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Getting it Right Early: South Australian Government's Prevention and Early Intervention Strategy for Child Abuse and Neglect 2018

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PREMIER'S FOREWORD

Getting it Right Early: South Australian Government's Prevention and Early Intervention Strategy for Child Abuse and Neglect provides the framework for South Australia to get it right for our most vulnerable children and families. It commits the South Australian government to reduce the number of children and families requiring a child protection response through a focus on prevention and early intervention initiatives. Sitting as part of this Government's broader child wellbeing and child safety reform package, it highlights the need for a fundamental shift in the focus of our investment and our efforts so that we are providing the right early help to our children, families and communities before they are in crisis.

In *The Life They Deserve*, the report of the Royal Commission into the Child Protection system, the need for change across the continuum of child protection services was made clear. *A Fresh Start* illustrates the Government's response to the Royal Commission. This Strategy builds upon the commitment to prevention and early intervention outlined in *A Fresh Start*. It represents a new way of focusing Government services and will require joined up efforts of Government, non-government organisations and community.

Every year, South Australia is proud to welcome about 20,000 new born children as citizens of our State. Amongst these children, we welcome about 1,000 Aboriginal new born children. These Aboriginal children belong to the oldest living culture in the world, a strong and resilient culture that has survived and thrived in spite of the continued experience of disadvantage, racism and trauma. Together with a number of children we welcome from interstate and overseas, these children are our future educators, our artists, our tradies, our sports people, our innovators, our volunteers, and our leaders. They will also be the aunties, uncles, mothers and fathers of tomorrow's children. In *Getting it Right Early*, we will improve the life pathways of future generations of South Australians by reducing vulnerability to child abuse and neglect and supporting every child to thrive.

JAY WEATHERILL (signature)

Premier of South Australia

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INTRODUCTION

A Fresh Start is the Government of South Australia's response to the *Child Protection System's Royal Commission Report: The Life They Deserve* and outlines what is changing in the child protection system. It shifts the focus from solely responding to abuse to a heightened emphasis on strengthening families before they reach crisis point and delivering targeted early intervention for our most vulnerable families. As part of the *A Fresh Start* response, the Early Intervention Research Directorate is responsible for creating and coordinating a five year whole of government prevention and early intervention strategy. This first phase of the strategy sets the framework and the first year of commitments for the Government's prevention and early intervention effort. Over the next five years the strategy will be revised to incorporate new evidence from data and practice, evaluation of what works and ongoing research to shape how we deliver prevention and early intervention initiatives. Further phases of reform will be implemented progressively, learning as we go. Future decisions will be based on evidence and a commitment to ongoing evaluation.

Getting it Right Early: South Australian Government's Prevention and Early Intervention Strategy for Child Abuse and Neglect 2018 sets a course for action to reduce vulnerability for South Australia's children and young people. By adopting a public health approach, the Strategy recognises the multiple and inter-related risk factors that impact on the lives of families and children, and the need for shared responsibility and accountability. It is part of the Government's commitment to broader reform to deliver an integrated response to children and families along a continuum of care and support.

This Strategy's focus is on building a comprehensive understanding based on data and evidence about prevention and early intervention supports for children and families vulnerable to child abuse and neglect and then redesigning our system to ensure the best possible outcomes for these children and families.

This Strategy sets four priorities that combine improved ***evidence and intelligence*** gathering, ***system reforms*** that strengthen the capacity to provide prevention and early intervention supports, recognising and responding to the ***over-representation of Aboriginal people in the child protection system***, and ***targeting services*** for those with greatest need. Ultimately, implementing this Strategy will enable us to:

- identify the risk factors that make contact with child protection services more likely
- know who is experiencing these risks
- understand what will make a difference for families and communities
- design and deliver services that work
- maximise the impact of investment.

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The Strategy has been developed in consultation with key government, non-government and community stakeholders, including targeted conversations with Aboriginal leaders and community representatives. Conversations will continue through the actions included in this strategy and in designing and shaping the next phases of the strategy.

WHAT IS PREVENTION AND EARLY INTERVENTION?

The term **'prevention'** refers to actions designed to stop something before it actually occurs, or to reduce the likelihood of predictable outcomes. The term **'early intervention'** refers to actions designed to change the direction of people's lives who show signs of an identified problem, or who exhibit risk factors or vulnerabilities for an identified problem. Early intervention is the early help (e.g. information, services, and policies) necessary to combat identified risks. A goal of early intervention is to prevent the escalation of serious issues that may require a more intensive response.

