems and institutions.

Accordingly, we will:

- take actions to ensure law, policy and practice are designed to respond to the root causes of poverty and disadvantage for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- challenge racism where we see or experience it in laws, policies, procedures or behaviours.

## Advice

Information contained herein, reflects advice provided to DCSYW regarding the Family Participation Program.

### General

QATSICPP has consistently expressed our concerns to the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women regarding the failure to adequately address 2 key findings of the evaluation of the Family Led Decision Making Trials; (*Take from evaluation report directly and embed link*)

1. The level of resourcing required to ensure program fidelity, capacity to meet demand and achieve the intended outcomes, in line with the program intent.
2. Changing entrenched individual and organisational cultures in the department to empower the Family-Led Decision Making service providers and families so that they can be independent. The willingness, capacity and capability of the statutory agency and its officers to effectively share and/or relinquish power and authority for decision making is fundamental to the success of the program.

It is QATSICPP's position that failing to adequately ameliorate these risks will inevitably compromise;

- The scope of service,
- The quality of service,
- The capacity to adequately respond to demand,
- The capacity to achieve desired outcomes and deliver the intended impact of the reform.

If there is insufficient funding available to deliver the intended benefit, to the scope, scale and quality anticipated, the Department must acknowledge this and contract only for what the organisations agree is achievable, commensurate with what the Department is willing to invest. If this falls short of the intent and compromises the ability to achieve the intended impact of the reform, the Department must be accountable for this.

The level of resources allocated should be commensurate with the stated priority.

This is not the case, and this is outside of the locus of control of service providers.

QATSICPP is of the opinion that the recent legislative amendments and the policy commitment outlined in the Our Way strategy provide optimal conditions to achieve

transformative change. However, a lack of active reform of Departmental processes such as commissioning and procurement, presents a significant impediment to the change envisaged. This reform program presents an opportunity to demonstrate a commitment to doing things differently, utilising place based planning approaches, empowered and engaged local partners and sharing decision making in the interests of children, families and communities.

## Processes

### Engagement:

QATSICPP contends that the process of transitioning resources (currently attached to the Recognised Entity Program) must commence with the direct engagement between the Department (Programs, Commissioning and Regional Directors) and current Recognised Entity Program providers within each distinct catchment area. The providers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Wellbeing Services, within prescribed catchments, should also be engaged in this process.

During this engagement, providers must be presented with an approved Statement of Program Intent for the Family Participation Program and a detailed, catchment profile to enable informed discussion, planning and decision making. Catchment profiles must contain the following information;

### *Data:*

*Regionally specific data to enable place based assessments of need and appropriate response from existing services including;*

- Number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children subject to notifications
- Substantiation Rates
- Harm types and where available risk profiles to understand local drivers of need
- Local trends and challenges (eg high prevalence of DFV, high prevalence of methamphetamine usage etc)
- Substantiation outcomes

*Substantiated, Child not in need of protection* - Information related to response, including rates of referral to FaCC, ATSI CFWB and other support services.

*Substantiated, Child in need of protection* - Intervention types and rates.

- Numbers of children and young people placed with Aboriginal kin
- Numbers of children in other placement types
- Issues related to kin placements within region.  
Are issues related to, for example;
  - processes for mapping and identification of kin?
  - Assessment processes?
  - Approval processes?
  - Availability of appropriate supports of Aboriginal Kinship carers?
- Number of children with current Cultural support plans? Identification of issues regarding quality of cultural support planning processes and outcomes.
- Rates of reunification or reconnection to Aboriginal Kinship placements?
- Rates of participation of family in existing decision-making processes?

*Investment information:*

Current Departmental regional investment profile, including;

Program/Service Type	Total Investment Amount	Target Client Numbers (ATSI)	Actual Client Numbers (ATSI)	Output Hours
ATSICFWB				
Recognised Entity				
Family and Child Connect				
Intensive Family Support				
Other Family Support (Secondary)				
Foster Kinship Care Services		# Carers		
Residential Care Services				
Domestic and Family Support Services				

#### Procurement:

A targeted *Request for Quote* process should be undertaken. Community Controlled Organisations, should be invited to submit fully costed proposals to deliver agreed functions, based on consideration of data contained within the catchment profiles, in order to satisfy the statement of program intent and deliver the primary outcome.

The Department must create a process that respects local expertise, demonstrates a willingness to enable Community Controlled Organisations to lead and cultivates innovation.

#### Clear, Timely Communication of Departmental Expectations:

The Department must ensure that providers are made aware that there is an expectation that proposals are oriented towards responding to the needs of families in order to optimise their participation in decision making processes.

It should be clearly stated that responding to the needs of the Department is not the purpose of this investment. This is a fundamental shift intended by this reform.

Organisations must be advised that there is an expectation that processes for ensuring access for families engaged in the FPP to the full scope of services offered through the ATSICFWB program must be clearly articulated in proposals.

#### Local Negotiation of Contracts

Determination of deliverables and agreed outcome measurement and performance reporting processes should be negotiated locally, by catchment.

These outcomes must be directly related to the program intent.

Where output measurement is to be utilised, these should be reasonable, negotiated on the basis of local need and, importantly, reflect the findings of the evaluation, ie the level of resource allocation required to enable quality processes and positive outcomes for families.