GETTING IT RIGHT EARLY

South Australian Government's Prevention and Early Intervention Strategy for Child Abuse and Neglect 2018 - 2019

Government of South Australia

FOREWORD

Every year, South Australia is proud to welcome about 20,000 newborn children to our State. Amongst these children, we welcome about 1,000 Aboriginal newborn children, who 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.

Our children are the future educators, artists, tradies, sports people, innovators, volunteers, and leaders. They will also be the aunties, uncles, mothers and fathers of tomorrow's children.

Getting it Right Early: South Australian Government's Prevention and Early Intervention Strategy for Child Abuse and Neglect 2018-19 provides the framework for South Australia to get it right for our most vulnerable children and families. It highlights the need for the Government to shift 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* is the Government's response to the Royal Commission and assigns the Early Intervention Research Directorate with responsibility for creating and coordinating a whole of government prevention and early intervention strategy. This initial Strategy sets the framework and identifies the first phase of commitments for the Government's prevention and early intervention effort. It also reflects key areas for investment outlined by our valued stakeholders in the community services sector, as their focus shifts towards growing our society's capacity in supporting our families and 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 MP

Premier of South Australia

Dr Susan Close MP

Minister of Education and Child Development

INTRODUCTION

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 through ***culturally-informed approaches***, and ***targeting services*** for those with greatest need.

The Strategy has been developed in consultation with key government, non-government and community stakeholders.

This Strategy is not intended to stand alone. At a state and national level, a lot is changing – including new policies, legislation and strategies that relate to the safety, wellbeing and development of children. These reforms go beyond the child protection sector, incorporating the work of government and non-government agencies across:

- Education and child development;
- Domestic and family violence;
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs;
- Youth services;
- Drug and alcohol services;
- Health, including mental health;
- Justice;
- Housing and homelessness.

The Strategy will be revised to incorporate new intelligence 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 evaluation and continuous improvement.

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.**

OUR VISION

Children thrive in safe and nurturing environments.

OUR FOCUS

To ensure that the right supports are in place, at the right time, in order to reduce child abuse and neglect.

Foundations of a Prevention and Early Intervention Strategy

Getting it Right Early focuses on the opportunities to intervene **before problems occur** or **stop things getting worse** for vulnerable families. The State already makes significant investment in schools, children's centres, and antenatal and postnatal health care facilities to support child wellbeing. Over the next five years we will support these services to take a more active and coordinated role in our efforts to prevent child abuse and neglect.

Working together

If we are to improve the lives of South Australian children, we must change the way we work and try new things. This requires a shared commitment between government, non-government organisations and the community to reduce child abuse and neglect.

Voice of children and families

Underpinning this Strategy is the acknowledgement that children and families are experts in their own lives.

We will build on strengths as well as addressing risks

In order to minimise risk, protective and strengths-based responses will be the foundation for prevention and early intervention strategies. We will build on strengths at the individual, family or community level to form part of this prevention and early intervention agenda.

Prevention and early intervention will focus on Aboriginal children, families and communities who are over-represented in child protection

Recognising and valuing Aboriginal strengths and potential, government and other service providers will be equipped and accountable to provide culturally safe, competent and accessible services to Aboriginal children and families.

The importance of community and place

Different communities experience risk and vulnerability in different ways. Prevention and early intervention strategies for child abuse and neglect will be contextualised in order to be effective.

STRATEGIC THEMES

SUPPORT OUR MOST VULNERABLE

We will target our prevention and early intervention efforts to the most vulnerable children, families and communities.

PRIORITISE ABORIGINAL CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND CULTURES

We will implement culturally-informed approaches to improve how we work with vulnerable Aboriginal children and families.

STRENGTHEN THE SYSTEM

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

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.

