“There is no trust more sacred than the one the world holds with children. There is no duty more important than ensuring that their rights are respected, that their welfare is protected, that their lives are free from fear and want and that they can grow up in peace” - Kofi Annan
The State Government is committed to supporting children and young people to reach their potential and enjoy life opportunity.

This is a special challenge when dealing with children and young people in the care of the Department for Child Protection and Family Support (Department). At 30 June 2014, the Department had guardianship responsibility for 4237 children and young people. Each of these children and young people have suffered trauma, and have specific needs that require tailored care in a safe, supportive and stable environment.

The Western Australian out-of-home care sector is facing a number of ongoing challenges, including the significant over-representation of Aboriginal children, and it is timely that the government, in partnership with the community services sector, reviews its operation, funding and regulation.

The Department is proposing a suite of reforms to the Western Australian out-of-home care system that will place more focus on supporting children and young people to heal from trauma and enabling them to have increased life opportunities. These reforms include:

- introducing a new care model that better matches children to care arrangements that have the capacity, competency and support to meet their needs;
- developing an out-of-home care system that promotes stability and certainty for children in-line with the government’s permanency planning policy;
- growing the community services sector, including Aboriginal community controlled organisations, to become the predominant provider of non-relative out-of-home care;
- amending funding arrangements to support a more sustainable partnership between the government and community services sector;
- improving the Department’s ability to provide supportive and sustainable relative care arrangements;
- improving the oversight and regulation of the out-of-home care system in line with imperatives stemming from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse; and
- introducing an Outcomes Framework for Children in Out-of-Home Care to measure key aspects of children’s development, and strengthening the Rapid Response Framework, to promote a whole-of-Government focus and accountability for achieving outcomes.

The reforms outlined in this Out-of-Home Care Strategic Directions discussion paper aim to further advance and strengthen the Western Australian out-of-home care system. I invite you to consider the proposed directions and make informed comment on how we can best look after and support children and young people in out-of-home care.

Hon Helen Morton MLC
MINISTER FOR MENTAL HEALTH; DISABILITY SERVICES; CHILD PROTECTION
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**GLOSSARY OF TERMS**

**Aboriginal community controlled organisation (ACCO)** is an incorporated Aboriginal organisation, initiated, based and governed by the local Aboriginal community to deliver holistic and culturally appropriate services to the Aboriginal community that controls it.

**Better Care, Better Services** is the standards framework adopted by out-of-home care providers in Western Australia.

**Care adoption** refers to an order made under the Adoption Act 1994 by which a carer becomes the legal guardian of a child.

**Care arrangement** is a term for the organisational arrangement that provides out-of-home care for a child. An out-of-home care arrangement can include a foster care arrangement with relatives or non-relatives, as well as residential-based care arrangements.

**Charter of Rights for Children in Care** refers to the agreed rights of children in out-of-home care in Western Australia.

**Co-design** is the process where providers and users of a service both have input into the intended goal of a service, its structure and operation to enable that service to be mutually beneficial.

**Community services sector** is the collection of not-for-profit and for-profit non-government organisations that provide the community with services that meet a broad range of needs. In the context of this report, it refers specifically to those community organisations that are funded to provide out-of-home care.

**Department for Child Protection and Family Support (CPFS or Department)** is the Western Australian Government Department that provides and funds a range of child safety and family support services to Western Australian individuals, children and their families.

**Foster care** refers to a care arrangement where a family or an individual cares for children in their own home.

**National Standards for Out-of-Home Care** outlines the standards that all Australian state and territories are required to measure, monitor and report on for children in out-of-home care.

**Non-relative care** is an out-of-home care arrangement with a person(s) who is not a ‘relative’ as defined in the Children and Community Services Act 2004 (the Act), or a ‘significant other’ as defined in policy.

**Out-of-home care** is the provision of care arrangements outside the family home to children who are in need of protection and care, through the application of the Act.

**Out-of-home care sector** refers to the government and community services sector agencies that provide care arrangements for children living in out-of-home care.

**Out-of-home care system** is the collection of government and community services sector arrangements that provide out-of-home care.

**Parallel planning** is the process by which the Department simultaneously plans for both reunification and long-term out-of-home care to best support stability and certainty for a child.
Permanency planning is the case management principle and practice used to provide children in out-of-home care with safe, continuous and stable living arrangements, lifetime relationships and a sense of belonging.

Protection Order (Special Guardianship)/Special Guardianship Order is an order under the Children and Community Services Act 2004 which transfers full parental responsibility for the child to a special guardian.

Relative care is an out-of-home care arrangement with a person(s) who is a ‘relative’ as defined in the Act, or a ‘significant other’ as defined in policy.

Residential care refers to placement of one, or a number of children or young people, in a property owned or rented by an agency, and staffed by workers employed on a rostered basis. Residential care typically cares for children with complex and intense needs.

Structural disadvantage refers to the disadvantage and inequality that exists for certain groups in the community by nature of their class, gender, race/ethnicity or other demographic.
The child protection system exists on a continuum. Out-of-home care cannot be viewed in isolation from prevention and reunification services, or from children leaving the out-of-home care system.

Whilst not diminishing this interlink, this discussion predominantly focuses on the provision, funding and regulation of children living in out-of-home care arrangements.

This Out-of-Home Care Strategic Directions discussion paper is intended to propose a clear platform for out-of-home care in Western Australia into the future. The Western Australian Government seeks feedback regarding these proposed future directions. Feedback will be considered and incorporated into the Western Australian Out-of-Home Care Five Year Strategic Plan (2015-2020).

Interested parties, including children, young people, parents, carers, community services sector providers, government agencies, CPFS staff, and the wider community are invited to provide feedback.

Feedback can be provided by any of the following means:

- Emailing template feedback to OOHCreform@cpfs.wa.gov.au
- Posting your feedback to the:
  
  Accommodation and Care Services  
  Attention: Out-of-Home Care Reform Team  
  Department of Child Protection and Family Support  
  PO Box 6334, EAST PERTH WA 6892

Feedback must be received by close of business on 13 February 2015.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Western Australian Government is committed to promoting the safety and well-being of children and young people, assisting them to remain safe, and supporting them to be valued and cherished members of the community. The out-of-home care system supports those children most at risk of harm and/or abuse. These are the children in our community who most need protection and care within a stable, caring environment.

The introduction of the Children and Community Services Act 2004 was a landmark in the development of Western Australian out-of-home care. This was followed by the Review of the Department for Community Development published in January 2007, commonly known as the 'Ford Report', which has guided the development of the out-of-home care system for the last seven years.