In the context of this Strategy, the focus on prevention and early intervention is to identify and offer early support to families with known risk factors understood to increase the likelihood of children coming into contact with the child protection system. Ultimately, effective prevention and early intervention initiatives will positively impact the lives of vulnerable children and, over time, reduce the number of children requiring a formal child protection response.

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OUR VISION

The right services are available to the right people, at the right time, in order to reduce child abuse and neglect.

FOUNDATIONS OF A PREVENTION AND EARLY INTERVENTION STRATEGY

We will change the system

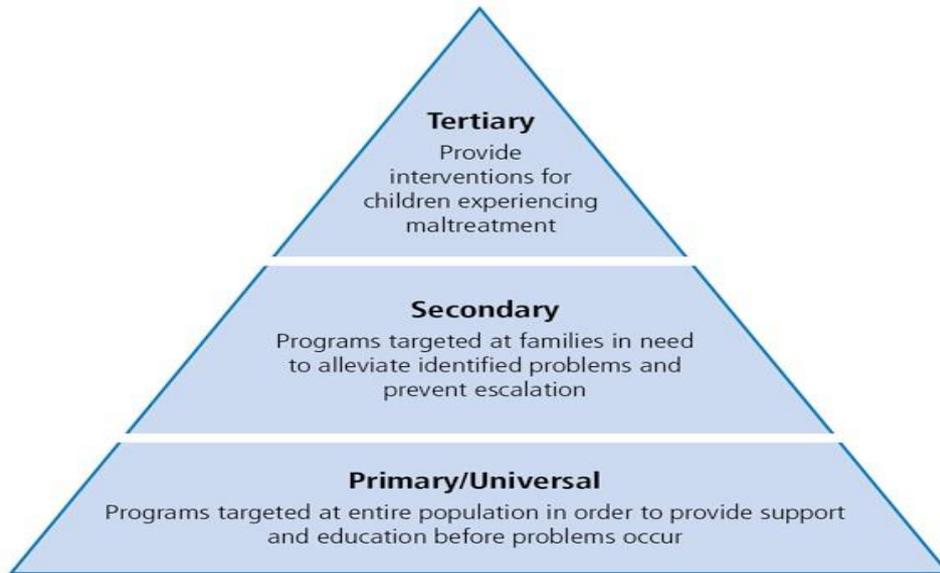
Getting it Right Early includes a range of initiatives outlined in *A Fresh Start* that relate to prevention and early intervention and provides a framework for continuous focus to ensure they are implemented in a coordinated way with evidence-based authority and legitimacy.

A Fresh Start accepted the Royal Commission's recommendation for a public health approach to child abuse prevention and early intervention. *Getting it Right Early* maps out what this approach looks like and will guide Government action into the future. Key features of a public health approach to child protection include having a population based understanding of the problem, having a rigorous evidence base, and ensuring a coordinated system.

Importantly, as demonstrated in figure 1 below, under a public health approach to child protection and early intervention the ideal expenditure and resources on child protection are weighted in decreasing amounts from universal (primary) services, targeted (secondary) intervention, and tertiary services respectively.

Getting it Right Early maps out a process for strengthening the provision of targeted primary and secondary interventions with the goal of reducing the need for tertiary responses. The State already makes significant investment in universal services such as schools, children's centres, and prenatal and antenatal health care facilities to support child wellbeing. Over the next five years we will support universal services to take a more active role in our child abuse prevention effort. This strategy focusses on the opportunities to intervene before problems occur or stop things getting worse for families we know are more vulnerable to contact with the child protection system.

Figure 1: Public health informed redistribution of resources on child protection



There are multiple opportunities for prevention and early intervention, based on the combined efforts of universal services and those that are targeted to families most at risk of child abuse and neglect. Change will be made at a whole of system level to improve the life chances and wellbeing of South Australian children.

Voice of Children and Families

Underpinning this Strategy is the acknowledgement that children and families are experts in their own lives. As a result, we also acknowledge it is our responsibility to position them to be able to influence and inform their own life pathways. More broadly, we respect children and families as key partners with Government and the non-government service sector in the development of a child abuse prevention response, and recognise the inclusion of their voices is critical if we are to support all children and families to be safe, to be happy and to thrive. It is also critical to recognise families, particularly parents, as partners in our efforts to improve the safety and wellbeing of children.

