

Information sharing and mandatory reporting law changes

Making it easier to better support ACT children, young people and families early

The ACT Government is reforming child, youth and family services to ensure we strengthen families and keep children and young people safe and connected. Legislative change is a foundational element of this plan for reform. Proposed changes to the *Children and Young People Act 2008* will deliver significant, tangible, positive change for children, young people, families, carers and workers who intersect with the child protection system. The new approaches to information sharing and mandatory reporting are central to achieving this.

What's changing

Information sharing and mandatory reporting laws are proposed to change so services working with children and families have greater flexibility and authority to get families the help they need at the right time.

The new information sharing model will enable greater, more proactive exchange of information directly between agencies involved with the safety and wellbeing of children and young people. This will enable services to collaborate more freely and together coordinate supports to meet individual needs.

The changes to mandatory reporting laws will shift focus to a child's holistic risk. Research shows children and young people who are abused or neglected, are frequently harmed in multiple ways. Expanding the abuse types in legislation will enable the ACT Government to better respond to the immediate needs of children and young people, and better understand and evaluate the data to ensure services are designed and delivered to meet these needs into the future.

Abuse types and required occupations to report will therefore be expanded, balanced against a new assessment model with more targeted reporting thresholds and better information sharing abilities.

These will empower people who work with and for children and young people to work collaboratively across the sector and seek out more appropriate and tailored early support services. This early, proactive action will shift families away from the statutory system when such an intrusive response is not needed, and instead towards services and supports that help these families achieve better outcomes.

Adjusting the reporting threshold will also better identify those children and young people who do need statutory involvement and enable them to get the help they need. See diagram at end for the proposed threshold change.

What the changes mean for information sharers

Information sharing plays a pivotal role when working with vulnerable children, young people and their families. The new information sharing model (see flowchart at end) streamlines the existing framework and will support prescribed agencies to collaborate and share information more easily.

By equipping agencies with more complete information, workers will be better able to develop and coordinate early supports for vulnerable families. It will also help them balance the issues of care and protection, consent and confidentiality, and know when to escalate concerns.

Legislation delivered in practice: Introduction of Structured Decision Making® tools

The transformative change Bill 2 will deliver will be strengthened in practice by the introduction of Structured Decision Making®(SDM) tools. These are a suite of internationally recognised child protection tools based on evidence and research, and ours will be designed specifically for the ACT context.

SDM tools will be used by mandated reporters and child protection staff to guide their decision-making at critical assessment points. This will improve the structure and consistency of these decisions. The tools will help mandated reporters decide if a report should be made, and help child protection staff assess referrals and identify those families most in need.

This integration of SDM tools will not only empower professionals with robust decision-making support, but also ensure a more standardised and informed approach to child protection processes.

What the changes mean for mandated reporters

Mandatory reporting is a key part of our child protection system. The proposed changes will provide easier pathways for reporters to know how to support families and ensure more timely, effective and targeted responses to the specific needs of the children and young people they are concerned about.

The impact on mandated reporters and children, young people and their families is intended to be positive. It will not be more work, but more informed and more efficient work that better enables reporters to address the needs of children and young people.

What will you need?

We know these changes will require agencies and services to adapt their work practices. So, what will you need to do that successfully? Time, training, financial support, human resources?

This is what we want to know so you can be supported through these changes and continue to confidently perform your important role in helping to keep children and young people in our community safe and connected.

