

Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs
Parliament House Canberra ACT 2600
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24 July 2020

Dear Committee Secretary

We thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Committee's Inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence. **The Institute of Child Protection Studies** (the Institute) seeks to enhance outcomes for children, young people and families through quality research, program evaluation, training and community education, advocacy and policy development. We are recognised for our expertise in child protection and the prevention of the abuse and neglect of children. We promote children's participation, the strengthening of service systems and practice and support the development of child-safe communities.

Towards A National Approach to Child Safety and Addressing Violence Against Children

The Institute's work in recent years has been particularly influenced by the *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse* and by the importance of coordinated and evidence-based strategies to promote and support the safety of children. The Royal Commission made detailed recommendations¹ as to the development and implementation of a comprehensive national strategy to prevent child sexual abuse. Such a national strategy should build on and extend the commitments and initiatives of the COAG-endorsed *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020* and coordinate with existing (and future) measures developed in implementation of the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022*.

These are important initiatives that should align with the development and implementation of child safe standards. In order that this national work is effective, we believe that the reforms and initiatives should be implemented consistently across the nation with a monitoring and evaluation framework developed and supported from the beginning of implementation.

These insights have led us to work closely with and in support of the work of Families Australia and the National Coalition on Child Safety and Wellbeing, the primary voice for the community and research sectors on the *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020*. In all material respects **the Institute endorses the insights and recommendations of the submission of Families Australia to this inquiry**. Our own submission will merely seek to give emphasis to the more detailed content of the Families Australia submission.

Our intent is that this coordinated national approach to child safety and addressing violence should assist to develop a consistent focus on improving the culture and practices of families, organisations and communities to create conditions of safety for children and young people². It will also assist in developing skills and capacity in addressing risks and building preventative practice in the community more broadly. This will include promoting more accurate knowledge and understanding of interpersonal safety and listening respectfully to children and young people and their concerns.

The voices of children and young people with lived experience must be elevated into policy, program and service delivery along with other key stakeholder representatives. More research is needed that engages directly with children and young people.

¹ Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse "Final Report – Preface and Executive Summary" (2017) Australia and particularly recommendations 6.1 to 6.5

² Higgins, Kaufman & Erooga "How can child welfare and youth-serving organisations keep children safe?" (2016) *Developing Practice: The Child, Youth and Family Work Journal*, Vol. 44, 48-64

Key Points from the Families Australia submission

The Institute supports the focus on addressing the rights and needs of women as victims and survivors of family, domestic and sexual violence. But so far, this focus has resulted in a failure to address the rights and needs of children and young people as victims and survivors.

There is insufficient coordination across policy agendas at the national level and, between the *National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children 2012-2022* and the *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020*.

The effects of family, domestic and sexual violence on children and young people are wide-ranging and include poorer physical and mental health, poorer social and economic functioning, and higher mortality³.

Children and young people play a key role in breaking intergenerational cycles of family, domestic and sexual violence as part of a prevention agenda and attitudinal change. Yet children and young people experiencing family, domestic and sexual violence continue to be seen as passive victims, collateral damage or are not visible or noticed at all.

Research has identified a need for better integration of services for children and young people including better communication and coordination between family violence services and other systems including child protection, justice, education and family support systems such as those that deliver maternal and child health services⁴.

We refer to our own recent study seeking to better understand the service system responses for children and young people exposed to domestic and family violence who come to the attention of the statutory child protection service in Queensland⁵. The findings highlighted the barriers to children and young people accessing child-centred, trauma-informed services that meet their needs and the limitations in the capacity and capability of child protection workers. Rather than services for children and young people, the focus was on services to the parents and the unchallenged assumption that parents accessing services were able to support the needs of the children or young people in their care.

Significant gaps in services available for children and young people exposed to, or experiencing, family, domestic and sexual violence have been identified in the research⁶. A service stock take and gap analysis across all jurisdictions, would enable a better understanding of the services available and inform a national policy response.

We endorse each of the recommendations of the Families Australia submission.

Yours sincerely



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³ Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry (2013). Taking Responsibility: A Roadmap for Queensland Child Protection.

⁴ AIFS CFCA (2015). Children's exposure to domestic and family violence - Key issues and responses.

⁵ Cahill, A., Stewart, J. & Higgins, D. (2020). Service system responses to children and young people in the statutory child protection system who have experienced or witnessed family violence. Canberra: Institute of Child Protection Studies, Australian Catholic University. Accessible at https://www.acu.edu.au/-/media/feature/pagecontent/richtext/about-acu/institutes-academies-and-centres/icps/_docs/service-system-responses-in-statutory-child-protection_family-violence_feb2020.pdf?la=en&hash=43E90FEDE58C5838DDE52DFC889498CE

⁶ Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety. (2020). Violence prevention and early intervention for mothers and children with disability: Building promising practice: Key findings and future directions (Research to policy and practice, 16/2020). Sydney: ANROWS. Accessible at <https://d2rn9gno7zhxqg.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/25091746/ANROWS-RtPP-valentine-parentschildren-DFV.pdf>