

# Queensland

In Queensland, the government progressed its long-term *Our Way Strategy (2017-2037)* commitment to co-design service system responses for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families through the release of a second action plan, *Changing Tracks 2 (2020-2022)*.

The First Children and Families Board, with majority Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander membership, continues to have oversight of the *Our Way Strategy*. An external evaluation of *Our Way* commenced in 2020 which will align with the Wellbeing Outcomes Framework developed in 2019. Also released in 2020 is a whole-of-government Queensland Healing Strategy developed by the Healing Foundation.

Key achievements in the past 12 months include:

- Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak (QATSICPP), in consultation with members, finalised the Family Participation Program (FPP) guidelines – a first for government-funded service guidelines to be written by a peak body. These guidelines inform the state-wide delivery of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family-led decision-making and have so far resulted in improved referral processes and engagement of families.
- Collaboration agreements between the Queensland Government's Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women, QATSICPP and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations (ATSICCOs) were developed to progress the transfer of legislated delegations from the chief executive to an appropriate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander entity. Early adopter sites are soon to take up delegated functions.
- First jurisdictional use of the Family Matters Practice Reflection Tool to assist services to operate according to the Family Matters building blocks.
- QATSICPP and members leading development of a Family Caring for Family model of kinship care.
- Appointment of a chief Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health minister.
- Release of the *Every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student Succeeding Strategy*, in line with the Advancing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education action plan.

While these initiatives embed greater self-determination and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led solutions, Queensland faces the following challenges:

- **Continued low rates of children admitted to out-of-home care being placed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kin and carers** (30.9% compared to national average of 65%, down from 36.5% in 2018 and 55.3% in 2017). Potential reasons for this include change fatigue from frequent system reform, continued use of culturally inappropriate (structured decision-making) tools, and difficulties in kin carer households meeting Blue Card assessment levels that now include criminal history to age of 10 and non-child-related offences.

- **A decrease in proportional investment in ATSICCOs.** Although the total funds provided to ATSICCOs increased slightly, this is the third year in a row for a decrease in overall proportion of funding.
- **Provision of data on key areas such as service access and reunification.** In 2017, the Queensland Government stated a commitment to develop aligned measures, however it remains unable to provide data on key areas requested for this report.

Positive outcomes achieved in this reporting period include the funding of youth justice and domestic violence workers in ATSICCOs, as well as improved collaboration among the Department of Justice, Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women and ATSICCOs. This is grounded in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family-led decision-making and fully implementing the Child Placement Principle.

However, recently legislative amendments were tabled (the *Child Protection and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2020*) that include adoption as a permanency option (albeit the last preference) for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, despite strong opposition voiced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders and a wide range of non-Indigenous supporters during consultations.

Reactionary policy and legislation decisions that do not consider cultural rights, and inflict long-lasting trauma and negative impacts on social determinations of health and wellbeing, challenge the progress made in recent years.

Across the next 12 months, Queensland Family Matters hopes to see:

- evidence-based investment in prevention and early intervention services that are effective at diverting families from the child protection system, that demonstrate cultural capability and resource partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities that value cultural knowledge, expertise, leadership and solutions
- the commitment made to improve data quality realised, with local level catchment profiles made available to provide line of sight for outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
- independent oversight on implementation of the Child Placement Principle in child protection decisions, and a dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's commissioner to turn around the rates of placement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kin and carers.