

A BLUEPRINT FOR A NATIONAL CHILDREN'S PLAN

Let's make children a national policy priority in Australia

Children should be a central focus of our society and all government action. Childhood is a unique opportunity to set the foundations for positive lifelong outcomes, and when we provide children with the support they need to thrive, children and society more broadly benefit. Yet, for many children and communities across Australia, this promise is not being met.

For many children, Australia is one of the best countries in the world to grow up in



Every child in Australia should have the opportunity to reach their fullest potential and thrive, however, despite significant effort over many decades, our existing systems continue to prevent us from making this a reality. In policy, budgets and services, children are consistently overlooked, dealt with in responses designed primarily for adults, or responded to through uncoordinated and fragmented approaches that do not recognise or respect their unique experiences and needs. These challenges for children and their rights in Australia are long-standing, but they are solvable if we:

 <p>TRANSFORM how society thinks about and engages with children, and how we understand childhood</p>	 <p>CREATE a coordinated approach to supporting children's development and responding to their needs, with policy, funding and administrative arrangements to match</p>
 <p>ELEVATE children to the centre of the national conversation and understand that children have rights that must be respected</p>	 <p>RECOGNISE that when children's rights are realised and made real, this leads to better outcomes for all</p>

Governments have the opportunity and the responsibility to drive this fundamental shift in how children – and childhood – are understood, approached and invested in across Australia. This will require a clear shared commitment and coordinated action at a national level. The natural vehicle for such action is a **National Children's Plan**.



THE BLUEPRINT

A National Children's Plan would:

- Establish a clear vision for children and childhood in Australia
- Provide a long-term, comprehensive and overarching framework for all policy and decision-making that affects children, with clear policy and investment commitments and implementation plans to ensure they are translated to effective action
- Place children at its centre, informed by children themselves, and understand children holistically in the various contexts of their ecologies – their families, schools, communities – no matter where they are.

In doing so, the Plan would address the individual, social and economic dimensions of childhood, including the macro forces and structures that shape and determine children's experiences and outcomes in childhood and throughout their lives. It would explicitly encompass an intergenerational lens and, by connecting a clear vision for childhood in Australia with a comprehensive plan for achieving it, make Australia a world leader.



By providing a clear vision for childhood in Australia - the first chapter in all our lives - a National Children's Plan would effectively articulate a roadmap for the ambitions of Australian society as a whole.

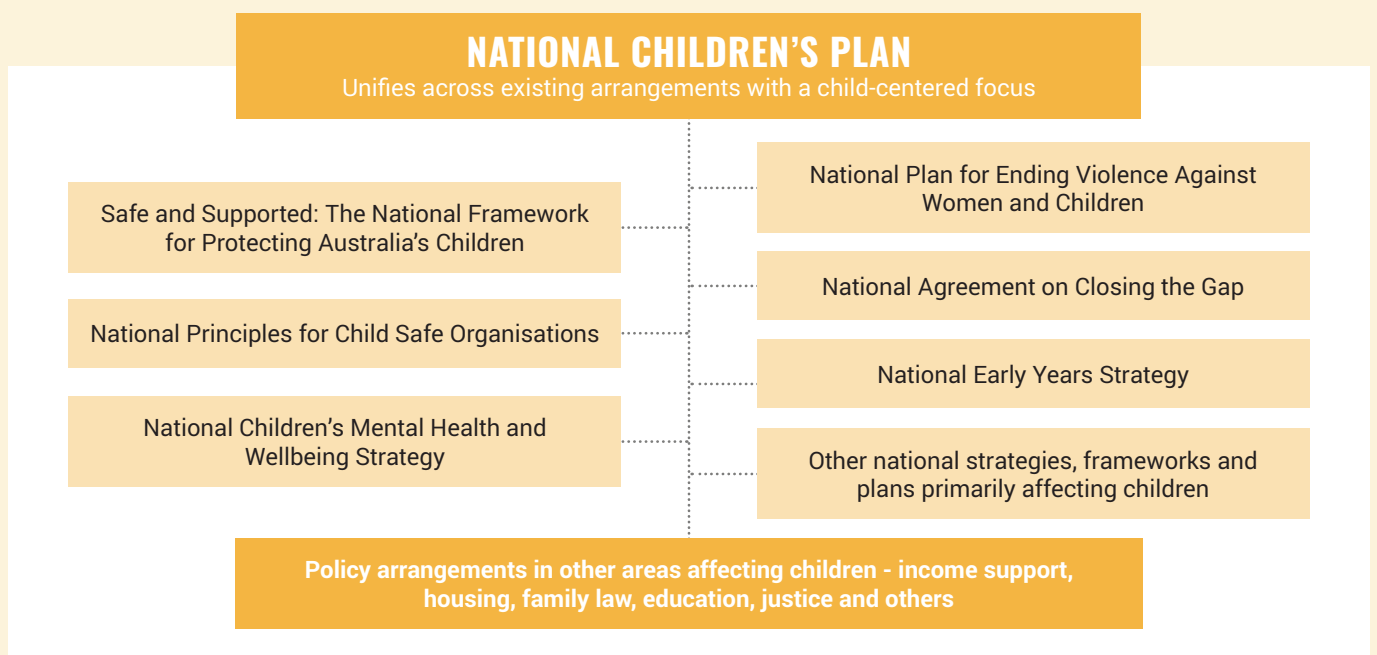
It would enable the realisation of the enormous and compounding human, civic and economic benefits of early investment, prevention of harm, and targeted early intervention for greater collective wellbeing. Ultimately, it would provide the pathway to improved quality of life and prosperity in all its dimensions for all members of our society – a truly transformative change for this and future generations.



