



**Children in Care
Collective**



2023 ACHIEVEMENTS

We are always better together than we are apart.

Acknowledgement

The Children in Care Collective acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of this country, and honours their connection to land, water and community. We pay our respect to them, their cultures and customs, and to Elders past, present and emerging.

We are always better together than we are apart

The Children in Care Collective is an interagency think-tank formed in 2016 to share experience, discuss best practice, learn from researchers and policy experts in out of home care and advocate for change.

Members of the Collective are out-of-home care service providers and academics centres in Australia. Together they provide a unique combination of practitioner and academic wisdom and experience. The Collective uses evidence-based practice, practitioner knowledge, research and the expert knowledge of children and young people themselves to address difficult systemic issues for children and young people with complex needs living in out-of-home care.

The Collective's goals are:

- building our practice capabilities based on academic and expert practitioner evidence
- partnering with others to improve outcomes for children and young people in out-of-home care
- advocating to ensure the rights of all children are recognised and respected, prioritising the safety and wellbeing of children and young people in care with complex needs
- establishing a national network of service providers, practitioners and academics working collaboratively and proactively to improve the care of children with complex needs living in out-of-home care.

A Message from the Chair

I would like to acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which I write this message – the Turrbal and Yuggera people and acknowledge the deep and long history of stewardship of the lands on which we meet as a Collective across this vast continent and pay my deepest respects to the Elders who guide and support us, for the leaders of the future and for the children, young people, and families we have the privilege to support.

It is hard to believe that 2024 is well and truly underway. 2023 was another extremely busy year for everyone but despite the range of pressures– economic, regulatory, political and social - the members of the Children in Care Collective have continued to lead and drive solutions to difficult systemic practice issues faced by the sector. We welcomed new agencies to the CCC and it is great to see our network continue to grow. Our meetings were graciously joined by many guest speakers and partners who helped shape our thinking, guide our work plan and support our vision.

I would like to thank all the member agencies of the Children in Care Collective for your feedback and support throughout the year. It remains true that we are always better together than we are apart. I would also like to thank our partners including government, non-government, peaks and the various academic institutions who have supported the CCC in 2023. Thanks also to the many other staff who assist the work of Collective behind the scenes in terms of web, technical, administrative support and of course Lindy Annakin our co-ordinator who helps keep us all in check and does a wonderful job in ensuring all the moving parts run smoothly and helping us to move from words to actions. I would also like to thank Life Without Barriers for their ongoing financial commitment and support of the CCC. This support has been greatly appreciated and members of the Collective have acknowledged the impact this support has had for the CCC over the years.

Whilst the challenges we face into 2024 are strong I am confident that we will continue to harness our energy to make a positive impact for those who need us most. Sadly, this will be my last message as Chair of the Children in Care Collective as I move on from Life Without Barriers to a new role as CEO of the Parenting Research Centre. I would like to congratulate Lisa Giacomelli on her unanimous support from members of the CCC to commence in the Chair role and I look forward to seeing the Collective go from strength to strength under Lisa's leadership.

Finally, thanks for the vote of confidence from members for allowing me to Chair over the last few years and for your wonderful support, energy and enthusiasm – it has been a privilege and honour to be in the company of so many dedicated champions for those who need us most. Thank you for all you have done, are doing and will continue to do to drive positive change.

Best wishes for 2024 and beyond.

Rob Ryan
Chair, Children in Care Collective

Vision of Success

The Collective's vision of success emphasises its focus on good outcomes for children and young people growing up in care.

Children and young people actively participate in decisions that enable them to grow up healthy, safe, strong and self-determining, with information about sources of assistance and support being readily available and accessible.

In order to achieve this vision, the Collective has identified five policy issues in the out-of-home care system as priorities for action.

Policy Priorities in 2023

- Improving the health and well-being of children and young people in out-of-home care.
- Partnering with ACCOs and First Nations peak bodies to identify strategies to increase the number of Aboriginal children placed with Aboriginal community-controlled organisations.
- Improving support for children in out-of-home care who have experienced sexual abuse or display harmful sexual behaviours.
- Better supporting carers of children and young people with complex needs.
- Improving planning and support for young people transitioning to independence.

We acknowledge there are many other issues and are willing to support others to address the need for change where the outcome is improving the experience of children and young people growing up in out-of-home care system and supporting them to become healthy, strong and self-determining adults.