SUPPORT OUR MOST VULNERABLE

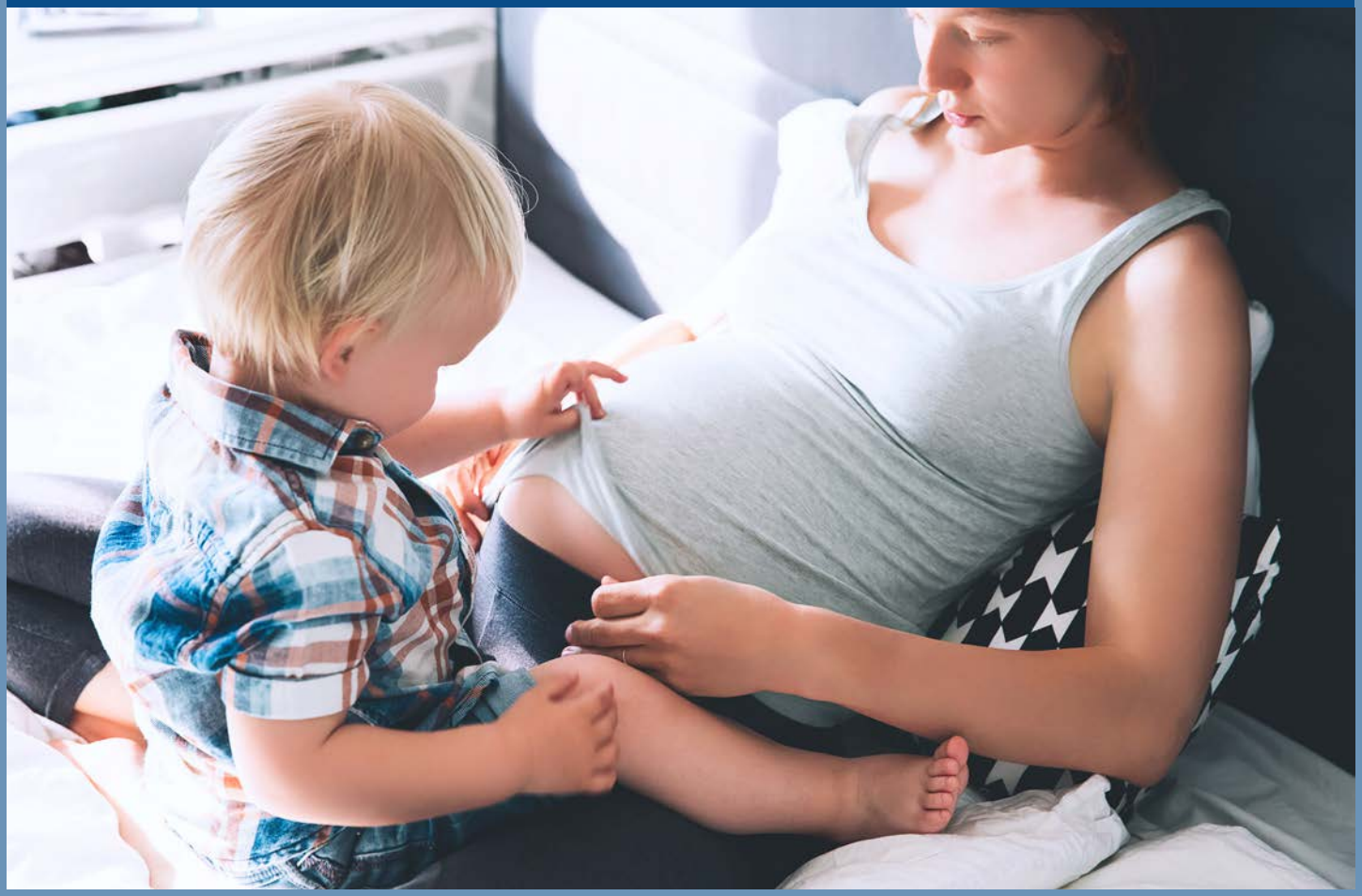
We will target our prevention and early intervention efforts to the most vulnerable children, families and communities.

Our promise to understand the evidence and improve the system is underpinned by a commitment to support the most vulnerable in our community. 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 tools 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 involve developing strategies that respond to the inter-generational impacts of child abuse and neglect.

What We Have 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
  - Young parents
  - 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?

