

# Australian Centre for Child Protection

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University of  
South Australia



# Welcome

*The University of South Australia is dedicated to research that is informed, leading-edge and relevant. UniSA is fortunate to have a flagship national research centre, the Australian Centre for Child Protection, conducting research that supports the development of policy and practice solutions to make a real difference to the lives of vulnerable children and their families.*

*The following selection of the Australian Centre for Child Protection’s outstanding achievements from their first decade shines a light on the positive difference that can be made by committed people doing sound research in partnership with policy and practice leaders.*

*The work done by the Centre will help ensure our children are protected against abuse and neglect. There is no higher priority.*

**Professor David Lloyd**  
Vice Chancellor,  
University of South Australia



**Acknowledgement of Country**

UniSA respects the Kaurna, Boandik and Barngarla peoples’ spiritual relationship with their country. We also acknowledge the diversity of Aboriginal peoples, past and present.

*Find out more about the University’s commitment to reconciliation at [unisa.edu.au/RAP](http://unisa.edu.au/RAP)*

# Contents

Introduction	4
Improving services for homeless children	7
Changing Australia’s focus to early intervention and prevention	8
Championing real change for Aboriginal children, families and communities	11
Transforming the standards for professional practice	12
Parenting in a new culture: supporting refugee families	15
Focusing service delivery on the needs of vulnerable children	16
Partnering for real-time research impact in child protection services	19
Delivering evidence informed child protection policy	20
Improving responses for children with Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder	23
Bridging the gaps between research, policy and practice	24
Thank you	26





# Introduction

Child abuse and neglect is one of the most confronting issues facing our society – yet research in this area has significantly lagged behind other paediatric fields.

At the Australian Centre for Child Protection we are building research career pathways so that Australia’s best and brightest can devote their talents to making new discoveries in this most important field.

Driven by the University of South Australia’s commitment to deliver innovative and sustainable solutions that respond to the most pressing needs of society, the award-winning team have pioneered methods for research with some of the most vulnerable children, families and communities in Australia. This includes world-first research focusing on: predicting and preventing high levels of child protection involvement and cumulative harm, understanding the extent and impact of child sexual abuse in institutions, working with refugee families to support parenting in a new culture, support needs for children with highly complex behaviours in foster

care, highlighting the needs of homeless children, understanding the impacts of child removal, fathering and family violence, and supporting the wellbeing of the child protection workforce. Aligned with leading peak bodies, community-controlled organisations, communities and other researchers, we also focus on supporting child, family and community strengths for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Supported over the past decade by a National Advisory Council of seven eminent Australians, our award-winning team has included professionals from a wide range of disciplines. Since our inception, we have worked with hundreds of organisations and thousands of practitioners, academics and policy-makers in Australia and overseas to enable new discoveries to be immediately translated into policy and practice to collectively make a difference for our most vulnerable children. We are proud to share our achievements over our first decade with you.

# By the numbers:



non-government, philanthropic and academic partners



awards



establishment grant from the Australian Government



publications and presentations



PhD students



projects



staff since its inception





# We are here to make an impact and lasting change. This is how.

## Improving services for homeless children

Every night, there are children staying in homelessness services.

31,000 children under 18 years of age (20,000 under 10 years old) have experienced homelessness because they were escaping domestic and/or family violence. (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Specialist Homelessness Services Report 2014-2015).

No child should experience a life like this, so we partnered with Mission Australia to form a powerful alliance across several organisations to investigate and improve services for homeless children.

In 2009, we received a grant from the Sidney Myer Foundation, allowing us to explore the current impacts of homelessness and its precursors on children. We identified that the impacts on children are significant and they need specialist support. Moved by the findings, we investigated how homelessness services were responding to dependent children. Our research resulted in support for changing the way we address homelessness in Australia, and it continues to build to this day.

### Our research resulted in:

**Policy change:** dependent children are now recognised as clients of homelessness services and entitled to have their needs addressed.

**Service provision change:** service providers are now responsible for addressing the individual needs of dependent children.

**Practice change:** information showcasing promising practice has been circulated and training and resources that support work with homeless children are now available to service providers.