UNIFYING OUR APPROACH

A National Children's Plan would provide a long-term and comprehensive plan for protecting, promoting and fulfilling children's rights in Australia, extending for at least 10 years.

The Plan would establish overall outcomes, priorities, and accountabilities in relation to children, supported by specific investment, action plans and oversight. It would also unify the various existing national plans, frameworks, strategies and agreements relating to children, connecting and filling the gaps between them, and create a cohesive, coordinated and joined-up system that is organised around children. It would connect portfolios that are not usually thought of as 'children's portfolios', recognising the different roles and responsibilities of the Federal, State and Territory governments, while highlighting their shared objectives and interests, and opportunities for collaboration, coordinated investment and shared accountability for outcomes.





CHILDREN AT THE CENTRE

The Plan would centre, and take as its starting point, children themselves, and would be deeply and directly informed by children. It would reflect their own experiences and views on what will make a difference for their development in services, supports and material conditions, rather than existing ways of doing things or discredited assumptions about childhood and children's experiences of their lives.

Children would be meaningfully and actively involved in all elements of a National Children's Plan. This isn't just the right thing to do, it is the smart thing to do - policies designed in consultation with those they are made for are more tailored to need and fit-for-purpose, producing better outcomes, improving efficiency, and saving resources.

At all points, children's involvement needs to be meaningful, safe, and supported by appropriate resourcing. It should not be tokenistic. There would be clarity at each stage about the extent of children's participation and influence, taking into account children's evolving capacities, and with explicit discussion of the potential for change and limitations on influence arising from their involvement.

There would be a focus on enabling participation that is representative and reflective of the diversity of children and their experiences in Australia. In particular, this should include children whose experiences are typically not represented in processes such as these.



PRINCIPLES AND POLICY FOCUSES

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which enshrines children's rights, is the most ratified treaty in the world because there is a near global consensus on the importance of childhood. A National Children's Plan would be grounded in a small number of overarching principles reflecting a child rights framework, including the four general principles of the CRC itself – freedom from discrimination (Article 2), the best interests principle (Article 3), the right to life, survival and development (Article 6) and the right to be heard (Article 12).

The Plan would focus on the areas of greatest importance to upholding children's rights in Australia. Twelve policy focus areas have been identified as indicative priorities for the Plan to address the most significant underlying drivers of children's rights violations and impediments to better outcomes for children in Australia. Many are interrelated, and some are of different types than others. They are intended only as a starting point, and to highlight the importance of a comprehensive approach to identifying the policy areas that most matter to children's outcomes and experiences of their rights.

 Freedom from poverty	 Standard of living	 Supportive family	 Connection to culture	 Safety	 Child-centered systems
 Rights in youth justice	 Health and wellbeing	 Access to education	 Healthy environment	 Digital wellbeing	 Participation



