



The National Clinical and Therapeutic Framework for children and young people who have displayed concerning or harmful sexual behaviour

Consultation Summary
April 2025

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The Australian Centre for Child Protection (ACCP) was awarded a contract in October 2024 by the National Office of Child Safety (NOCS), within the Attorney-General's Department, to develop the *National Clinical and Therapeutic Framework* for responding to children and young people who have displayed concerning or harmful sexual behaviour (the Framework). The ACCP has partnered with Professor Simon Hackett of Durham University and Lumenia to form the project team.

This is a national project which spans approximately 10 months and serves as a key measure from the *National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021-203*, and the subsequent *National Action Plan* (NAP), specifically measure 14:

“Set up a national clinical framework for responding to children and young people who have displayed harmful sexual behaviour...the framework will include advice and best practice ways to help health professionals providing therapeutic treatment and ongoing support for children with harmful sexual behaviour.”

The Framework will consist of five key sections: i. Overview of a Clinical and Therapeutic Service System; ii. Key Principles of Practice; iii. Responses and Assessments; iv. Workforce Capability Building; and v. Framework Outcomes and Evaluation Guidelines. The project aims to deliver an evidence-informed consultation and collaborative design process that engages key stakeholders including government, the service sector, and subject matter experts, in the development of the Framework.

This Consultation Summary provides a high-level overview of what we heard from the first round of consultations that have helped inform the development of the First Draft of the Framework – currently open for the second round of consultation and feedback.

The development of this First Draft Framework was underpinned by a comprehensive, staged consultation process designed to integrate practice expertise, cultural knowledge, and research evidence. The process engaged a wide range of stakeholders to ensure the Framework is practical, inclusive, and nationally aligned. There were two primary stakeholder groups engaged in this process:

- **Advisory Groups:** Including the interjurisdictional Children with Harmful Sexual Behaviours Prevention and Response Working Group (Working Group), the National Clinical Reference Group (NCRG), and the National Strategy Advisory Group (NSAG). These groups provided expert oversight and ensured alignment with national priorities.
- **Service Sector Representatives:** Encompassing practitioners and organisations across prevention, intervention, and tertiary services, with direct experience in supporting children and young people displaying concerning or harmful sexual behaviours.

Advisor Group Sessions

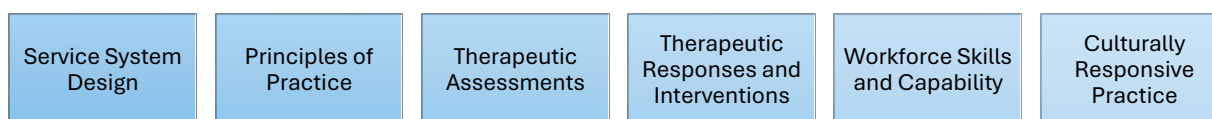
Three major advisory groups contributed:

- Working Group: Two sessions focused on project overview and early consultation insights.
- NCRG: A full-day session explored assessments, interventions, and workforce capability through breakout discussions.
- NSAG: Contributed strategic input, particularly around non-negotiables for the Framework and language considerations.

Service Sector Representatives

Consultations with the service sector were structured into six content streams to allow targeted, relevant input:

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Each stream included three workshops, predominantly online, with consistent facilitation protocols and data collection tools (e.g., Mentimeter surveys and group transcription).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Engagement

A dedicated, culturally safe consultation stream was led by Lumenia, led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander facilitators, using yarning methodologies. Engagement was both online and in-person (e.g., during the AbSec and PeakCare events) and targeted Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, and culturally and linguistically diverse professionals, including Elders and frontline staff.

Contributors

In total 525 total registrations were received for the workshops, with 203 unique individuals signing up to attend one or more sessions. Although there was some drop out prior to sessions, 282 attendees contributed across the six streams and 18 workshop discussions. All sessions had break out groups and each themed discussion was reviewed and consolidated with others.

What we heard

The following is a summary of key ideas and themes that emerged from each of the six streams of workshops with the service sector.

Stream 1 – The Service System

Contributors to these sessions identified key themes, including the differentiation between secondary and tertiary services, systemic gaps, workforce challenges, service overlap, and the role of age and developmental considerations in service delivery. They highlighted barriers within the system such as fragmentation, accessibility issues for rural and vulnerable populations, and workforce shortages. The importance of prevention, early intervention, and sustainable service models was also emphasised.

Recommendations for the Framework included capacity-building through targeted training, integrated service, legislative reforms, and enhanced interagency collaboration. Suggestions for addressing inequities involve culturally tailored approaches, improved funding, and centralised resources. Contributors also noted that systemic reforms to ensure holistic, equitable, and sustainable support, alongside increased public awareness and comprehensive data evaluation would optimise intervention outcomes.