Develop specific service proposals that target risk and vulnerability, including support for:

- young parents
- families with a child(ren) already known to the child protection system
- parents who had been in care themselves

Lead: EIRD and Line Agencies

Produce and publish policy briefs to better understand and respond to the needs of identified groups, including:

- those experiencing domestic and family violence
- families with chronic and repeat involvement in the child protection system
- children with disabilities
- culturally diverse groups

Lead: EIRD

Develop a comprehensive community risk profile bringing together accurate data from multiple sources to improve system responsiveness to vulnerable groups, taking into account geography, age, and demographic characteristics

Lead: EIRD

Engage with children and young people to inform the design of new prevention and early intervention services

Lead: EIRD and Line Agencies

Develop a future research agenda to continue building the evidence base for prevention and early intervention

Lead: EIRD

Undertake research to specifically explore inter-generational patterns of abuse and neglect and strategies to break this cycle

Lead: EIRD

Develop and test tools that use real time, linked data to better respond to children at risk of child abuse and neglect

Lead: EIRD and Office for Data Analytics

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

Lead: EIRD and Line Agencies

PRIORITISE ABORIGINAL CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND CULTURES

We will implement culturally-informed approaches to improve how we work with Aboriginal children, families and communities.

We will work across government as part of our commitment to the national *Family Matters* campaign, including that:

- All families enjoy access to quality, culturally safe, universal and targeted services necessary for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to thrive
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations participate in and have control over decisions that affect their children
- Law, policy and practice in child and family welfare are culturally safe and responsive
- Governments and services are accountable to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

We recognise culture as a protective factor. We value cultural identity and recognise that each community will have different cultural protocols and that there is not a 'one size fits all' approach. We recognise the right to self-determination for all Aboriginal children, families and communities. We commit to providing prevention and early intervention supports for Aboriginal families when they need it. We will ensure that families and communities have a voice in shaping what those supports will look like. We will also understand what works to reduce child neglect and harm in Aboriginal families and communities.

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. We will work with Aboriginal South Australians to position Aboriginal people as leaders of prevention and early intervention practice, policy and system reform. We will ensure government and other service providers deliver evidence-based, culturally safe services that are accessible, transparent, accountable, and competent.

Children and families who have been identified, through evidence-based practice, as most vulnerable to risk of child abuse and neglect will benefit from our targeted investments.

We will support the development of a culturally responsive workforce, systems and practices that are informed by the ongoing impacts of racism, inter-generational trauma and multi-generational disadvantage. Recognising these impacts and improving cultural practice will enable healing.

What We Have 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 improve culturally appropriate services
- Commenced 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 research, evidence gathering and release of data
- Embedded a recognition of Aboriginal over-representation in all aspects of work undertaken under this Strategy.

What's Next?

Evaluate an additional 50 programs for cultural competency

Lead: EIRD

Engage with Aboriginal families and communities who have experience with the child protection system to inform prevention and early intervention service provision

Lead: EIRD

Develop a response to the findings of the Case File Review into Aboriginal over-representation in the child protection system

Lead: 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

Lead: EIRD and Line Agencies

Incorporate the unique experiences of Aboriginal people within the child protection system into any service planning

Lead: Whole of Government

Pilot at least one community-driven prevention and early intervention service program for Aboriginal children and families

Lead: EIRD and Line Agencies

Work with the Family Matters Steering Group (SA) to ensure consistent approaches to addressing Aboriginal over-representation in the child protection system

Lead: EIRD and Department of Child Protection

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, in the right way. This means we will stop doing things that don't work, and refocus our current investment on things that do. It will also make new investments in prevention and early intervention for child abuse and neglect by building on what works and promoting innovation.

Government agencies and NGOs working together to share the responsibility for change will be fundamental to this. It is also critical that South Australian services and initiatives are implemented in a way that complements national policies and programs.