The Collective defines 'complex needs' in the following way:

A child or young person with complex needs has a range of interrelated difficulties that require coordinated support from multi-disciplinary care teams. Their challenges extend beyond early and developmental trauma and frequently include health conditions, disability, suicidality and mental illness, harmful behaviours to themselves and others, and drug and alcohol use.

A child or young person with complex needs living in out-of-home care displays ongoing behaviours that impact the safety of themselves and/or others, including their carer(s), and the stability of their placement.

Complex needs result from clinical, behavioural and environmental factors. The frequent instability of out-of-home care placements, particularly residential care, can of itself create complexity for a young person.

The term "complex needs" acknowledges that children in out-of-home care often have experiences, traumas, or vulnerabilities that may have a significant impact on their emotional, psychological, physical, and social development. Without the right supports and services, a child or young person's complex needs may consistently undermine their capacity to engage in activities that contribute to health, safety, wellbeing and happiness.



Advocacy

The Collective seeks to influence policy and practice improvements by sharing its collective experience and wisdom with decision-makers and key stakeholders.

Submissions

Submission to the inquiry by the National Children's Commissioner into the opportunities for reform of youth justice and related systems across Australia, June 2023

Submission to the NSW Minister for Family and Communities and Secretary of NSW Department of Communities and Justice on the Evaluation of the Permanency Support Program, December 2023

Campaign support

The Collective declared its support for a constitutionally enshrined First Nations Voice to Parliament. It fully endorses the establishment of a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Commissioner, signing SNAICC's joint statement and making representations to the Prime Minister and the Minister for Social Services

The Children in Care Collective supports the call on the Australian Council of Attorneys-General by the Australian and New Zealand Children's Commissioners and Guardians (ANZCCG) to raise the age of criminal responsibility from 10 years of age to the internationally recognised standard of 14 years. The Collective made representations to Attorneys General in all Australian jurisdictions.

Speakers/Guests at CCC Bi-Monthly Meetings

February Adele Cox, Director Sector Development, SNAICC: SNAICC's current work and priorities and opportunities for contribution from the Collective

April Jamie Crosby, Families Australia: Background to Safe and Supported The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021-2031

June Dr Karen McLean, MBBS FRACP MEpid PhD, Paediatrician and Vulnerable Child Health Lead, The Centre for Community Child Health, Royal Children's Hospital: Health for children and young people in out-of-home care –research and advocacy experiences

August Alex Hains, Executive Director, and Alicia Harwood, A/Director, National Mental Health Commission: The National Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy Journey

Professor Philip Mendes, Director Social Inclusion and Social Policy Research Unit, Monash University and A/Professor

Melissa O'Donnell, Dep. Dir. Research, Australian Centre for Child Protection: The introduction of extended out-of-home care (OOHC) till 21 years in Australia: A mapping of policy, legislation and programs in each jurisdiction.

October Maree Walk, CEO, ACWA
Amanda Paton, Deputy Director Practice, Australian Centre for Child Protection, University of South Australia: An update on research about harmful sexual behaviours: work in WA and SA and how this fits with the national perspective

Research

In 2024 we worked on mapping access and blocks to mental health and wellbeing of children and young people in care in the Hunter Central Coast district. We conducted a survey of out-of-home care service providers in the district and a report of the survey results, together with the review of CCC agency experience conducted in 2022, is underway.

The premise of this project is that all children and young people in out-of-home care should have access to appropriate and sufficient mental health support and healing – as a right. Even when children entering care have not experienced abuse or neglect, they will have experienced trauma in some form.

Members

The Collective member agencies are located in all states and territories in Australia, with several operating nationally. The members are:

Allambi Care
Anglicare NSW South | NSW West | ACT
Anglicare Sydney
CareSouth
Key Assets Australia
Life Without Barriers
Lifestyle Solutions
Mackillop Family Services
Marist180
Pathfinders
Settlement Services International
Uniting NSW/ACT
Institute of Child Protection Studies (ICPS) - Australian Catholic University
Australian Centre for Child Protection (ACCP) - University of South Australia
Research Centre for Children and Families (RCCF) – University of Sydney.

Lifestyle Solutions joined the Collective in 2023.



For more details about the Children in Care Collective and to contact us, please visit:

www.childrenincarecollective.com.au