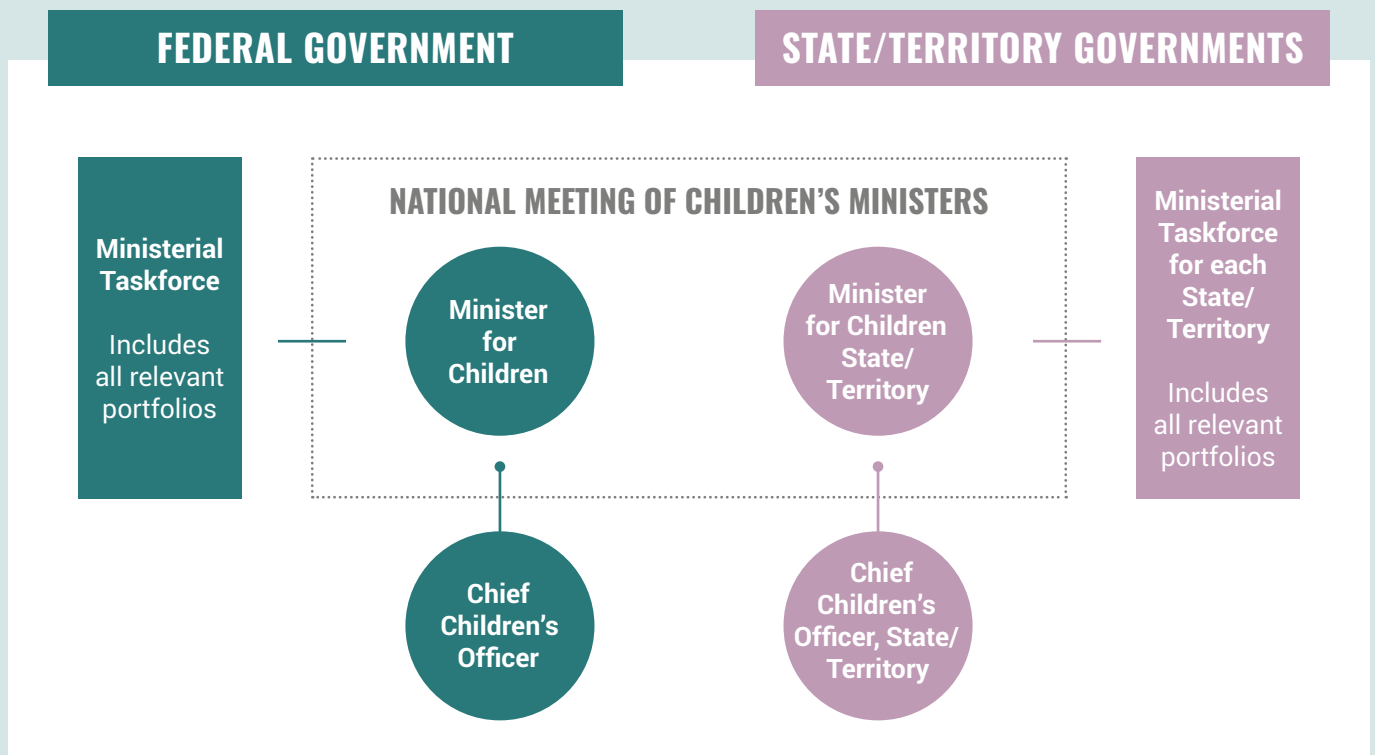
A specific focus is required on the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. The arrangements supporting this focus should be determined by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and organisations through an appropriate process and with meaningful involvement by children. This may include the development of a specific national strategy or plan for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. This could be informed by and align with the National Children's Plan, allowing for the necessary knowledges, approaches and perspectives being fully embedded in all relevant policy and action from an appropriate basis of strengths, expertise and community involvement.



GOVERNANCE

The Plan would establish governance and accountability arrangements that ensure monitoring and oversight of children's rights across Australia and implementation of the Plan itself. It would include commitments by the Federal, State and Territory governments to appoint a Cabinet-level Minister for Children. This Minister would be responsible for the wellbeing of children aged up to 18, including leadership and coordination at Ministerial level across other portfolios affecting children, through a Ministerial Taskforce or similar.

The Minister would be supported by an appropriately resourced departmental unit or office located in a central agency, potentially including a Chief Children's Officer with an independent coordination and leadership role within the public service, reporting directly to the Minister. A regular Ministers' Meeting or similar could be established to provide a mechanism for meaningful oversight and collaboration between jurisdictions at Ministerial level. The Plan would include commitments to whole-of-government mechanisms to ensure strong accountability for delivering on outcomes. These could include tools to consider the impact of government decision-making like child rights impact assessments, and making children visible in child-responsive budgeting.





OUTCOMES, DATA AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The National Children's Plan would set out clear, agreed outcomes and actions to be jointly pursued by all Australian governments and regularly reported on, through an Australian Child Rights Index and Scorecard.

- The Index and Scorecard would include an explicit outcomes and measurement framework for children's rights, as well as lead indicators, to measure and monitor the realisation of children's rights and their wellbeing and development.
- It would incorporate child-centred indicators of rights fulfillment and child wellbeing that are co-designed with children and reflect children's experiences of their rights and children's own priorities.
- Civil society would play an important role in developing and implementing the Plan and ensuring accountability by governments for achievement of its intended outcomes.
- State and Territory Children's Commissioners, Guardians and Advocates have a critical role in monitoring, protecting and advocating for children's rights. They should be consulted and involved in all relevant arrangements under the National Children's Plan.
- The National Children's Commissioner has a unique role, as the independent Commissioner and member of the Australian Human Rights Commission. This role should be recognised and promoted in the National Children's Plan, and embedded – with appropriate resourcing – across all aspects of the Plan, with advice from the Commissioner themselves.



Let's unlock the potential of Australia's children, now and in the future, by creating a **NATIONAL CHILDREN'S PLAN**

For more information on the Blueprint for a National Children's Plan, please visit <http://childrightstaskforce.org.au/> or contact Howard Choo, Save the Children & 54 reasons (howard.choo@savethechildren.org.au) or John Livingstone, UNICEF Australia (livingstone@unicef.org.au)

This Blueprint has been developed by the Australian Child Rights Taskforce. The Taskforce is the peak body for child rights in Australia and includes over 100 organisations and individuals with expertise in children's rights.