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 service

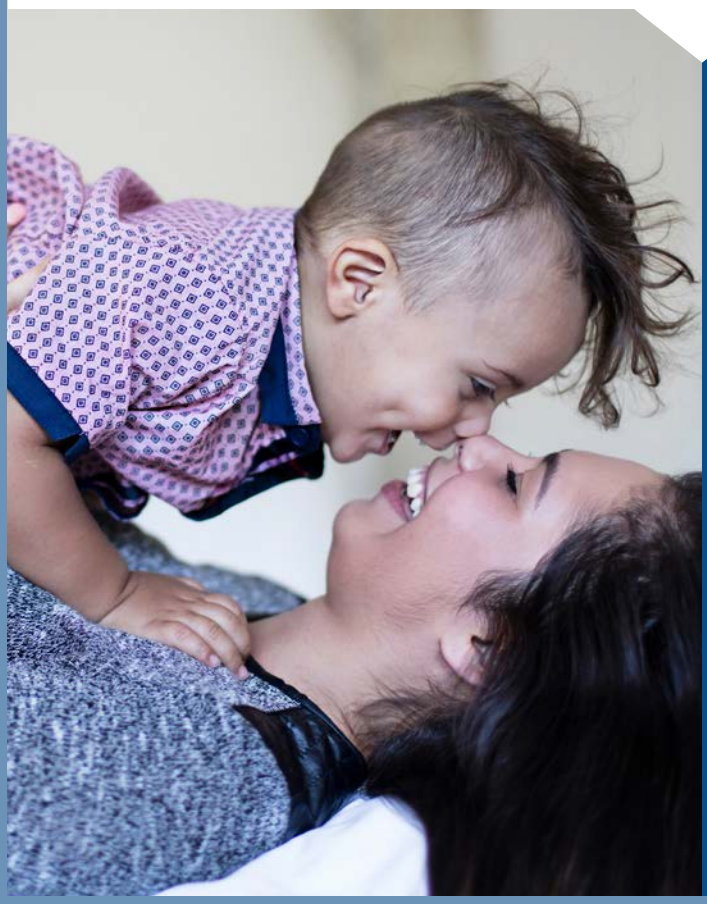
The main focus of early intervention and prevention for child abuse and neglect is on providing targeted services to those we identify as most vulnerable. In particular, the links between health, antenatal care and education services will be a priority.

Adult services

The 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 and caregivers.

Build workforce capacity

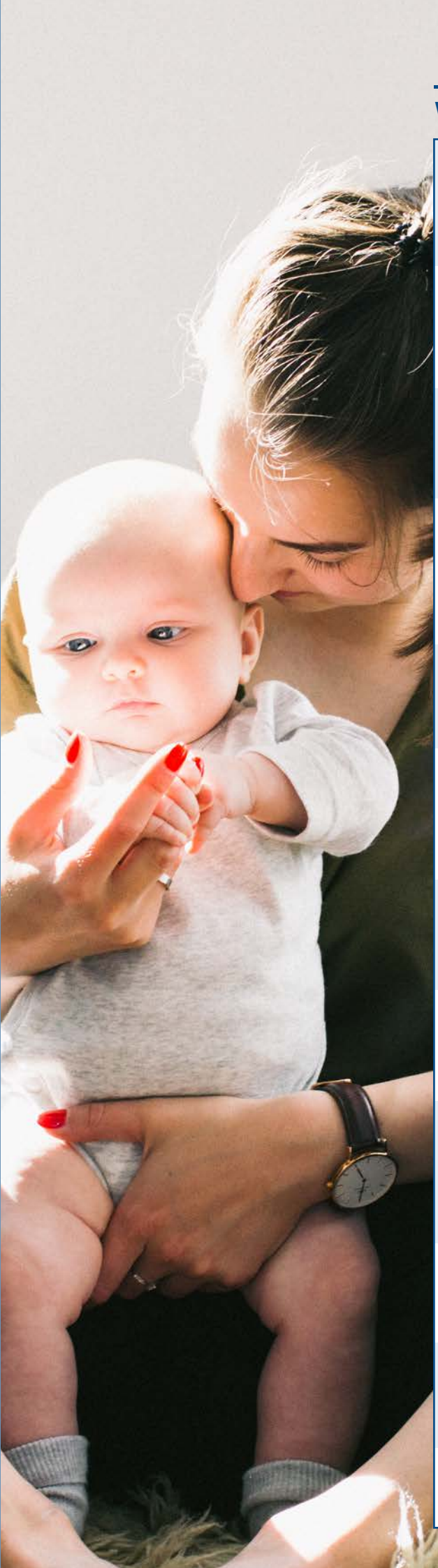
Child abuse and neglect early intervention and prevention strategies must be delivered by a workforce skilled and capable to work with vulnerable children and families, often with complex, multifaceted needs. We will develop a system that enables the workforce to be culturally responsive, appropriately qualified and adequately supported.