**Working closely with the Australian Centre for Child Protection was incredibly useful in not only progressing what was an important project in light of homelessness policy reform, but in developing models of collaboration across research, policy and practice. Bringing different sectors together, across these domains, is never easy but with perseverance and a shared vision we were able to create the foundation for future research, practice development and policy consolidation for children who are homeless, their families and the practitioners who work alongside them.**

**Sean Lappin**, former homelessness policy advisor to Mission Australia

With the support of Mission Australia, Institute of Child Protection Studies, Sidney Myer Fund, Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth, Hanover Welfare Services, University of New South Wales, New South Wales Government and Australian Government.

**Between 2014-2015 there were:**

**255,657**  
homeless clients

**70,000**  
were under 18

**42,000**  
aged under 10

(Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Specialist Homelessness Services Report 2014-2015)



# Changing Australia's focus to early intervention and prevention

## National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020

In 2005, the year the Centre was established, more than 250,000 reports of suspected child abuse were made to Australian child protection services. Largely reactive, these services were responding to harm to children once it had occurred, rather than working to prevent harm to children.

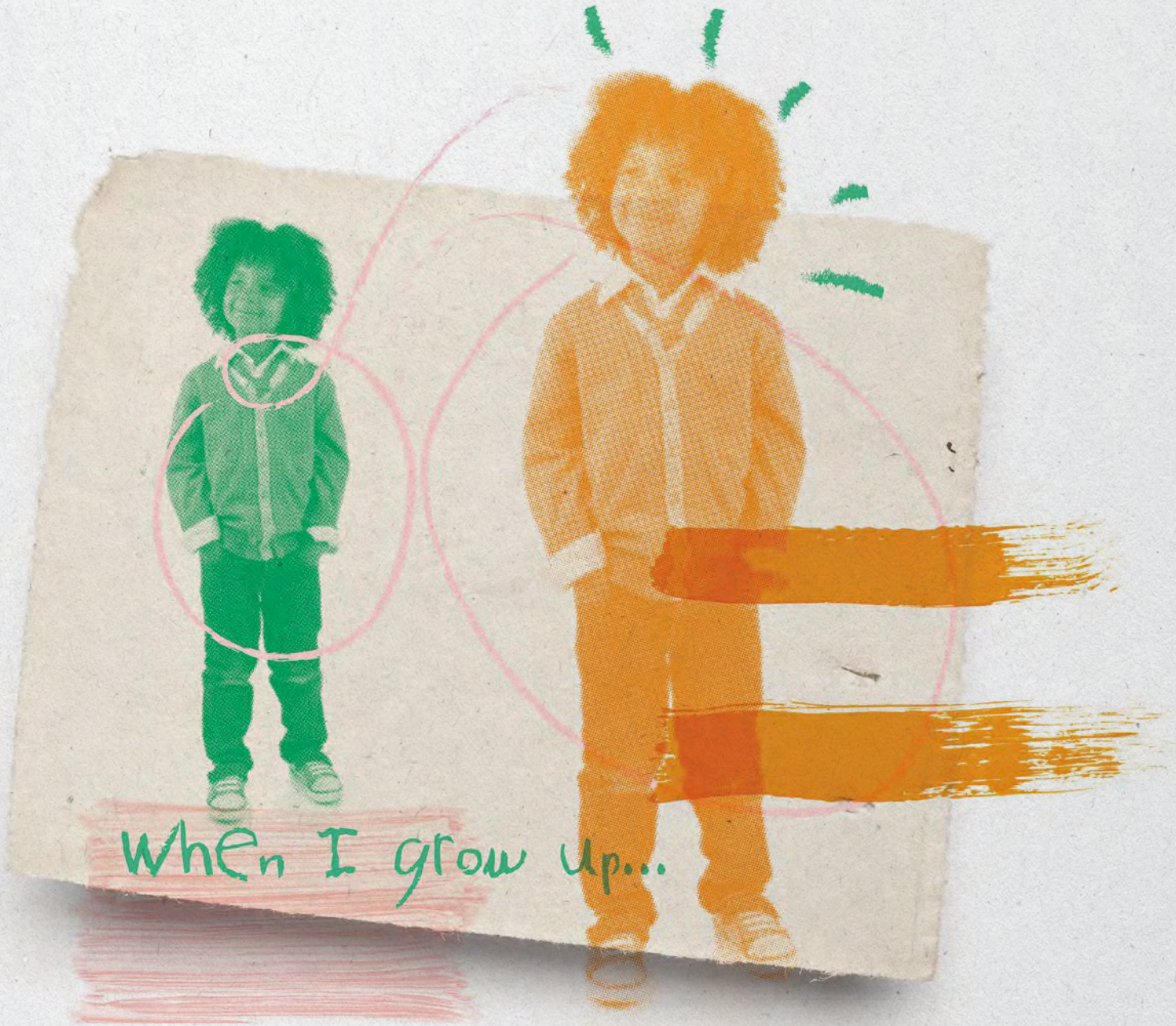
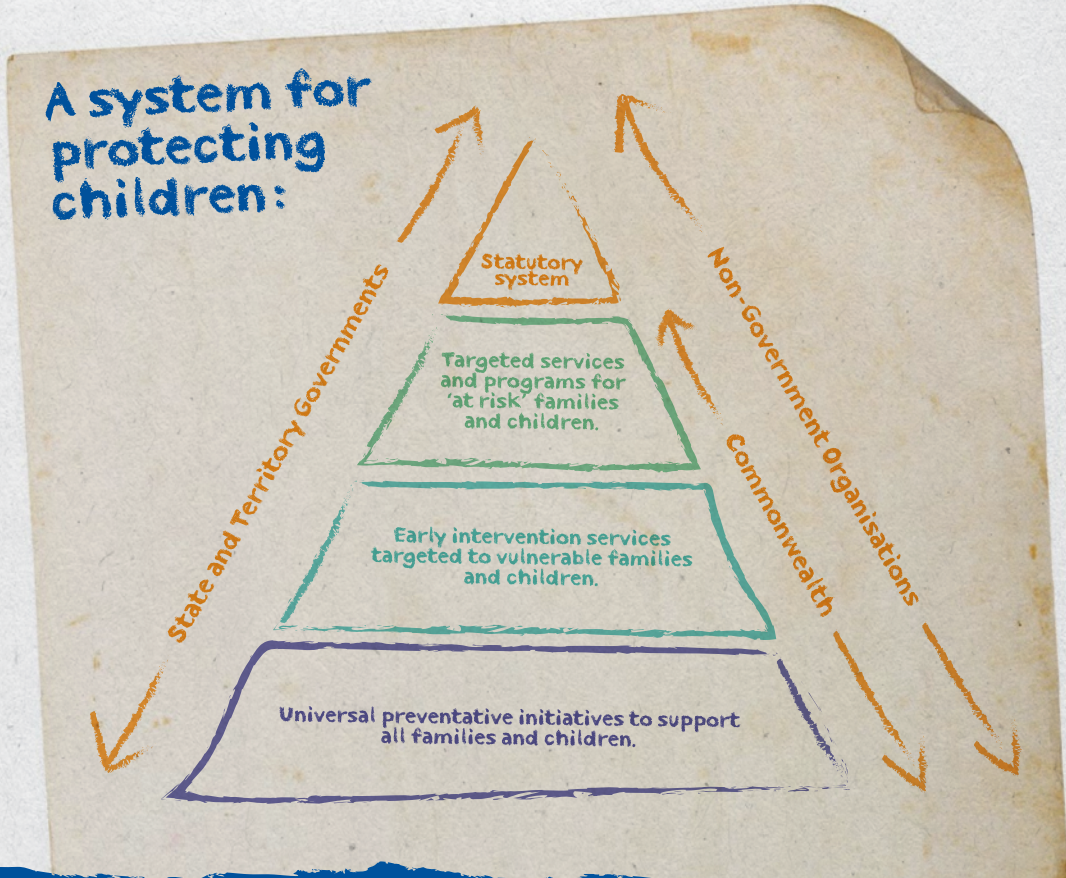
In 2009, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) adopted the public health approach as the means to reduce child abuse and neglect and strengthen child protection in Australia through the COAG National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020. The National Framework is a long-term national approach to ensure the safety and wellbeing of Australia's children and to deliver a reduction in levels of child abuse and neglect.

We continue to oversee its implementation through representation on the national steering committee and working groups.

We have been instrumental in changing the way society thinks about child protection.

Applied to child abuse and neglect, a public health approach comprises health promotion and prevention strategies available to the whole population. These include targeted interventions for vulnerable populations, as well as specialist protective and therapeutic interventions for populations where child neglect or mistreatment has occurred.