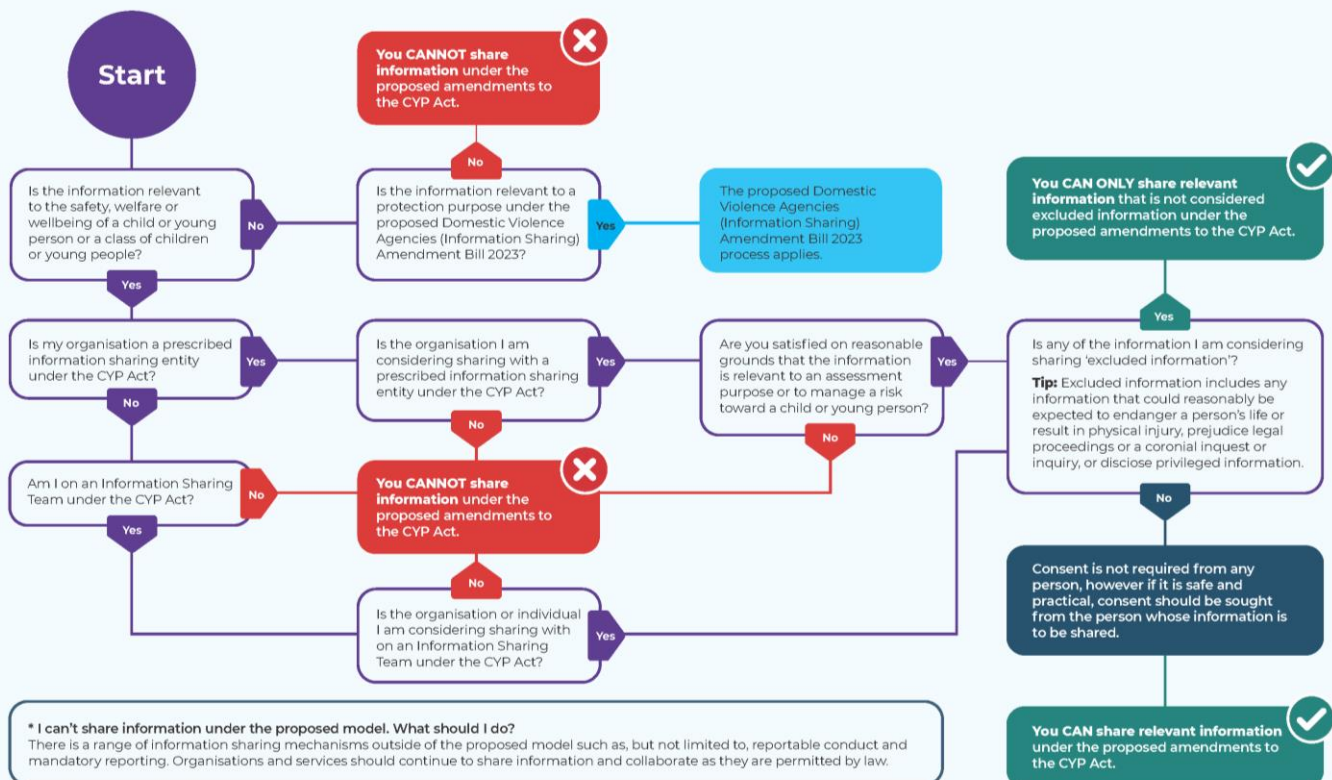
It will also help Government align implementation of other reforms impacting on the child and family sector so workforces can effectively make these changes and understand their obligations without unnecessary stress or pressure.

Next steps

Join the conversation and tell us what you need to realise these changes and shift our child protection system for the better. Our information paper has all the details about the proposed changes.

Visit [YourSay Conversations: Changing the Children and Young People Act 2008](#).

Can I share information under the proposed amendments to the Children and Young People Act 2008?



MANDATORY REPORTING:

Current vs proposed future reporting thresholds

Current threshold

You believe on **reasonable grounds** a child or young person may have or is experiencing

- sexual abuse
- non-accidental physical injury



Future threshold

You believe on **reasonable grounds**

a child or young person **is at risk of significant harm**

Harm caused by 1 or more...

- sexual abuse
- grooming or sexual exploitation
- physical abuse
- emotional abuse
- basic physical, emotional, developmental or psychological needs are not being met
- being exposed to family violence

Harm may be...

- a **single** act, omission or circumstance
- a **combination or accumulation** of acts, omissions or circumstances