What We Have Done

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

- Commenced mapping of 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 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 (CFARNs) in four locations.



What's Next?

Work with stakeholders to develop a performance and accountability framework for the Strategy to track the success of prevention and early intervention responses

Lead: EIRD

Develop a map of government funded prevention and early intervention services for child abuse and neglect, identifying gaps and priorities

Lead: EIRD and Office for Data Analytics

Develop a data analytics process for monitoring and evaluating early intervention services, including outcome measures informed by evidence

Lead: EIRD and Office for Data Analytics

Evaluate new measures introduced within the child protection system for their interaction with and effectiveness in supporting the early intervention and prevention effort

Lead: Department of the Premier and Cabinet and Department of Child Protection

Evaluate the CFARNs to ensure they effectively identify, assess and serve vulnerable children and reduce response times

Lead: EIRD

Establish a decision making assessment tool to inform all funding decisions, and an evaluation matrix for prevention and early intervention programs

Lead: EIRD and Line Agencies

A plan to enhance universal services where evidence indicates this works best

Lead: EIRD and Line Agencies

Develop a system wide plan which targets prevention and early intervention investment on services and programs that work

Lead: 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

Lead: EIRD

Review and amend government procurement practice to support service responses that deliver sustainable outcomes

Lead: EIRD and Line Agencies

Work with potential service providers in the co-design and commissioning of new prevention and early intervention initiatives

Lead: Line Agencies

Develop the next iteration of this Strategy in collaboration with stakeholders

Lead: EIRD

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.

The Early Intervention Research Directorate (EIRD), through arrangements with skilled researchers and the work of the Office for Data Analytics, will:

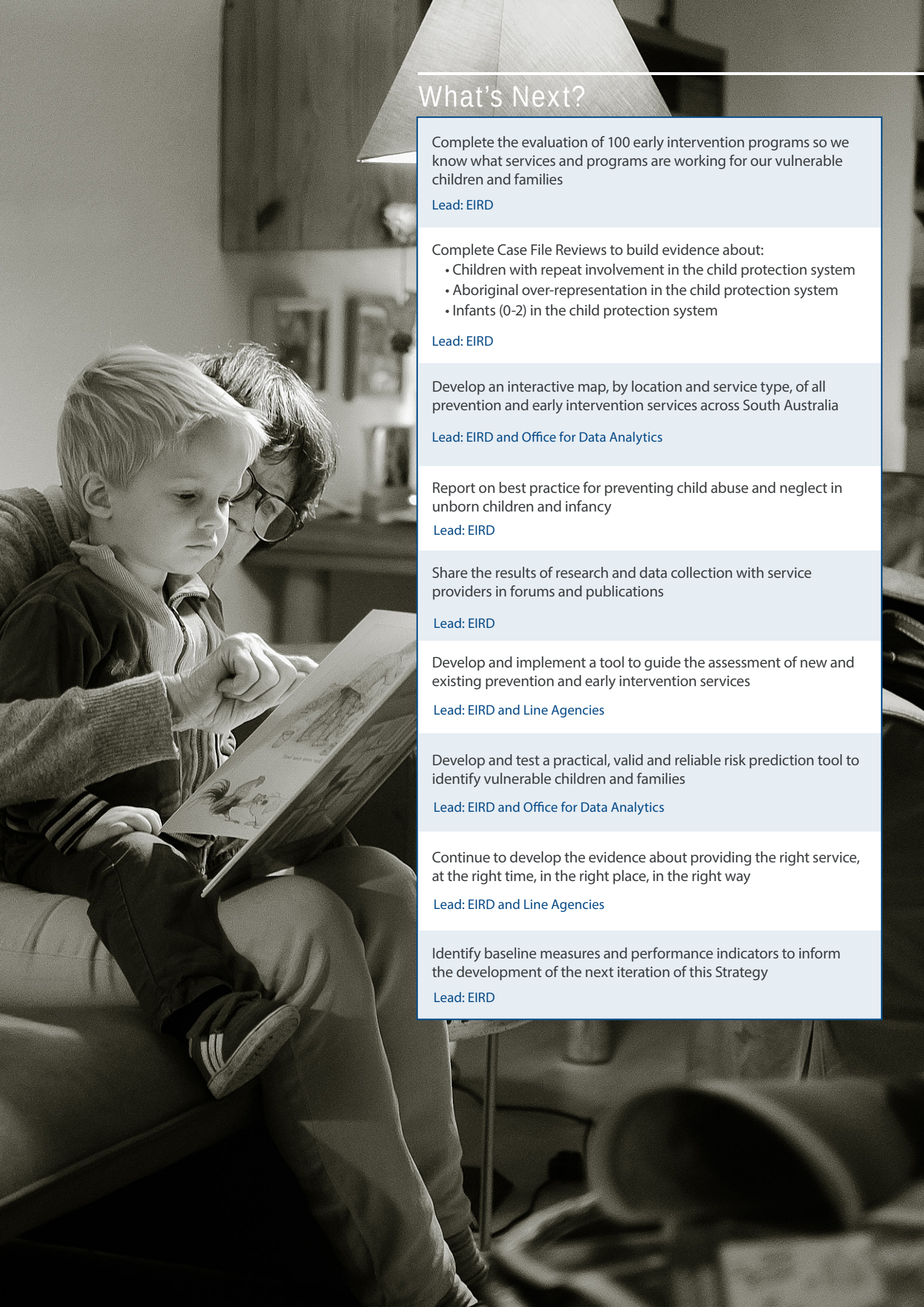
- Build a profile of the multiple and inter-relational risk and protective factors that can lead to vulnerability to child abuse and neglect
- Build the evidence around effective service provision
- Build the evidence around the experience of vulnerable children and families
- Use evidence to inform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