This current review intends to further progress and give direction to the out-of-home care system in Western Australia.

Children in the Western Australian Out-of-Home Care System

At June 2014, there were 4237 children in the care of the Department for Child Protection and Family Support. More than 50% of children in out-of-home care are Aboriginal, and 60% of all children are under the age of ten. Whilst the rate of children entering care remains steady at 6%, the total number of children in out-of-home care continues to grow.

The main reasons for children entering out-of-home care are for substantiated allegations of emotional abuse and neglect, which are underpinned by alcohol and drug misuse, mental health issues and family and domestic violence. These factors often combine with structural disadvantage, poverty and intergenerational trauma to create deeply entrenched patterns of dysfunction and child safety issues.

These trends and observations are similar to those seen in other jurisdictions around Australia and in many like countries.

Challenges Facing the Out-of-Home Care System

The number of children in out-of-home care is increasing, with children entering out-of-home care younger and remaining longer. There are also a growing number of children and young people in care with complex, intense and trauma-related needs. Aboriginal children are significantly over-represented, now comprising over 50% of all children in out-of-home care, and increasing at a significantly faster rate than non-Aboriginal children in out-of-home care. Relative care has now overtaken non-relative care as the predominant out-of-home care arrangement type. In combination, these trends result in increasing difficulty in attracting and retaining enough suitable foster carers to provide quality placements, and in particular long-term placements. Ultimately this detracts from the quality of life outcomes and opportunities for children in out-of-home care.

The Western Australian community services sector is relatively small compared with other Australian and international jurisdictions. This leads to untapped opportunity, as well as a series of funding arrangements that are unsustainable to government.

As knowledge and understanding of the importance of stability and certainty to children’s well-being has increased, the Western Australian out-of-home care system has not fully adjusted. Many of the current out-of-
home care arrangements are time-limited and do not provide an opportunity for permanent placement, leaving a system that does not always reinforce policy.

In Western Australia, Government currently fulfils the role of provider, funder and regulator of out-of-home care through the Department for Child Protection and Family Support. Emerging findings from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Abuse, may lead to an imperative to strengthen external regulation processes.

The Future of Out-of-Home Care in Western Australia

The four key drivers for reforming the current system are:

1. The significant over-representation of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care.
2. The current system is operating at, or near, full capacity.
3. Community expectations of out-of-home care and the nature of the community in which it operates have changed significantly.
4. The increasing complexity of needs of children.

The Department has collaborated with the major stakeholders in the Western Australian out-of-home care system to establish the key characteristics of the future system and the strategic directions to achieve them.

The Department’s prime objective for the Western Australian out-of-home care system is to continue the development of a quality system that places children in stable care arrangements that best meets their needs, as early as possible, for as long as is needed.

Five strategic directions have been developed to achieve this vision for the Western Australian out-of-home care system (appendix 1):

• **Strategic Direction One**
  An out-of-home care system that is driven by the needs of the child
  A new care model will be introduced that increases the focus on resourcing care arrangements to meet the varying needs of children. A child assessment and matching process will assess the needs of every child (across a range of factors), leading to placement in a care arrangement that has the capacity, competency and support that can best promote them to heal from trauma.

• **Strategic Direction Two**
  An out-of-home care system that values and promotes stability and certainty for children
  The new care model will be structured to reinforce stability, certainty and permanency for children. This will include a review and strengthening of prevention and reunification services, and where children can’t be reunified an increased emphasis on the use of permanent out-of-home care orders.
• **Strategic Direction Three**  
   A responsive and sustainable out-of-home care system with capacity.  
The community services sector will play a far greater role in the provision of out-of-home care arrangements — chiefly non-relative care - requiring a significant growth in this sector’s capacity. Within this, there will be a strong focus on building the capacity of Aboriginal community controlled organisations and facilitating partnership models to better meet the needs of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care. This community services sector growth will be sustained through reviewed funding levels and processes, and possibly ordered through a state-wide area-based funding model to promote a regional focus and response to need. The Department’s predominant provision of out-of-home care will become relative care, with resources, structures and processes re-aligned to better support and sustain these care arrangements.

• **Strategic Direction Four**  
   An out-of-home care sector that is accountable  
The Department will further enhance its role in coordinating the out-of-home care system by strengthening its standards accountability and regulatory frameworks. Accountability to outcomes for children will also be improved by the development of an Outcomes Framework for Children in Out-of-Home Care, which will build on the across-government Rapid Response Strategy.

• **Strategic Direction Five**  
   An out-of-home care sector that is consistent  
There will be an increased focus on ensuring greater consistency across the out-of-home care system. This will enable Western Australian children in out-of-home care, irrespective of their location, care arrangement or care provider, to live in a consistently high quality care arrangement that enhances their life opportunities.

**The Next Steps**  
These strategic directions have been developed collaboratively with key stakeholders in out-of-home care in Western Australia. This collaborative approach will result in more effective and efficient arrangements for the children in out-of-home care. The end result that is sought by all is that children in out-of-home care will grow into adults who are content, culturally connected and contributing members of their community.

With feedback received from this Out-of-Home Care Strategic Directions discussion paper, it is intended that the proposed reforms will be further developed and introduced gradually over the coming years. It is anticipated that the Out-of-Home Care Five Year Strategic Plan, as well as an Implementation Plan, will be developed and released in May 2015 with the objective of commencing a staged roll-out of the suite of changes in June 2015.
INTRODUCTION

“Our children must be able to grow up nourished and supported in loving and caring environments. They must have time to be children with all the wonder, happiness and innocence that childhood should bring.” - National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children

Children are important. They are to be valued as individuals in their own right, as well as for their importance as the future of our community. Cherishing their importance and recognising the vulnerabilities of children, communities throughout history have put in place special ways to enable both their protection and safe development.

The United Nations enshrines this belief in the Convention on the Rights of the Child which outlines the basic rights of children. As a signatory to this Convention, the Australian Government has committed, and has an obligation to pursue, the right of Australian children to be protected and cared for, free from abuse, violence and exploitation.

Accordingly the Australian Government has developed the National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children (2009-2020). This Framework outlines the roles and obligations of State and Territory Governments, as well as community services sector organisations, in safeguarding and protecting Australian children.

The Government of Western Australia meets these responsibilities through the framework established by the Children and Community Services Act 2004, and other supporting legislation. The key objectives of this statutory framework are (s6):

- to promote the wellbeing of children, other individuals, families and communities; and
- to acknowledge the primary role of parents, families and communities in safeguarding and promoting the wellbeing of children; and
- to encourage and support parents, families and communities in carrying out that role; and
- to provide for the protection and care of children in circumstances where their parents have not given, or are unlikely or unable to give, that protection and care; and
- to protect children from exploitation in employment.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (ATSICPP) acknowledges the importance of family, cultural and community connections to the identity and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who come into contact with the statutory child protection system. This is reflected in the Children and Community Services Act 2004 (s12).