Working together with the Coalition of Organisations Committed to the Safety and Wellbeing of Australia's Children (led by Families Australia), the Australian Government and State and Territory Governments







# Championing real change for Aboriginal children, families and communities

While we continue to take positive steps towards reconciliation and recognition of Indigenous issues, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families continue to be disadvantaged across many health and social outcomes, including over-representation on all child protection indicators.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are almost 10 times more likely to be removed from a home than non-Indigenous children.

There is limited information in how we can reduce over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in child protection. We are committed to help initiate change in communities through our research and partnerships with a number of key Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations.

We have repeatedly called for greater national investment in research to identify alternative responses for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families that recognise and address intergenerational harms as a result of colonisation, assimilation and the forced removal of children.

In recognition of this, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner recommended the establishment of a National Institute of Excellence in Indigenous Child Wellbeing and the Australian Centre for Child Protection is working to realise this vision.

## We are making an impact

1. We have provided program evaluation services leading to an evidence base for new approaches, such as Winangay Tools for the assessment of Aboriginal kinship carers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation initiatives to alleviate intergenerational trauma.

2. Our research has enhanced knowledge within the sector about working with Indigenous children and families, which will inform systemic change and lead to improved service provision through identifying alternative approaches to working with families.

3. We have developed strong partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous organisations and continue to collaborate on building the evidence base around more effective ways of working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

With the support of Winangay Resources Inc, Institute of Child Protection Studies, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation, Aboriginal Health Council of South Australia, Aboriginal Family Support Services, Sidney Myer Fund, Queensland Government, Government of South Australia and the Queensland and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak.

**"We know what we are doing in child protection isn't working for Aboriginal kids, families and communities. We urgently need a Centre of Excellence led and controlled by Aboriginal people and drawing collectively on all available wisdom and expertise so we can find new ways and approaches that acknowledge the strengths of Aboriginal people, stop overrepresentation, ensure safety and produce outcomes for kids."**

**Aunt Sue Blacklock**, Respected Elder of the Nucoorilma people from Tingha, part of the Gamilaraay nation, Chair of Winangay Resources Incorporated and Australian Centre for Child Protection Ambassador for Children



# Transforming the standards for professional practice

Australia's child protection systems comprise a diverse range of professions. Ensuring staff have adequate training in how to respond to and address child abuse and neglect is critical.

The Professionals Protecting Children series is an award-winning research project, aiming to prepare and assist professionals such as educators, social workers, psychologists and health professionals to prevent and respond to child abuse and neglect.

**The Centre worked with educational providers, accrediting agencies and key professional bodies to:**

**Detail prevention, identification and response to child abuse and neglect within tertiary education programs across a range of professions;**

**Explore how professionals can be best prepared to work with vulnerable children and families;**

**Identify best practice in teaching and learning, and resource development opportunities for effective practice.**

As a result of our research, information about child abuse, prevention and response has been incorporated into key university degrees and we co-funded the development of Child Wellbeing and Protection Curriculum for the Australian Social Work Education and Accreditation Standards.

We funded and collaborated with the University of Technology Sydney to develop the Child Protection and Nursing and Midwifery Education Curriculum Standards 2010. This project included the production of a series of DVD documentaries and resources demonstrating how nurses and midwives can lower key psycho-social risk factors associated with child abuse and neglect.

***“In overcrowded professional education programs, many stakeholders press for their concerns to be included; it is sometimes too easy to dismiss such claims because of the wide range of competing claims. The area of child protection, however, is not one of these... This report on a benchmark study of coverage of child protection issues in teacher education programs in Australia represents a serious challenge to ‘business as usual’.”***

**Prof Marie Brennan**, formerly Secretary/Treasurer, Australian Council of Deans of Education and Professor, School of Education, University of South Australia.

*Excerpt from the Foreword to the Professionals Protecting Children: Child Protection and Teacher Education in Australia.*

With the support of the Ian Potter Foundation, Australian Psychology Society, Australian Association of Social Workers, Council of Deans of Nursing and Midwifery Australia and New Zealand, Australian Council of Deans of Education, and Australian Council of Heads of Schools of Social Work.







## Parenting in a new culture: supporting refugee families

The stories of refugee children and their families are often unheard by the wider community.