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 along with our information about vulnerable members of the community to redesign our early intervention system. We also value the practice wisdom, experience and evidence that is held within the service system.

What We Have Done

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

- Established the 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:
    - 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
    - EIRD Case File Review #1 – which identifies the early intervention and prevention pathways for child protection concerns raised in pregnancy.



What's Next?

Complete the evaluation of 100 early intervention programs so we know what services and programs are working for our vulnerable children and families

Lead: EIRD

Complete Case File Reviews to build evidence about:

- Children with repeat involvement in the child protection system
- Aboriginal over-representation in the child protection system
- Infants (0-2) in the child protection system

Lead: EIRD

Develop an interactive map, by location and service type, of all prevention and early intervention services across South Australia

Lead: EIRD and Office for Data Analytics

Report on best practice for preventing child abuse and neglect in unborn children and infancy

Lead: EIRD

Share the results of research and data collection with service providers in forums and publications

Lead: EIRD

Develop and implement a tool to guide the assessment of new and existing prevention and early intervention services

Lead: EIRD and Line Agencies

Develop and test a practical, valid and reliable risk prediction tool to identify vulnerable children and families

Lead: EIRD and Office for Data Analytics

Continue to develop the evidence about providing the right service, at the right time, in the right place, in the right way

Lead: EIRD and Line Agencies

Identify baseline measures and performance indicators to inform the development of the next iteration of this Strategy

Lead: EIRD

OUR LANGUAGE

Vulnerable

The term **'vulnerable'** refers to children and families displaying the early signs, symptoms or predispositions that may lead to child abuse or neglect requiring formal child protection services.

Prevention

The term **'prevention'** refers to actions designed to stop something before it actually occurs, or to reduce the likelihood of predictable outcomes.

Early Intervention

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.