We will build on strengths as well as addressing risks

Prevention and early intervention should incorporate protective and strength-based responses, as well as those that minimise risk. Strategies that build on strengths at the individual, family or community level will form part of this prevention and early intervention agenda.

Prevention and Early Intervention will target Aboriginal children, families and communities who are over-represented in child protection

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Government and other service providers will be equipped and accountable to provide culturally safe, competent and accessible services to Aboriginal children and families recognising the varied experiences of Aboriginal people - such as location, culture and language. We will target our investment to those children and families we know are most vulnerable to risk of child abuse and neglect and provide them with the early help they need, whilst recognising their strengths and potential.

Recognising the importance of community and place

Different communities experience risk and vulnerability in different ways. This may be due to geography, socioeconomic conditions, history, demographic characteristics and cultural differences. As the evidence grows about the different risk factors for child abuse and neglect and how they are experienced differently, prevention and early intervention strategies for child abuse and neglect will be contextualised in order to be effective.

STRATEGIC THEMES

1. Build the evidence

We will improve the collection and use of data and other evidence so we understand the problem better and know what works.

2. Strengthen the system

We will support a prevention and early intervention response that is connected and responsive to need.

3. Reduce Aboriginal over-representation

We will improve how we support vulnerable Aboriginal children and families.

4. Support our most vulnerable

We will know our vulnerable children, families and communities and target our prevention and early intervention efforts.

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1. Build the evidence

We will improve the collection and use of data and other evidence so we understand the problem better and know what works.

While we know quite a lot about our South Australian children and families at risk, there is still much we don't know. In addition, information is not always presented in ways that enable good, evidence-based decisions about services and supports. Early Intervention Research Directorate (EIRD), through arrangements with skilled researchers, and through the work of the Office for Data Analytics, will:

- Build a profile of the multiple and inter-relational risk and protective factors that can lead to vulnerability to child abuse and neglect.
- Build the evidence around effective service provision
- Build the evidence around the experience of vulnerable children and families

That information will be provided to government departments, service providers and other decision makers in formats which are useful to them. We will map and evaluate our early intervention programs and use this, and our information about vulnerable members of the community, to redesign our early intervention system.

What we've done

As part of *A Fresh Start* the South Australian Government has:

- ✓ Established the Early Intervention Research Directorate (EIRD) in November 2016
- ✓ Established the Office for Data Analytics (ODA) and enacted the *Public Sector (Data Sharing) Act 2016* in December 2016
- ✓ Commenced the Vulnerable Children's Project which will use data analytics to support the business processes of the child protection system and pull together a fuller picture of the needs of our vulnerable children and families
- ✓ Engaged a consortium of internationally renowned researchers with expertise in population health, child protection and child development to support the evidence gathering process
- ✓ Established a post-doctoral fellowship program, incorporating three key research projects and case file reviews focusing on:
 - Pregnancy and Infancy
 - Children with repeat involvement in the child protection system
 - Aboriginal over-representation in the child protection system
- ✓ Commenced evaluation of 100 South Australian Government funded early intervention programs to ensure the services we fund accord with best practice
- ✓ Commenced a Case File Review of the over-representation of Aboriginal children in the child protection system
- ✓ Delivered two policy papers:

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- Child Protection in South Australia – which describes the experience and characteristics of children in South Australia who are in contact with the child protection system.
- South Australian EIRD Case File Review Research Policy Brief #1 – which identifies the early intervention and prevention pathways for child protection concerns raised in pregnancy.

What's next?

Activity – next 12 months	Lead
Complete the evaluation of 100 early intervention programs so we know what services and programs are working for our vulnerable children and families	EIRD
Complete Case File Reviews to build evidence about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infants (0-2) in the child protection system • Children with repeat involvement in the child protection system • Aboriginal over-representation in the child protection system 	EIRD
Develop an interactive map, by location and service type, of all prevention and early intervention services across SA	EIRD and ODA
Report on best practice for preventing child abuse and neglect in unborn children and infancy	EIRD
Develop and implement a tool to guide the assessment of new and existing prevention and early intervention services	EIRD and line agencies
Develop and test a practical, valid and reliable risk prediction tool to identify vulnerable children and families	EIRD and ODA
Continue to develop the evidence about providing the right service, at the right time, in the right place	EIRD

2. Strengthen the system

We will support a prevention and early intervention response that is connected and responsive to need.