Stream 2 – Principles of Practice

Contributors to this stream highlighted the need for tailored, developmentally informed interventions that prioritise safety, collaboration, and strengths-based, restorative practices. Practitioners spoke of working holistically, incorporating systemic, familial, and cultural factors to ensure inclusive and equitable care. Core principles suggested highlight the importance of dynamic safety planning, evidence-based practices, and the active involvement of children, families, and multidisciplinary teams in intervention planning.

Recommendations for inclusion in final principles included fostering a well-supported workforce through training, reflective supervision, and professional development while promoting systemic collaboration and

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equity in service provision. They emphasise adaptability, intersectionality, and the integration of contemporary research and cultural sensitivity to create a comprehensive, flexible, and sustainable framework for therapeutic responses. Regular evaluation and monitoring were also discussed to ensure that interventions remain effective and responsive to individual needs.

Stream 3 - Conducting Therapeutic Assessments

Discussions emphasised a comprehensive, trauma-informed, and collaborative approach, incorporating developmental, psychosocial, and cultural contexts. Core assessment purposes include understanding behaviour severity, informing tailored interventions, developing safety plans, and addressing systemic and familial influences were noted as common. Collaboration with families, schools, and agencies is highlighted as effective to gather holistic insights, with a focus on building trust and ensuring ethical practices.

Recommendations stress the importance of standardised tools, cultural sensitivity, and avoiding harm through strengths-based methods and reducing stigma. Practitioners encouraged consideration of diverse needs, such as those of neurodiverse and culturally diverse populations, while addressing systemic barriers like resource constraints and poor interagency collaborations. Tailored strategies for different age groups, gender, and technological influences were suggested to ensure that assessments are inclusive and actionable, supporting both the child and their environment effectively.

Stream 4 – Treatment Responses and Interventions

Core domains noted by contributors to this stream included safety and risk management, understanding behaviour in context, and promoting behavioural change through tailored, trauma-informed, and developmentally appropriate therapies. They described that interventions should prioritise safety, emotional regulation, and family involvement while addressing cultural and systemic factors. Therapy should aim to repair harm, foster accountability, and strengthen protective factors such as healthy relationships and caregiver support.

Key recommendations emphasized age-appropriate approaches, flexible engagement methods, and culturally responsive practices, particularly for Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander and culturally diverse communities. They noted that secondary services should focus on early intervention and education for lower-risk behaviours, while tertiary services should handle complex, high-risk cases. Practical challenges, including stigma, resource constraints, and family resistance, underscored the need for systemic collaboration, practitioner training, and community trust-building. They highlighted the need for capacity building, early prevention programs, and holistic frameworks to create unified and effective responses across service systems.

Stream 5 – Workforce Skills and Capacity Building

Themes from this stream emphasised the need for foundational knowledge in trauma-informed practice, cultural competence, and child development, along with core skills in assessment, risk management, and family engagement. Emotional resilience, empathy, and professional boundaries were also highlighted as essential attributes. Current gaps noted related to inadequate training, supervision, and wellbeing support, which contributors felt led to workforce burnout and reduced effectiveness.

To address these challenges, the contributors discussed targeted training, national accreditation frameworks, and collaborative models like supervision and mentorship. They stressed the importance of integrating dynamic knowledge-sharing practices, addressing systemic barriers, and fostering interagency collaboration to ensure a sustainable and equitable workforce. They explored the value of tiered accreditation systems to support professional growth for both generalists and specialists while maintaining high standards and accessibility.

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Stream 6 – Culturally Responsive Practice

Contributors for this stream explored a range of areas to inform the Framework. Key themes included the necessity of culturally safe and appropriate services, the integration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led healing practices, and the development of culturally tailored assessment tools. Contributors stressed the need to address systemic biases, intergenerational trauma, and the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in child protection and justice systems. They noted that cultural responsiveness should encompass understanding family and kinship structures, employing culturally informed language, and tailoring interventions to the diverse cultural, religious, and geographic contexts of families.

Workforce development was highlighted as critical to fostering culturally safe practices. Recommendations included increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander practitioners, providing comprehensive cultural fitness training for all staff, and ensuring ongoing cultural supervision. Contributors expressed that all practitioners should actively reflect on their cultural knowledge and biases while engaging families and communities through respectful, tailored methods. Incorporating cultural practices into therapeutic work, such as yarning and meeting children on Country, was identified as a best practice for fostering trust and promoting healing. They advocated for systemic changes to ensure equitable access to culturally informed services and a sustainable framework for long-term support.