Traumatic pre-migration experiences, together with the challenges of settling into a different country, can significantly affect family wellbeing and parenting practices. For some, parenting styles from their countries of origin are not endorsed in Australia. This lack of validation of parenting practices can lead to additional stress for parents from refugee backgrounds.

The Centre conducted a ground-breaking research project to examine why recently arrived families are presenting to the child protection system, and to identify culturally appropriate strategies and models for intervention.

As the first study of its kind in the world, this research laid the foundation for an informed understanding of refugee families' experiences of parenting during resettlement which has informed policy and practice in child protection, family intervention and community development.

The Centre's research recognised the value of diverse knowledge and skills to engage parents from refugee backgrounds to enhance their parenting practice.

Our findings led to greater awareness of the experiences of refugee families and influenced further study throughout Australia, generating a wider understanding about cultural and parenting differences.

Engagement in the research meant that child protection practitioners had access to information about the challenges involved in responding to the different needs of members of refugee families.

With the support of the Government of South Australia.





# Focusing service delivery on the needs of vulnerable children

Child protection is everybody's business. However not everyone feels equipped to respond to this challenge.

Putting children and parenting needs at the forefront requires a change in attitude, perception and ways of working across all levels of the social services system.

With a view to driving system change, working with national peak bodies and organisations including Anglicare Australia, Mental Health Coalition, Families Australia, Family and Relationship Services Australia, the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care, Alcohol and Other Drug Council of Australia, Communities for Children facilitating partner organisations, and the disability sector, we developed and implemented the 'Protecting and Nurturing Children: Building Capacity Building Bridges Initiative' (BCBB).

The BCBB initiative was created under the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020, which aims to promote a collective responsibility for children's wellbeing, improving the outcomes for children in families with multiple and complex needs, regardless of whether these families present to an adult specialist service or a child and family service.

Working in partnership with 12 Communities for Children sites, BCBB developed relationships, strengthened collaboration and informed practice to make children's needs visible, particularly within services targeted toward adults.

**Key achievements resulting from this initiative include:**

**Strengthening practice and collaboration of more than 2000 practitioners from more than 250 agencies across 12 communities**

**Creating a new generation of trainers in child and family sensitive practice with more than 40 practitioners attending Train the Trainer sessions**

**Developing practical, freely available e-learning resources and sharing these through our partnership with the Children of Parents with a Mental Illness (COPMI) initiative.**

BCBB further led to the national 'Child Aware Local Initiative' that places children's needs at the centre of policy, practice and community action in locations throughout Australia.

**“It has served to highlight the importance of keeping children at the centre, to understand vulnerability, and around the need for a better co-ordinated approach, so we no longer mirror a family’s chaos.”**

**Nina Levins**, Anglicare, the auspicing agency of Communities for Children in Alice Springs.

With the support of Department of Social Services, Australian Government and participating Communities for Children facilitating partners.







## Partnering for real-time research impact in child protection service

State-based child protection services and their practitioners have a primary responsibility to respond to the problems of abuse and neglect. Decision-making within this context is under a high degree of pressure.

In an attempt to address these challenges, many of Australia's state and territory based statutory child protection organisations have adopted new child protection practice frameworks.

In a flagship project, the Centre in conjunction with the Western Australia Department for Child Protection and Family Support, developed a program of research to examine how one of the frameworks was implemented and its impact on children, families and the child protection system.

This practice framework was developed in Australia and is now used in more than 200 jurisdictions and 13 countries.

This research project was the first to examine how introducing a new way of working impacted children, their families, their practitioners and the child protection system. Forging strong research and practice alliances, this research exemplifies collaborative partnerships with industry partners where there is a two-way exchange of learning and knowledge through the co-creation of the research program.

By understanding what works in the child protection framework, our research is enhancing the translation of research into practice to achieve desired practice outcomes for children and families, while also improving employee wellbeing.

We continue to communicate research findings to the Department as they become available, facilitating the implementation of change and improve practice.

With the support of The the Government of Western Australia.