The Department for Child Protection and Family Support is the government agency with the responsibility to protect, safeguard and promote the wellbeing of Western Australian children. However, the Department for Child Protection and Family Support cannot do this alone, and the Rapid Response Strategy — prioritising government services for children in out-of-home care — underpins the whole-of-government response to vulnerable children, including children in out-of-home care.
A key component of the work of the Department is providing guardian and care arrangements for children who are unable to be safely cared for at home. The Department fulfills this obligation through providing and funding a range of different services that make up the out-of-home care system.

This document sets out a package of strategic reforms to the Western Australian out-of-home care system. The package was developed collaboratively between the Department for Child Protection and Family Support and the community services sector. Details of the process are in Appendix 2. The ultimate goal of these reforms are a more efficient and effective out-of-home care system, that results in better life outcomes and opportunities for children.

SNAPSHOT OF CHILDREN IN OUT-OF-HOME CARE IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

CHILDREN IN THE CEO’S CARE
2000 to 2014

2001 Gordon Inquiry and implementation of recommendations - Strong Families, remote child protection workers

2006 New legislation Children and Community Services Act - increased Court oversight, legislated relative care, child participation etc Extended services up to 25 years of age for children previously in care

2007 Review of Department for Community Development (Ford review) 69 recommendations endorsed by Government

2009 Mandatory reporting legislation introduced (Ford recommendation)
RATE OF CHILDREN IN OUT-OF-HOME CARE
per 1000 WA Children

AGE OF CHILDREN IN CARE
June 2014

PLACEMENT LOCATION
as at June 30 2014

RATE OF CHILDREN IN OUT-OF-HOME CARE
per 1000 WA Children

AGE OF CHILDREN IN CARE

- Less than 1 year: 28%
- 1 to 4 years: 12%
- 5 to 9 years: 4%
- 10 to 14 years: 23%
- 15 years and older: 32%

PLACEMENT LOCATION

- Country: 38% (1,626 children)
- Metro: 60% (2,537 children)
- Other: 2% (30 children)
DEVELOPMENT OF THE WESTERN AUSTRALIAN OUT-OF-HOME CARE SYSTEM

In 2006 the Western Australian Government announced a review of the Government’s welfare agency, the then Department for Community Development. This review, known as the ‘Ford Report’, made a number of recommendations related to increasing the range, resourcing and quality of the Western Australian out-of-home-care system.

This Report established the blueprint for, and has guided the development and organisation of the Western Australian out-of-home care system since then. The recommendations provided the firm foundation on which the current out-of-home care system has been developed. The developments in the out-of-home care system since the Ford Report include:

Foster Care:

• Development and implementation of the Foster Care Partnership as the framework for providing foster care with improvements to attract, retain and include carers as essential members of the care and protection team.

• Significant growth and expansion of out-of-home care arrangements provided through the community services sector. The funding for community services sector care arrangements has increased from $11.7 million in 2007/8 to an anticipated $74.2 million in 2014/15.

• The creation of specialist out-of-home care programs that provide individualised placements for children or young people with complex needs and challenging behaviours.

• The appointment of positions and programs focused on supporting the needs of Aboriginal children.

Residential Care:

• Implementation of a network of four-bed Family Group Homes. Currently there are 41 Family Group Homes (21 metro and 20 country) with most operated by the community services sector.

• Implementation of a network of four to eight bed Residential Group Homes, based on the rostered residential care model. Currently 22 Residential Group Homes (14 metro, 8 country) are operated by the Department, catering for children and young people with complex support needs.

• Establishment of the Kath French Secure Care Centre to provide safety and intensive support for children and young people who present an extreme risk to themselves or others.

• Development of the At Risk Youth Accommodation (ARYA) service. Managed by a community services sector agency, ARYA provides a safe overnight bed for up to six young people who are being supported by the Department.

• Adoption of the Residential Care (Sanctuary) Framework as the means of providing therapeutic residential care within the Department.
Permanency:

- Development of the Department’s Permanency Planning Policy, prioritising stability and certainty for children.
- Legislative changes allowing for the permanent placement and transfer of guardianship of children outside the out-of-home care system, through Protection Order (Special Guardianship).
- Creation of the Home-4-Life program that aims to facilitate permanent out-of-home care arrangements.

In 2013/14, the Department spent $307 million on supporting children and young people in out-of-home care.

The current organisation of the Western Australian out-of-home care system exists on a continuum (shown in figure 1). As the continuum advances, so does the complexity of the child’s needs; the expertise and skill required to care for the child; and the cost of the care arrangement.

**Figure 1**

- **Department provided**
  - Residential Group Home: 2.6%
  - General Foster Care: 26.9%
  - Relative Care: 42.9%
- **Community services sector provided**
  - Transitional High Needs: 0.6%
  - Family Group Home: 4.7%
  - Specialised Fostering: 3.2%
  - Disability Placement Program: 1.8%
  - General Foster Care: 5.8%

**Increases in:**
- Complexity
- Cost
- Care expertise

**Reduces in:**
- numbers of children

**Initial assessment of child**
- Child placement principle process
- Which care arrangement best meets support needs of children

**Child needing out-of-home care**
THE IMPETUS FOR REFORM

The directions set by the Ford Report have now been implemented. Western Australia has developed an out-of-home system that is significantly better resourced, has greater range and increased quality.

Nevertheless it is timely to examine how the quality of the out-of-home care system can be raised to the next level and improve outcomes for Western Australian children in out-of-home care. It is also important to take into account the issues and challenges that have been raised by public examination of historical and current practices in out-of-home care arrangements and approaches.

There are four key drivers for reforming the current out-of-home care system.

1. The significant over-representation of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care.
2. The current system is operating at, or near, full capacity.
3. Community expectations of out-of-home care and the nature of the community in which it operates have changed significantly.
4. The increasing complexity of needs of children.

These four factors are not unique to Western Australia. They are pressures being experienced in out-of-home care systems across Australia and in other communities throughout the world.

The Department is committed to establishing a clear and strong framework for the future of a sustainable, quality out-of-home care system in Western Australia, which takes account of these factors.

This plan establishes a clear way forward. It provides a blue-print for a coordinated partnership between the Department and the community services sector to support and develop some of the most vulnerable members of the Western Australian community.

