

Communiqué

Child and Family Services Reform Forum on 6 December 2022

On 6 December 2022, the ACT Government held a forum to progress the implementation of recent child and family services strategies, with a particular focus on the first 4-year action plan under the *Next Steps for Our Kids 2022-2030 (Next Steps)* strategy.

This forum was the second in a series that brought together a wide range of partners, including government, academic and community sector representatives to discuss broader system reform and how to support collective action to build a stronger, fairer and more effective service system to support children, young people and families in all their diversity.

The forum was hosted by Minister for Families and Community Services Rachel Stephen-Smith and facilitated by Nicole Deen of Kasama Consulting. Two workshops were facilitated by Ms Melanie Saballa, Executive Branch Manager – Next Steps – Reform and Strategy Implementation and Ms Silvia Lopic, Acting Executive Group Manager – Child, Youth and Families.

The day included a panel discussion with government, academic and community sector leaders, followed by two workshops that sought participant feedback on the draft 4-year action plan for the *Next Steps* strategy.

Over 80 partners attended the forum, including representatives from community organisations, academic partners and ACT Government Directorates.

Minister's Address

In her opening address, Minister Stephen-Smith reminded participants that they had come together in March 2021 and reconfirmed their shared goal of co-designing a service system that truly supports children, young people and their families. She shared the importance of co-developing a governance mechanism to support joint government and community sector decision-making that would enable the broader reform of the service system. A key learning from the process so far was the need to establish a layered approach that enables wide engagement and supports a mix of governance, strategy and development activities. The Minister also emphasised the need for collective action and advocacy, and a focus on earlier support to children, young people and families.

The Minister outlined other significant pieces of work in the broader reform agenda for children, young people and families that sit alongside and interact with the *Next Steps* strategy. These include:

- Best Start for Canberra's Children: the First 1000 Days Strategy
- Maternity in Focus: the ACT Public Maternity System Plan
- Set-up for Success
- ACT Wellbeing Framework and linked Child and Young People Lens
- Healthy Canberra: ACT Preventive Health Plan.

Panel discussion

A panel discussion was conducted with four leaders from the community and government sector:

- Frances Crimmins, Chief Executive Officer, YWCA Canberra
- Selina Walker, Chairperson, Yerrabi Yurwang
- Stephanie Hodson, Chief Executive Officer, Relationships Australia Canberra & Region
- Fiona May, Senior Director, Industry Development, Community Services Directorate

The discussion's topic centred on disrupting old habits and practices and creating an enabling environment for systemic change and reform. The scene was strongly set in the opening remarks which outlined the interplay between Federal and State policies and how they can reduce the availability of the right levers to make an impact across the social determinants of health here in the ACT. Panel members shared some recent case studies which spoke to some of the barriers that exist in the current system, the role gender can play and how risk is perceived and influences practice. A key theme from all panel members was the importance of values based working including a commitment to open, communication trust, and respect and the need to genuinely listen to people, respect their perspectives and meet the family where they are. They also shared that system change depends on individual changes and that everyone has a role to play, starting with questioning our own biases and assumptions before we attempt to support others. Panellists also stressed that we need more data, research and evaluation of programs to better design and improve programs, and that funding is needed for organisations to conduct this critical work.

Stakeholder workshops

Two workshops were held with a focus on seeking participant feedback to support the development of the first 4-year action plan under *Next Steps* strategy. While both workshops followed the same format, they each approached the tasks with a lens from one of the strategy domains - Strengthening Families or Partnering with the Community.

In the morning session, participants looked at a strategy map and were asked to review the reform elements and commitments that were grouped into three priority areas – Foundational, Critical and Important priorities. Participants considered if the Foundational Priorities (the base or foundation from what everything else develops) were the right ones, and if there were any gaps or changes that were needed. They also reviewed the draft Action Plan, presented as a Strawman, and provided feedback on the layout and format of the plan.

In the afternoon session, participants considered and provided feedback on the opportunities to be involved in the implementation of the strategy, what actions could they contribute to and what might their involvement look like. As a key element of the *Next Steps* strategy is to establish effective strategic partnerships, participants provided feedback on how to know if this has been achieved.

Initial Feedback from participants

The workshops generated much discussion and thoughtful input from participants who brought their diverse experiences and perspectives to the table. There was common feedback around:

- the need for greater workforce training and development, including:
 - a focus on recruitment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff
 - opportunities for shared training across organisations



- interoperability between key pieces of legislation
- information sharing between organisations
- the size of the child, youth and family sector
 - how is this defined
 - how we can bring sub-groups from the sector together
 - opportunities to create an integrated services system.

What next?

The first 4-year action plan under *Next Steps* is due for release in early 2023 and the Next Steps Reform and Strategy Implementation team are committed to ensure it is co-designed with partners. The team will now undertake more detailed analysis of the feedback provided during the workshops which will then be used to refine the Action Plan. This analysis will be available in early 2023 at <https://yoursayconversations.act.gov.au/children-and-family-services-reform/next-steps-our-kids-2022-2030>

The team can also be contacted for further information or feedback: CBRStepsUp@act.gov.au or ACTEarlySupport@act.gov.au.



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