Across Australia and the  
world, there is increasing  
and unsustainable demand  
for child protection services.  
In 2013-2014, there were:

304,097

maltreatment reports

54,438

verified abuse or  
neglect cases

137,585

investigations



# Delivering evidence informed child protection policy

- There have been 40 inquiries into child protection and related systems over the past decade.
- Ideas about role of the state in the family, strong community feelings, intense media attention and high political sensitivity add to the already complex and emotionally-charged process of child protection policy development. It is not surprising that evidence-informed policy is a relatively recent notion in child protection and that there are often significant barriers to the uptake of research findings in the policy arena.
- We are working towards overcoming many of these barriers and we have made noteworthy contributions to recent reforms in child protection policy and reform efforts.
- Through evidence-informed submissions, advice and appointments, the Centre has influenced the findings and recommendations of state and federal child protection inquiries and royal commissions including:
- Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse
  - Child Protection Systems Royal Commission (SA)
  - National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children
  - Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection Services in NSW
  - Board of Inquiry into the Child Protection System in the Northern Territory
  - Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry
  - Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry

**"Over a 10 year period the Centre has produced a strong body of evidence in the field of child protection and this has influenced national policy directions and practical responses to working with vulnerable children."**

*Department of Industry, Innovation, Climate Change, Science, Research and Tertiary Education 2013.*

*With the support of Australian Government, State and Territory Governments.*







## Improving responses for children with Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder

We know that drinking alcohol while pregnant can have a significant, long-term effect on an unborn child. Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) embodies a range of permanent cognitive and physical disorders caused by prenatal exposure to alcohol.

Even with the clear evidence that alcohol misuse is associated with child removal in as many as 70% of child protection cases, FASD remains largely unrecognised as an issue among children who are placed in out of home care.

The significant effect on brain development means that many children with FASD have behavioural issues, making it difficult for foster carers to manage. As a result, they are less likely to experience a continuous and stable foster family, often moving from placement to placement.

The critical need to identify effective ways of enabling children placed in foster care who have alcohol-related behavioural issues to experience a stable home life led the Centre to undertake a review of interventions to support children with FASD. We interviewed foster families caring for children with FASD and helped identify strategies to support the social and emotional development of children in their care.

As a result of the research, we developed practice papers and webinars in partnership with the peak body for FASD awareness National Organisation for Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (NOFASD).

***“Thank you for this excellent webinar. Our foster care team found it highly relevant to our work; informative and well presented. It was particularly helpful to include practical strategies for managing the symptoms that may present for a child with FASD.”***

*Anglicare Sydney, New South Wales.*

With the support of the Australian Institute of Family Studies,  
National Organisation for Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders.

More than 330 participants representing over 106 government, non-government, philanthropic and Indigenous organisations across Australia attended a webinar on Supporting Children and Families Affected by Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD). The webinar also reached many rural and remote practitioners, as well as grandparents, who would normally lack access to such workshops and seminars.



# Bridging the gaps between research, policy and practice

It takes an average of 17 years for new research findings to be implemented in the health sector. Vulnerable children cannot wait this long.

Since its inception the Centre has been proactive in increasing the use of evidence in policy and practice. This has included major research into the barriers and facilitators of research application and the factors that lead to the diffusion of innovation in policy and practice. From this research, the Centre developed a suite of strategies aimed at reducing the barriers to research uptake and increasing the user-friendliness of research products.

These strategies were implemented through the Centre's research partnership with the former National Child Protection Clearinghouse (now the Child Family Community Australia information Exchange) at the Australian Institute of Family Studies. The Clearinghouse was a Government funded web-based resource that shares quality, evidence-based information into practitioners' hands.

We also have a dedicated UniSA-sponsored child protection research collection on Australian Policy Online, making access to the latest reports and research relating to child protection easier for policy-makers and practitioners.

We continue to expand our research to include the emerging field of implementation science, focusing on methods for integrating evidence-based practices into the child protection, health and education sectors.

**“The Australian Centre for Child Protection is responsive to emerging research needs and has proven their capacity to engage and communicate with local and international, government and non-government partners and through their work support organisations such as the Office of the Guardian.”**

**Pam Simmons**, former Guardian for Children and Young People, South Australia

With the support of the Australian Research Council, Australian Institute of Family Studies.

**420,000**  
publication downloads

**23%**  
web usage increase

**1.4M**  
web hits

**735,000**  
page downloads







We would like to thank the children, families, carers, practitioners and policy-makers who have supported our work in protecting and improving the lives of vulnerable children.

With thanks also to our partners who continue to collaborate and support the Centre in an effort to close the significant gaps between child protection research, policy and practice.