Challenges and Trends

The main challenges and trends facing the Western Australian out-of-home care system are:

Continued growth in numbers of children in out-of-home care – Whilst the rate of children entering out-of-home care has remained steady, the total number continues to increase. Children are also entering out-of-home care at a younger age, and remaining longer. The number of children in out-of-home care has risen from 2655 in June 2007 to 4237 in June 2014.

Attracting and retaining carers – recruitment and retention of relatives and non-relatives willing and able to provide quality care arrangements, and in particular long-term care, continues to be difficult.

Over-representation of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care – The number and proportion of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care is growing. Aboriginal children now comprise over 50% of all children in out-of-home care, and the number of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care is growing at a faster rate than non-Aboriginal children. The ability to find quality and culturally appropriate placements is a pressing and significant issue.
A system lacking flexibility — The implementation of the current system has a tendency to be driven more by program definitions and accountabilities, rather than the needs of the children. This raises difficulty in matching children with care arrangements that will meet their specific needs.

Permanent care arrangements - Many of the current out-of-home care options are time-limited, and do not provide an opportunity for permanent placement. This conflicts with the overwhelming research demonstrating that stability and certainty are major contributors to child-wellbeing.

Increasing complexity of children’s needs - There are a growing number of children and young people in out-of-home care, with complex and intense trauma-related needs. The out-of-home care sector’s understanding of what is needed to meet these needs has also improved. These children require both therapeutic support, as well as arrangements that safeguard the community. The current arrangements to meet the needs of these children represent a significant cost pressure for Department.

Relative care - Relative care has become the main means of out-of-home care provision, accounting for 43% of all children in care. The proportion of Aboriginal children living in relative care is higher at 48.6%. It is important to develop appropriate processes to support and sustain relative carers and children in these care arrangements.

Regulatory oversight – The Department currently fulfils the role of out-of-home care provider, funder and regulator through the Department for Child Protection and Family Support. It is important to ensure the current rigour and safety is maintained with explicit and transparent arrangements, so there can be no actual or perceived conflicts-of-interest.

A developing community services sector - The Western Australian community services sector is relatively small compared with other Australian and international jurisdictions. This limits the availability of care arrangements, as well as creating a series of funding arrangements that are unsustainable to government. There is also an untapped opportunity to build and develop the capacity of the ACCO sector in order to respond to the increasing number of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care.

Child outcomes are not always adequately measured – Whilst system and process outcomes are articulated, measured and monitored, the individual outcomes sought and provided for children and young people in out-of-home care are not. This is a missed opportunity for the out-of-home care system to receive ongoing feedback as to its own efficacy.

Aboriginal Children in Care

Aboriginal children and young people are over-represented in the Western Australian out-of-home care system. As at June 2014, whilst making up 5.5% of the population, Aboriginal children comprised 50.6% (2144) of children in the Western Australian out-of-home care system.

The increasing number and proportion of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care presents significant challenges and carries with it a responsibility to support the individual and cultural needs of children in out-of-home care, their families and their communities. The Aboriginal community will play a significant role in this work.

As in other parts of Australia, Western Australian Aboriginal people have a complex history with the out-of-home care system, originating with the large-scale, government-led removal of Aboriginal children from their family throughout the twentieth century. Known as ‘the Stolen Generation’, this deeply traumatic part of Australia’s
recent history resonates and manifests itself in every Western Australian Aboriginal family today. The impact of this intergenerational trauma is substantial, and coupled with the structural disadvantage faced by many Aboriginal families has played a significant part in the disproportionate number of Aboriginal children entering out-of-home care today.

While there is a strong argument that out-of-home care arrangements should be consistent, the historical context and current disproportionate level of Aboriginal children entering the out-of-home care system necessitate an approach that is targeted to meet the needs of these children, their families and their communities. The number of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care provides this fundamental imperative. It has been argued that ‘getting the out-of-home care system right for Aboriginal children, will get it right for all children’. This cultural lens must be applied to all the work that we do in this sector.
The government’s prime objective for the Western Australian out-of-home care system is to continue the development of a quality system that places children in stable care arrangements that best meets their needs, as early as possible, for as long as is needed.

The key characteristics of the Western Australian out-of-home system will be:

1. An out-of-home care system that **driven by the needs of the child**
2. An out-of-home care system that **values and promotes stability for children**
3. A **responsive and sustainable** out-of-home care system with capacity
4. An out-of-home care sector that is **accountable**
5. An out-of-home care sector that is **consistent**

**STRATEGIC DIRECTION ONE**

An out-of-home care system that is **driven by the needs of the child**

All children entering out-of-home care have experienced some form of trauma. Whether it is before birth; in their early years; or by the simple fact they are no longer living with their family-of-origin. At base, out-of-home care arrangements are to provide an environment for safe healing from this trauma.

As a result of trauma, the needs of children in out-of-home care will vary from less complex and intense to highly complex and intense, and for each child these needs are likely to change over time. For out-of-home care to be a healing environment, care arrangements must fit the child’s needs, and not the reverse. The Western Australian out-of-home system must be more and flexible child focused and less program focused.

The future out-of-home care system will assess the various needs of all children through a child assessment and matching process.

A new integrated care model (figure 2) will be developed around the concept that different needs require different levels of resource. After the assessment of a child’s needs, the new model will better match the child with a care arrangement with, wherever possible, corresponding supports (both for the carer and child), capacity, and competency required to meet their identified needs (figure 3). As the needs of a child change, the resources for that care arrangement is similarly adjusted. Elements of co-design should enable the child, carer, care provider and where appropriate their family, to develop the most effective care arrangement. Providers will be expected to demonstrate how the competency, capacity and support of care arrangements meet the needs of children in out-of-home care.

A central difference in the future care model will be the increased expectations placed upon care arrangements. Providing healing care to children who have experienced trauma is a different kind of parenting that combines compassion with specialised care. It requires a level of knowledge, skill, time and support beyond that of typical parenting. The future care model will resource care arrangements for this expectation.
The strategies to achieve this are:

- Implement a system of flexible out-of-home care arrangements that are based on a holistic assessment of the needs of the child, which will be matched with the support, competency and capacity required to provide for those needs. The resources provided to the care arrangement will be regularly reviewed and evolve with the child’s development. This will require:
  - Implementing a structured child assessment and matching process, inclusive of a cultural framework, to establish the child’s current and future needs.
  - Implementing a new care model that leads to a care arrangement that best meet the needs of that child.
- Develop competency standards for out-of-home carers that correspond with the different needs of children, and facilitate the implementation of appropriate training and development.
- Develop a shared understanding and expectations of therapeutic care for children.
- Develop and implement appropriate processes and structures to better support and sustain relative carers and children in these care arrangements.