As we gain a deeper understanding of our vulnerable children, families and communities, and about what works, we will rebuild and strengthen the prevention and early intervention system to provide the right services, to the right people, at the right time. This means we will stop doing things that don't work, and refocus our current investment on things that do. It will also mean increasing our investment in prevention and early intervention for child abuse and neglect. Working collaboratively and sharing the responsibility will be fundamental to this.

Serving children and families

It is imperative that the right balance is struck between assessment and referral and timely access to practical help. Often the most vulnerable families are the least likely to seek help. We need to be better at identifying them wherever they present, so that vulnerable children and families get the support they need at the right time and in the right place, without having to go through multiple assessments and delays.

Targeted services in a universal context

The main focus of early intervention and prevention for child abuse and neglect is on providing targeted services to those we identify as most vulnerable. Universal services also play a significant role in identifying these vulnerable children and families and connecting them with appropriate services. We will continue to improve our understanding of how best to target our services and, where appropriate, how to target services within a universal service context.

Adult services

Importantly, we know that risk of child abuse and neglect is generally measurable by adult conditions such as domestic and family violence, homelessness, drug and alcohol abuse and unmanaged mental illness. Adult service providers will have a stronger role in identifying and responding to vulnerable children and families to better support their adult clients as parents.

Child protection system as a whole

An improved child abuse early intervention and prevention effort relies on all elements of the service sector actively taking a role. Notifications to the child abuse report line already identify a large number of children and families in need of assistance, even if not requiring a mandatory response. We will improve the way in

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which the child protection system and early intervention services work together to prevent things getting worse for vulnerable children at this early notification point.

What we've done

As part of *A Fresh Start* the South Australian Government has:

- ✓ Commenced mapping the early intervention and prevention service system
- ✓ Established the Child Safety Pathway to implement a multi-agency intake model offering a broader child protection and development approach to families and children at risk, streamlining the response to child abuse notifications
- ✓ Established the Multi-Agency Assessment Unit (MAAU) within the Child Abuse Report Line call centre to ensure an integrated cross-agency approach to responding to new notifications
- ✓ Reviewed service models for universal programs, including Child and Family Health Services
- ✓ Piloted the Child and Family Assessment and Referral Networks in four locations.

What's next?

Activities – next 12 months	Lead
Work with stakeholders to develop a performance and accountability framework for the Strategy to track the success of prevention and early intervention responses	EIRD
Develop a map of government funded or provided prevention and early intervention services for child abuse and neglect, identifying gaps and priorities	EIRD
Develop a data analytics process for monitoring and evaluating early intervention services, including outcome measures informed by evidence	EIRD
Evaluate new measures introduced within the child protection system for their interaction with and effectiveness in supporting the early intervention and prevention effort	DCP
Evaluate the CFARNS to ensure they effectively identify, assess, and serve vulnerable children and reduce response times	EIRD
Establish a decision making assessment tool to inform all funding decisions, and an evaluation matrix for prevention and early intervention programs	EIRD and Line agencies

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A plan to enhance universal services where evidence indicates this works best	EIRD and line agencies
Develop a system wide plan which targets prevention and early intervention investment on services and programs that work	EIRD and Line agencies
Develop and implement a workforce development plan to support service providers, including those in universal and adult services, to build their capacity to provide early help to vulnerable children and families	EIRD
Review and amend government procurement practice to support service responses that deliver sustainable outcomes	EIRD
Work with potential service providers in the co-design and commissioning of new prevention and early intervention initiatives	Line agencies

3. Reduce Aboriginal over-representation

We will improve how we support vulnerable Aboriginal children and families.

Aboriginal people are disproportionately over-represented in the child protection system. We must understand more about what contributes to this over-representation, taking into account the history of dispossession and ongoing cultural and social oppression.

We acknowledge that successive governments have failed Aboriginal children and families, and work with Aboriginal South Australians to position Aboriginal people as leaders of prevention and early intervention practice, policy and system reform. We must ensure that government and other service providers are equipped and accountable to provide culturally safe, competent and accessible services to our Aboriginal children and families. We will target our investment to those children and families we know are most vulnerable to risk of child abuse and neglect and provide them with the early help they need.

We will value cultural identity and recognise the right to self-determination of all Aboriginal children, families and communities. To provide prevention and early intervention supports for Aboriginal families we will ensure that they have a voice in shaping those supports. We will also understand what works to reduce child neglect and harm in Aboriginal families and communities.