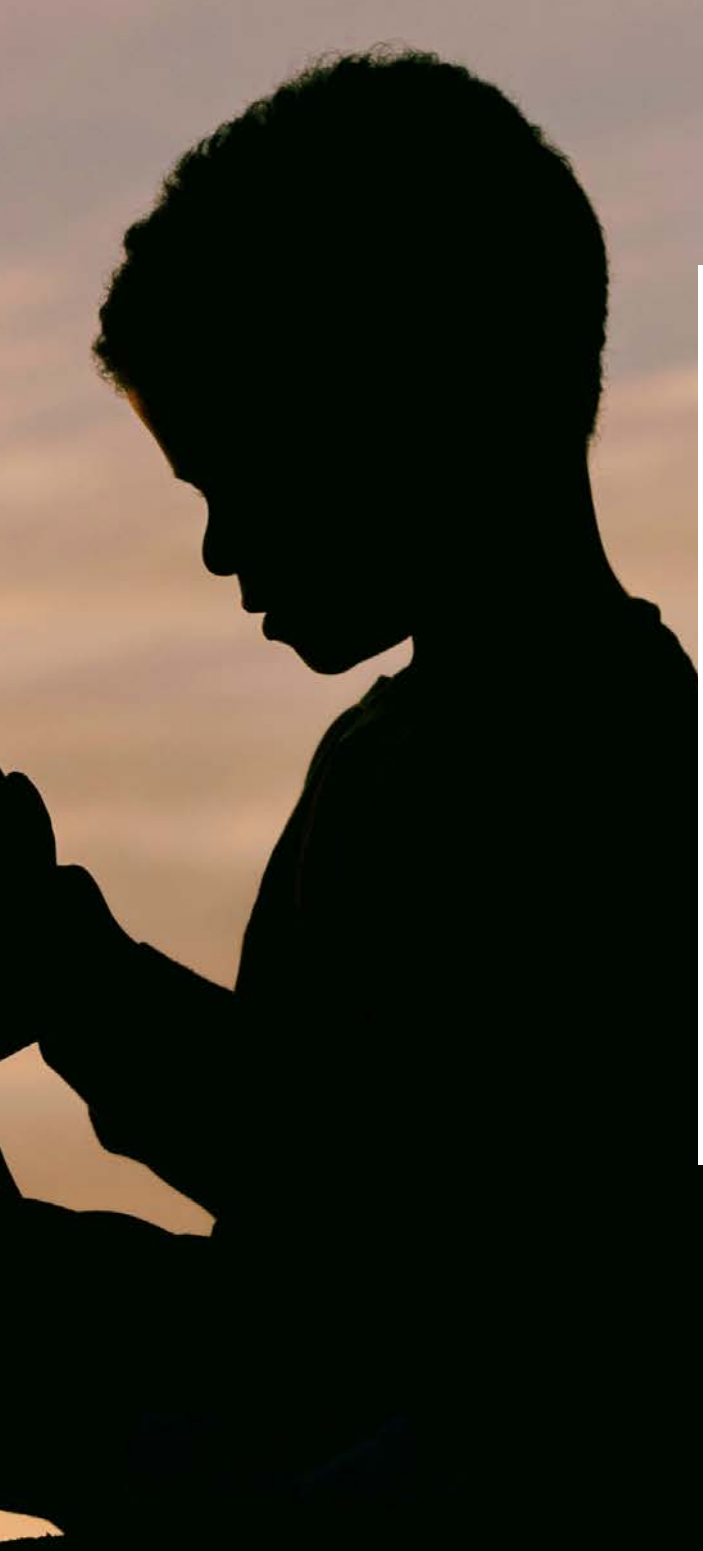
Line Agencies

The term **'line agencies'** refers to South Australian Government departments that deliver services and/or directly engage non-government service providers.

Stakeholders

Our **'stakeholders'** include statutory authorities, non-government organisations (NGOs), peak bodies, service providers, children, families and communities. These stakeholders play an essential role in promoting child safety and wellbeing. They may receive funding from government, but are independent entities and important partners in achieving our vision.

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.



BEING ACCOUNTABLE

This whole of government Strategy was approved by Cabinet on 7 February 2018. EIRD will work with line agencies to implement the Strategy.

The EIRD Governance Committee will oversee implementation of the Strategy, with executive representation from government agencies including Department of the Premier and Cabinet, Department of Treasury and Finance, Department of Child Protection, Department of State Development (Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation), Department for Health and Ageing, Department for Education and Child Development and Department for Communities and Social Inclusion.

We are 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. The Strategy will be revised and updated through this work, based on emerging evidence and a greater understanding of what is making a difference. The next iteration of this Strategy will specify targets and measures to assess performance over time.

Progress toward achieving the objectives of this Strategy as well as new findings and research outcomes will be published on the EIRD website: www.dpc.sa.gov.au/eird

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of South Australia

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