Figure 2
Future Care Model
Figure 3

Western Australian Out-of-Home Care Arrangements

- COMPETENCY
  - Assessed carer ability
  - Assessed carer cultural competency
  - Initial training/development
  - Ongoing training/development

- CAPACITY
  - Carer remuneration
  - Carer time-expectation
  - Physical care setting

- SUPPORT
  - Key worker
  - Carer supports
  - Child supports
  - Community supports

Child assessment and matching

Care arrangement funding
STRATEGIC DIRECTION TWO
An out-of-home care system that \textit{values and promotes stability and certainty} for children

Children who experience long-term stable care arrangements where there is certainty about their future, achieve better life outcomes. In out-of-home care, this goal is referred to as permanency planning.

Stability gives children the opportunity to attend the same school long-term, to have life-long friends, and to have a known group of people that understand their childhood history. Certainty gives children a knowledge of who their long-term carer will be, and an ability to plan for their future. Stability and certainty provides a child the ability to have a sense of belonging and a stronger sense of identity and culture. This provides benefits that a network of therapeutic professionals cannot.

It is important that the current policies and systems intended to achieve these outcomes are updated and strengthened in order to be more effective.

There are two elements to permanency planning:

1) Requiring a timely decision about the future for that child, and
2) Identifying and supporting an appropriate and permanent care arrangement.

Making timely decisions

Delivering permanency starts with timely decision-making. The timeframes for making permanent decisions will now commence the moment a child enters out-of-home care. This will better enable time-frames to more accurately meet the Department’s intended time-frames for permanent decision-making.

A \textit{permanency planning hierarchy} will be established, articulating the priority legal and care outcomes for children (figure 4). Reunification and placement with family will continue to be the first priorities. However, Protection Orders (until 18) will now only be considered appropriate, if a Protection Order (Special Guardianship) and Care Adoption have been assessed as not in the best interests of the child.

Figure 4

| 1 | Reunification |
| 2 | Special Guardianship Order or care adoption with a relative or significant other |
| 3 | Protection Order (until 18) AND stable care with relative or significant other |
| 4 | Special Guardianship Order or care adoption with a non-relative |
| 5 | Protection Order (until 18) |
The success of implementing an out-of-home care system that promotes stability and certainty is not entirely in the control of the Department. Continued education and collaborative work will be done with the Judiciary, community services sector and Aboriginal community controlled organisations to promote the sector-wide implementation of the government’s policy. The benefits of introducing statutory changes to support this direction will also be examined.

Finding Permanent Placements

To safely restore a child to their family provides a child with a level of identity and belonging that, by definition, cannot be provided for a child not living with their family-of-origin. The Department will further develop a system – through the implementation of Family Support Networks, Enhanced Contact Centres, a Departmental Reunification Model, and strengthened community services sector early intervention and reunification services - that focuses on and has capability to achieve safe early intervention and timely reunification of children.

Where reunification of a child with their family cannot occur safely within the designated time-frames, and long-term out-of-home care is required, the out-of-home care system will be designed to reinforce stability, certainty and cultural security for that child.

The future care model reinforces the principles of parallel planning, where simultaneous planning occurs for a child to be reunified, at the same time as planning for the possibility of permanent out-of-home care. The future out-of-home care system will consider every placement a potential permanent placement. If a decision is made that a child is to remain in out-of-home care, then the child is able to remain in their current care arrangements for the long-term.

As the Department envisages the community services and Aboriginal community controlled organisations playing an increasingly prominent role in the provision of out-of-home care, the services they provide will need to reflect these priorities. The Department will develop contractual arrangements which reinforce this policy, which may include appropriate incentives. The cultural needs of Aboriginal children in care will also be a strong area of focus, with particular reference to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle.

The strategies to achieve this are:

- Develop and implement mechanisms to reduce children entering care, and to promote children in out-of-home care returning safely to their family as early as possible. This will include:
  - Reviewing community services sector early intervention and reunification services to strengthen the focus on preventing children entering out-of-home care, as well as timely reunification support.
  - Developing specific responses to meet the early intervention and reunification needs of Aboriginal children, families and communities.
  - Developing and implementing Family Support Networks.
  - Developing and implementing a Departmental Reunification Model.
  - Developing and implementing Enhanced Contact Centres.
- Further embed the Department’s permanency planning policy into practice. This will include:
  - Amending the permanency planning policy to reflect time-frames for permanent decision-making and care arrangements commencing from the moment a child enters out-of-home care.
• Developing mechanisms to enable all children retain a connection to family and culture.
• Developing and implementing a permanency planning hierarchy ordering priority permanent options for children.
• Reviewing the role of the Home-4-Life program with a view to greater integration and success-rate within the out-of-home care system.
• Developing a policy and practice for contact between foster carers and birth parents, to assist children to retain a connection with their birth family.

• Structure the out-of-home care system to promote and reinforce permanency as the overarching principle. This will include:
  • Implementing a care model where most care arrangements can transition directly into permanent out-of-home care without a change of placement. (figure 2)
  • Developing contracting arrangements with the community services sector to reinforce the Department’s permanency planning policy.
  • Expanding the capacity of the out-of-home care sector, including the Department and community services sector providers, to support and provide care arrangements for children for Protection Order (Special Guardianship) and care adoption. This includes:
    ▫ Building on recruitment strategies to include a greater capacity and emphasis on recruitment for permanent carers.
    ▫ Explore mechanisms to compensate community services sector agencies for the potential loss of a carer through the facilitation of permanent out-of-care arrangements (recognition based funding mechanisms).

• Continue targeted work with the community services sector, Judiciary and Aboriginal community supporting consistency in understanding and implementation of the permanency planning policy. This may include exploring and amending the language used, as well as legislation.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION THREE
A responsive and sustainable out-of-home care system with capacity.

The Department recognises that a thriving and diverse community services sector will have significant benefits for the overall out-of-home care system.

The Current Organisation and Funding of the Out-of-Home Care System

The current system where the Department is the provider and funder of similar out-of-home care arrangements raises perceptions of a conflict-of-interest. The argument has also been advanced that competition between the Department and community services sector services for resources, including carers, can be counter-productive. There is also a view that the prime responsibility and focus of the Department should be on statutory forensic responses to child protection concerns and the decision-making process involved in demonstrating the need for out-of-home care.
In recent times, governments have responded to these pressures by inviting an increase participation of the community services sector in the provision of out-of-home care. The involvement of the community services sector supports a more collective response to caring for children in out-of-home care.