We will support the development of practice which is informed by the impacts of racism, of inter-generational trauma, and multi-generational disadvantage, and which enables healing and understands culture as a protective factor.

In this agenda we will work across Government as part of our commitment to the national Family Matters campaign.

What we've done

As part of *A Fresh Start* the South Australian Government has:

- ✓ Evaluated over 50 programs for cultural competency
- ✓ Commenced development of a guideline to culturally appropriate services
- ✓ [Completed a case file review of over-representation of Aboriginal people in the Child Protection system]
- ✓ Established an Aboriginal Research Engagement Strategy, which has informed the evidence gathering and release of data discussed in priority 1
- ✓ Embedded a recognition of Aboriginal over-representation in all aspects of work undertaken under this Strategy.

What's next ?

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Activities- next 12 months	Lead
Evaluate an additional 50 programs for cultural competency	EIRD
Engage with Aboriginal families and communities who have experience with the child protection system to inform prevention and early intervention service provision	EIRD
Develop a response to the findings of the Case File Review into Aboriginal over-representation in the child protection system	EIRD
Develop a plan, with Aboriginal people, to support existing prevention and early intervention services to achieve cultural competency and embed cultural competency requirements for new services	EIRD and Whole of Government
Incorporate the unique experiences of Aboriginal people within the child protection system into any service planning	Whole of Government
Pilot at least one community-driven prevention and early intervention service program for Aboriginal children and families	EIRD and Line agencies

4. Support our most vulnerable

We will know our vulnerable children, families and communities and target our prevention and early intervention efforts.

Our promise to understand the evidence and improve the system is underpinned by a commitment to support the most vulnerable. We will use the evidence to build our understanding of risk and protective factors, and to identify and offer early help to our most vulnerable children and families. We will develop a case management tool to assist us in knowing in real time **who** our most vulnerable children and families are, **which** regions need more support, and **what** services will help and responding to this as it changes. We will also work to extend access to services to those who are currently missing out. This will also involve developing strategies that respond to the inter-generational impacts of child abuse and neglect.

What we've done:

As part of *A Fresh Start* the South Australian Government has:

- ✓ Prioritised research efforts that will help us to better understand the experience and outcomes of particularly vulnerable population cohorts
- ✓ Analysed data from multiple sources to understand risk in groups that require particular support, including:
 - Families with one or more children already engaged in the child protection system
 - First time parents with a history of contact with the child protection system
 - Teenage mothers
 - Families experiencing violence
 - Places that have a higher than average proportion of children known to the child protection system.
- ✓ Completed an initial community risk profile, describing known risk factors
- ✓ Implemented data sharing processes and used data linkage to understand patterns of risk and service utilisation

What's next?

Activities- next 12 months	Lead
Develop specific service proposals that target risk and vulnerability, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • young parents • families with a child(ren) already known to the child protection system • parents who had been in care themselves 	EIRD and Line agencies

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<p>Produce and publish policy briefs to better understand and respond to the needs of identified groups, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • those experiencing domestic and family violence • families with chronic and repeat involvement in the child protection system • children with disabilities and • culturally diverse groups 	EIRD, DPC
<p>Develop a comprehensive community risk profile bringing together accurate data from multiple sources to improve system responsiveness to locational and demographics particularly vulnerable groups, taking into account geography, age, and demographic characteristics</p>	EIRD, DPC
<p>Engage with children and young people to inform prevention and early intervention service provision</p>	EIRD
<p>Develop a future research agenda to continue building the evidence base for prevention and early intervention</p>	EIRD
<p>Undertake research to specifically explore inter-generational patterns of abuse and neglect and strategies to break this cycle</p>	EIRD
<p>Develop and test a case management tool that uses real time, linked data to better respond to children at risk of child abuse and neglect</p>	EIRD, ODA
<p>Evaluate risk indicators over time to ensure that the right services are provided to the right people, at the right time and in the right place</p>	EIRD and Line agencies

BEING ACCOUNTABLE

Progress toward achieving the objectives of this Strategy will be published on the Early Intervention and Research Directorate's website as well as providing updates as part of Government reporting against *A Fresh Start*.

An annual revision of the Strategy will be developed, based on emerging evidence and a greater understanding of what is making a difference.

We are also committed to working closely with the service sector, the community and our data experts to understand the impact of our work and to co-design effective supports for children and families.

Have your Say

To let us know what you think on YourSAy our website at www.eird.sa.gov.au.