The Western Australian community services sector’s current provision of out-of-home care is relatively small with Department funding for their services traditionally being limited and focused. Only a handful of community services sector agencies are recurrently funded to provide out-of-home care, and then predominantly only to children with the least complex needs. Department has sought services for children with the most complex needs by individual tenders on a case-by-case basis.

These funding arrangements cause several issues including:

- There is no financial incentive (indeed there may be a disincentive) for recurrently-funded agencies to bid for individual tenders for children with complex needs. This results in few agencies submitting offers for individual tenders, and the Department becoming price takers, rather than price setters.
- This can also result in recurrently funded agencies not having the capacity to provide care for children with complex needs.
- Non-recurrently funded community services sector agencies are unable to sustainably and accurately plan for out-of-home care provision, often leading to higher cost provision of individually tendered care.
- Non-recurrently funded community services sector agencies find it difficult to recruit carers for children with more complex needs as they don’t have a ready pool of carers to develop.

**Growing the Community Services Sector**

In the future system, the Department will progressively reduce its role as the predominant provider of non-relative care. The Department will transition to a system where the **majority of non-relative care arrangements are provided by the community services sector**. To best ensure that the Western Australian community is always provided with appropriate arrangements to care for children, the Department will continue to provide a level of non-relative out-of-home care.

For this partnership to be established and maintained sustainably, the capacity of the community services sector to provide a greater number and range of care arrangements will need to be increased. The Department will facilitate building the community services sector capacity through provision of an increased proportion of funding while supporting more recurrently funded agencies. It is important, and will be expected, that this capacity embraces the full-breadth of complexity and age of children in out-of-home care, and include all regions in Western Australia.

A key characteristic of this future funding arrangement will be the necessity for a **sustainable financial partnership** between the Department and community services sector agencies for the long-term. It is expected that a review of the financial partnership between the Department and community services sector will not only support sustainability, but also increase capacity in the out-of-home care system.

Concurrent with this increase in capacity will be the requirement for community services sector agencies to be able to provide a range of **support services for the child and their care arrangement**. This will include services such as leaving care services, post-Care Adoption support, intensive support to relative and non-relative carers, cultural connection for Aboriginal children, and an increasing responsibility for case management.
To organise this strategic growth of the community services sector, the Department will examine the merits of an area-based funding model for care arrangements. This will entail the requirement for community services sector agencies to provide the full suite of out-of-home care arrangements to children in a defined geographical area. This will enable more children to remain living in their local communities. This will also encourage community services sector agencies to invest in, and develop relationships and partnerships with local communities, government agencies and ACCOs, and to drive innovation in the development of sustainable, quality care arrangements focused on regional need.

Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations

An underdeveloped part of the Western Australian out-of-home care sector is Aboriginal community controlled organisations (ACCOs). These organisations, either individually or in partnership, will be essential to develop and grow the out-of-home care sector to be more connected and responsive to the Aboriginal community. This is of particular relevance given the current over-representation of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care in Western Australia. The out-of-home care system must be able to provide opportunities for Aboriginal children to be exposed to and learn their culture. The Department will actively build the capacity of ACCOs so they can provide local community leadership and management, control and decision-making for their community’s children. This strategy is aligned with directions outlined in The National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children (2009-2020).

Relative and Residential Care

For the foreseeable future, the Department’s predominant role in out-of-home care provision will become focused on relative care and residential care. The Department will re-align its structures, resources and processes to meet this change of focus.

The strategies to achieve this are:

- Grow the capacity of the community services sector to become the predominant provider of non-relative care. This will include:
  - Incrementally increasing the proportion of non-relative out-of-home care provided by the community services sector through an increase in recurrent funding.
  - Expanding the number of community services sector agencies that are recurrently funded to provide out-of-home care.
  - Reviewing current funding levels to ensure pricing is sustainable to the Department and the community services sector.
  - Funding and expecting the community services sector to provide care arrangements for children of all levels of complexity of need.
  - Strategically and actively growing the capacity of locally based Aboriginal Community controlled organisations (ACCO) to support and provide out-of-home care for Aboriginal children.
• Grow the depth of the community services sector to provide other support services to children in out-of-home care. This will include:
  ◦ Increasing the capacity of the community services sector, including ACCOs, to provide a range of out-of-home care support services, leaving care services, post-Special Guardianship Order and post-Care Adoption support, cultural connection for Aboriginal children, and intensive support to relative and non-relative carers.
  ◦ Developing the capacity for all community services sector agencies to provide delegated case management.

• Retain a mixed out-of-home care system, whereby the Department is the non-dominant care provider but retains the capacity to provide some non-relative foster care arrangements.

• Explore an area-based funding model to increase the opportunity of children remaining in their local area, where appropriate. A requirement will be that community services sector agencies provide the full suite of care arrangement options in a defined geographical area.

• Re-align the Department’s structures, resources and processes to enable an improved focus on effective support for relative care and residential care arrangements.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION FOUR
An out-of-home care sector that is accountable

Out-of-home care is a mechanism whereby the Department acts on behalf of the community to protect and provide safe care for vulnerable children. A fundamental feature of this compact between the Department and the community is that the services must be fully transparent and accountable.

The future out-of-home care system will be transparent and accountable for:

• The outcomes achieved for children in out-of-home care,

• The use of public funds, and

• The standards and performance of the care providing agencies.

These frameworks surround care arrangements to ensure a whole-of-community accountability to children in out-of-home care (figure 5).

Outcomes

The Department will implement a sector-wide, across-government Outcomes Framework for Children in Out-of-Home Care (appendix 3) (Outcomes Framework), to provide objective measures of the performance of the out-of-home care system. This framework will be used to monitor, measure and regularly report on the outcomes achieved for children living in out-of-home care. This evaluation of the outcomes achieved for individual children
will provide the foundation of an accountable, transparent and continuously improving system that focuses on improving key life outcomes for children in out-of-home care.

The Outcomes Framework will document six key outcome areas that are fundamental to the well-being of children in out-of-home care, including outcomes beyond care, and link to the National Standards for Out-of-Home Care and the Charter of Rights for Children in Care. The key outcome areas are:

- Children are safe and secure
- Children are healthy
- Children achieve
- Children belong
- Children participate
- Children enjoy life opportunity

The Department is committed to continuing to value the voice of children. The Viewpoint survey tool will continue to play a prominent role in providing meaningful input from children into their specific out-of-home care experience and the system as a whole.

The Outcomes Framework will connect and build on the Rapid Response Strategy, which coordinates actions across government recognising the priority needs of children in out-of-home care. It will articulate and motivate other government agencies with what priority outcomes are to be achieved for children in out-of-home care.

The Use of Public Funds

The Department is required to ensure the effective and efficient use of public funds.

By its very nature, significant elements of out-of-home care demand are difficult to forecast. Demand for the services is driven by many and complex economic and social factors impacting on individuals and families which are beyond the control of government.

However, through a review of funding modelling in line with a revised care model, the Department will strengthen its ability to forecast financial needs of the out-of-home care system. This will better enable the out-of-home care system to be resourced adequately and appropriately, and provide the most appropriate services in any particular location.

The Department will continue to require appropriate and transparent accountability from all sectors of the out-of-home care system for the use of public funds.

The Standards and Performance of Care Providing Agencies

Children in out-of-home care are vulnerable. The Department has a fundamental and absolute obligation to promote the provision of safe and quality care.

Recent public inquiries, including the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, have shown that fulfilling this obligation is problematic without adequate standards monitoring and reporting frameworks. Supported by the Better Care, Better Services Framework, Western Australia has performed well in this regard in recent times but needs to continue to be vigilant.
With the expansion of the community services sector and development of Aboriginal community controlled organisations foreshadowed in this report, and informed by the outcomes of the Royal Commission, the importance of monitoring the performance of all out-of-home care providers – including the Department and community services sector - will increase. The mechanisms for oversight and regulation of care standards and performance will be reviewed. Existing providers will need to inform themselves of the changing environment and new providers will need to be trained and sensitised to the requirements.

The strategies to achieve this are:

- Implement and integrate a sector-wide, across-government Outcomes Framework for Children in Out-of-Home Care, and regularly report on outcomes achieved. The across-government Rapid Response Strategy will be linked to the Outcomes Framework to best ensure a whole-of-government focus and accountability for achieving outcomes.

- Develop a partnership with a tertiary research body to monitor and report on outcomes for children after leaving care.

- Strengthen the use of the Viewpoint survey tool as a mechanism to provide meaningful input from children in out-of-home care.

- Develop and implement, in collaboration with Treasury, improved forecasting mechanisms for out-of-home care funding, including a Funding Plan and Strategic Asset Plan which meets the needs of the Western Australian out-of-home care system.

- Strengthen contracting arrangements with the community services sector to ensure performance and evaluation measures are clear, and best promote quality care and good outcomes for children in out-of-home care. Within this, investigate the implementation of performance based contracting linked to outcomes achieved for children in care.

- Review the oversight processes of the Western Australian out-of-home care system, including a focus on the Foster Care Directory and ‘employee carers’ of community services sector agencies.

- Explore the feasibility and benefits of a system of accreditation for out-of-home care providers in Western Australia.

- Explore the feasibility and benefits of external standards monitoring of out-of-home care providers in Western Australia.

**STRATEGIC DIRECTION FIVE**

**An out-of-home care sector that is consistent**

Consistency across the out-of-home care system will be a key characteristic in the partnership between the Department and the community services sector. Whilst diversity in care provision is essential - promoting innovation, flexibility and rigour – opportunities, standards and accountability must be consistent.

A child living in Kalumburu must have reliable quality of care; as must a child living in Geraldton, or in a suburb of Perth. The expectations of quality of a child’s care experience should be similar whether they live with a relative, a community services sector foster carer, or in Department residential care. The quality of care expected for Aboriginal children must be the same as that of non-Aboriginal children. The suite of care options...
available in the metropolitan area should, wherever possible, be available in country areas. The expectation of the community services sector must be equivalent to that of Department providers.

However, achieving consistency across a state as geographically, culturally and demographically diverse as Western Australia is a challenge and must always be done from the standpoint of substantive equality.

Consistency starts with a shared understanding of purpose and direction of the out-of-home care sector. Whilst the route may vary as to how to get there, a shared purpose enables the destination goal to be the same. This strategy provides an important statement of direction for the sector.

The strategies to achieve this are:

- Articulate and actively promote a shared sector vision for out-of-home care in Western Australia.
- Adopt and employ shared and consistent language throughout the out-of-home care sector.
- Implement processes and arrangements to best ensure the out-of-home care system provides a reliable high quality of care and opportunity to all children, irrespective of their location, care arrangement or out-of-home care provider. This will include:
  - Implementing processes to ensure that a child assessment and matching process provides a consistent, cross-sector understanding of a child’s needs.
  - Improving sector-wide consistency in the assessment and approval of carers, exploring processes such as a shared panel.
  - Developing and implementing consistent minimum expectations, and related training and support, for carers and workers in the out-of-home care sector, in-line with revised care model.
  - The Department and community services sector working together to ensure that country and metropolitan areas have similar care options available to them.

NEXT STEPS

These strategic directions have been developed collaboratively with key stakeholders in the provision of out-of-home care in Western Australia, including representation from the Aboriginal community controlled organisation sector. It will be a key tenet of the proposed future directions to support continuous evaluation, ensuring its components contribute positively to a more effective and efficient out-of-home care system. The end result must be the continued safety, stability and improved life outcomes and opportunities for children in out-of-home care.

With feedback received, it is intended that the proposed changes outlined here will be further developed and introduced gradually over the coming years. It is anticipated that the Out-of-Home Care Five Year Strategic Plan, as well as an Implementation Plan, will be developed and released in June 2015 with the objective of commencing a staged roll-out of the suite of changes in July 2015.
COMBINED STRATEGIES

STRATEGIC DIRECTION ONE
An out-of-home care system that is driven by the needs of the child

The strategies to achieve this are:

- Implement a system of flexible out-of-home care arrangements that are based on a holistic assessment of the needs of the child, which will be matched with the support, competency and capacity required to provide for those needs. The resources provided to the care arrangement will be regularly reviewed and evolve with the child’s development. This will require:
  - Implementing a structured child assessment and matching process, inclusive of a cultural framework, to establish the child’s current and future needs.
  - Implementing a new care model that leads to a care arrangement that best meet the needs of that child.

- Develop competency standards for out-of-home carers that correspond with the different needs of children, and facilitate the implementation of appropriate training and development.

- Develop a mechanism to identify and support the cultural needs of Aboriginal children in their care arrangement.

- Develop and implement appropriate processes and structures to better support and sustain relative carers and children in these care arrangements.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION TWO
An out-of-home care system that values and promotes stability and certainty for children in care

The strategies to achieve this are:

- Develop and implement mechanisms to reduce children entering care, and to promote children in out-of-home care returning safely to their family as early as possible. This will include:
  - Reviewing community services sector early intervention and reunification services to strengthen the focus on preventing children entering out-of-home care, as well as timely reunification support.
  - Developing specific responses to meet the early intervention and reunification needs of Aboriginal children, families and communities.
  - Developing and implementing Family Support Networks.
  - Developing and implementing a Departmental Reunification Model.
  - Developing and implementing Enhanced Contact Centres.
• Further embed the Department’s permanency planning policy into practice. This will include:
  ◦ Amending the permanency planning policy to reflect time-frames for permanent decision-making and care arrangements commencing from the moment a child enters out-of-home care.
  ◦ Developing mechanisms to enable all children retain a connection to family and culture.
  ◦ Developing and implementing a permanency planning hierarchy ordering priority permanent options for children.
  ◦ Reviewing the role of the Home-4-Life program with a view to greater integration and success-rate within the out-of-home care system.
  ◦ Developing a policy and practice for contact between foster carers and birth parents, to assist children to retain a connection with their birth family.

• Structure the out-of-home care system to promote and reinforce permanency as the overarching principle. This will include:
  ◦ Implementing a care model where most care arrangements can transition directly into permanent out-of-home care without a change of placement. (figure 2)
  ◦ Developing contracting arrangements with the community services sector to reinforce the Department’s permanency planning policy.
  ◦ Expanding the capacity of the out-of-home care sector, including the Department and community services sector providers, to support and provide care arrangements for children for Protection Order (Special Guardianship) and care adoption. This includes:
    ▫ Building on recruitment strategies to include a greater capacity and emphasis on recruitment for permanent carers.
    ▫ Explore mechanisms to compensate community services sector agencies for the potential loss of a carer through the facilitation of permanent out-of-care arrangements (recognition based funding mechanisms).
  ◦ Continue targeted work with the community services sector, Judiciary and Aboriginal community supporting consistency in understanding and implementation of the permanency planning policy. This may include exploring and amending the language used, as well as legislation.

**STRATEGIC DIRECTION THREE**

**A responsive and sustainable out-of-home care system with capacity.**

The strategies to achieve this are:

• Grow the capacity of the community services sector to become the predominant provider of non-relative care. This will include:
  ◦ Incrementally increasing the proportion of non-relative out-of-home care provided by the community services sector through an increase in recurrent funding.
  ◦ Expanding the number of community services sector agencies that are recurrently funded to provide out-of-home care.
  ◦ Reviewing current funding levels to ensure pricing is sustainable to the Department and the community services sector.
• Funding and expecting the community services sector to provide care arrangements for children of all levels of complexity of need.

• Strategically and actively growing the capacity of locally based Aboriginal community controlled organisations (ACCO) to support and provide out-of-home care for Aboriginal children.

• Grow the depth of the community services sector to provide other support services to children in out-of-home care. This will include:

  ◦ Increasing the capacity of the community services sector, including ACCOs, to provide a range of out-of-home care support services, including providing leaving care services, post-Special Guardianship Order and post-Care Adoption support, cultural connection for Aboriginal children, and intensive support to relative and non-relative carers.

  ◦ Developing the capacity for all community services sector agencies to provide delegated case management.

• Retain a mixed out-of-home care system, whereby the Department is the non-dominant care provider but retains the capacity to provide some non-relative foster care arrangements.

• Explore an area-based funding model to increase the opportunity of children remaining in their local area, where appropriate. A requirement will be that community services sector agencies provide the full suite of care arrangement options in a defined geographical area.

• Re-align the Department’s structures, resources and processes to enable an improved focus on effective support for relative care and residential care arrangements.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION FOUR
An out-of-home care sector that is accountable

The strategies to achieve this are:

• Implement and integrate a sector-wide, across-government Outcomes Framework for Children in Out-of-Home Care, and regularly report on outcomes achieved. The across-government Rapid Response Strategy will be linked to the Outcomes Framework to best ensure a whole-of-government focus and accountability for achieving outcomes.

• Develop a partnership with a tertiary research body to monitor and report on outcomes for children after leaving care.

• Strengthen the use of the Viewpoint survey tool as a mechanism to provide meaningful input from children in out-of-home care.

• Develop and implement, in collaboration with Treasury, improved forecasting mechanisms for out-of-home care funding, including a Funding Plan and Strategic Asset Plan which meets the needs of the Western Australian out-of-home care system.

• Strengthen contracting arrangements with the community services sector to ensure performance and evaluation measures are clear, and best promote quality care and good outcomes for children in out-of-home care. Within this, investigate the implementation of performance based contracting linked to outcomes achieved for children in care.
• Review the oversight processes of the Western Australian out-of-home care system, including a focus on the Foster Care Directory and ‘employee carers’ of community services sector agencies.

• Explore the feasibility and benefits of a system of accreditation for out-of-home care providers in Western Australia.

• Explore the feasibility and benefits of external standards monitoring of out-of-home care providers in Western Australia.

**STRATEGIC DIRECTION FIVE**

*An out-of-home care sector that is consistent*

The strategies to achieve this are:

• Articulate and actively promote a shared sector vision for out-of-home care in Western Australia.

• Adopt and employ shared and consistent language throughout the out-of-home care sector.

• Implement processes and arrangements to best ensure the out-of-home care system provides a reliable high quality of care and opportunity to all children, irrespective of their location, care arrangement or out-of-home care provider. This will include:
  
  • Implementing processes to ensure that a child assessment and matching process provides a consistent, cross-sector understanding of a child’s needs.
  
  • Improving sector-wide consistency in the assessment and approval of carers, exploring processes such as a shared panel.
  
  • Developing and implementing consistent minimum expectations, and related training and support, for carers and workers in the out-of-home care sector, in-line with revised care model.
  
  • The Department and community services sector working together to ensure that country and metropolitan areas have similar care options available to them.
APPENDIX 2
OOHC Plan Steering and Working groups

Minister

CPFS
Corporate Executive

Out-of-Home
Steering Group

Key Agencies with
Shared Responsibility
for Outcomes Under
Rapid Response
Strategy

- Department for Child Protection and Family Support
- Community Service Sector
- Department for Health
- Mental Health Commission

- Disability Services Commission
- Department of Education
- Department of Training and Workforce Development
- Department of Aboriginal Affairs

- Department of Sport and Recreation
- Department of Housing
- WA Police
- Drug and Alcohol Office

Outcome 1
Safe and Stable
Children live safely in a stable care arrangement

Outcome 2
Healthy
Children have their health needs assessed and attended to in a timely manner

Outcome 3
Achieve
Children attend and participate in quality education

Outcome 4
Belong
Children develop and retain a deep knowledge and understanding of their life history and identity

Outcome 5
Participate
Children participate in decision making that affects them

Outcome 6
Enjoy Life Opportunity
Children leave care with the best opportunity to live stable and productive lives