



Australian Research Alliance for Children & Youth

Working together to enhance the wellbeing and life chances of children and young people.

Protecting Children is Everyone's Business: National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children

Communique: Common Approach to Assessment, Referral and Support Taskforce

Inaugural meeting: Canberra, 18 June 2009

The Australian Government has engaged the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) to develop a common approach to assessment, referral and support for children who may be at risk of abuse or neglect. This is a key initial activity of the government's recently released [*Protecting Children is Everyone's Business: National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children*](#) and converts into action the evidence from the recent report released by ARACY, [*Inverting the pyramid: Enhancing systems for protecting children*](#).

Inaugural Taskforce meeting held in Canberra

The common approach is being developed by the Common Approach to Assessment, Referral and Support (CAARS) Taskforce, which held its inaugural meeting in Canberra (18 June).

The Taskforce is co-convened by the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and ARACY.



*Attendees at the inaugural taskforce meeting
(see below for a full list of meeting delegates)*



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The meeting was opened by The Hon Jenny Macklin MP, Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. Minister Macklin outlined the importance the Australian Government places on the Taskforce as one of the actions to support the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children.

Minister Macklin noted:

"The expertise of all Taskforce members will be critical in developing a common assessment tool to identify children at risk early. You all have a challenging - but exciting - opportunity to collaborate to address the issues around assessment and referral for children at risk of harm, and to find better ways - shared ways."



Minister Macklin opens the meeting

Professor Fiona Stanley AC, ARACY Chair, emphasised the importance of prevention as the key to effective child protection, highlighting the need for universal services to be active players in identifying children at risk:

"The current child protection system is swamped with cases where harm has already occurred. The humane and sensible approach is to have integrated systems that work together to respond to the needs of families and children as early as possible, to endeavour to prevent harm occurring in the first place."



Professor Stanley, ARACY Chair reiterates the case for a preventive approach



Key outcomes

The first meeting discussed the following:

1. Taskforce Terms of Reference and Governance

- The [Terms of Reference](#) were ratified. In summary, the role of the taskforce is to:
 - Decide on a process for the development of a tool/s to be used as a national approach to the prevention of child abuse and neglect, supported by common assessment and referral;
 - Agree on development of the tool/s to specifically target services most likely to encounter first warning signs of child abuse and neglect;
 - Consider and recommend possible tool/s trial options; and
 - Agree on recommendations for future work.
- The Taskforce agreed to establish (in the first instance) two working groups (see below), and also agreed that additional expertise, from within and outside of the Taskforce, would be co-opted to working groups as required

2. Development of the common assessment tool. Key issues:

- Clarification of purpose and scope
- Design
- Implementation, training and follow-up

3. Information sharing. Key issues:

- Privacy and legislative obligations
- Trust; and sensitivity to individual, family and organisational contexts
- Building on existing information sharing mechanisms and frameworks

4. Working Groups. Two groups were established:

- *Consultancy Working Group:*
Selection and briefing of the consultant to develop options for a common approach to assessment, referral and support, and information sharing (**Note:** expressions of interest closed on 18 June; this working group will meet to select a consultant before the end of June)
- *Cultural Change Working Group:*
To examine culture change implications of common assessment and related systems change issues for organisations and professions



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Ongoing engagement

The CAARS Taskforce will provide oversight to the work of the consultant and the working groups. Individuals and organisations are invited to participate in the work of the Taskforce and consultant – see [ARACY website](#) for details.

The Taskforce will meet again in November 2009, and submit an interim report to Minister Macklin by the end of the year.



*Professor Stanley, Minister Macklin and
ARACY CEO, Dr Lance Emerson*

The Taskforce membership list and Terms of Reference and the *Inverting the pyramid* report are available on the [ARACY website](#).

Ends. 23 June 2009

Attached:

- 1. List of attendees at inaugural meeting*



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Common Approach to Assessment and Referral (CAARS) Taskforce

First meeting 18 June 2009: Attendance and apologies

In attendance:

Co-convenors: The Hon. Jenny Macklin*, Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

Professor Fiona Stanley, Board Chair, ARACY

Facilitator: Mr Michael White, Director, MW Group Consulting

Taskforce Members - Government:

Ms Linda Apelt	Director-General, Department of Communities, Queensland
Mr Mark Byrne	Director, Disability, Youth, Child, and Family Services, Tasmania
Mr Martin Hehir	Chief Executive, ACT Department of Disability, Housing & Community Services
	Mr Frank Duggan, Senior Director, Office for Children, Youth and Family Support, ACT Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services
Mr David Cain	A/Principal Policy Officer, Department of Child Protection, Western Australia
Mr Allan Joy	Department of Health and Families, Northern Territory Government
Ms Linda Mallett	Acting Director-General, Policy & Planning, NSW Department of Community Services
Mr Mick Naughton	Children Youth & Families Division, Department of Human Services, Victoria (standing in for Paul McDonald, Executive Director)
Ms Lynette Pugh	Director, Community Connect Branch, Department for Families and Communities, South Australia
Ms Cate McKenzie	Group Manager, Women & Children's Policy, FaHCSIA

Taskforce members - Non-Government:

Mr Brian Babington	CEO, Families Australia
Ms Maree Faulkner	CEO, National Association for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect
A/Prof Kelsey Hegarty	The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners
Prof Stewart Einfeld	Brain & Mind Research Institute (standing in for Professor Ian Hickie, Executive Director)



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Mr Steve Larkins*	Chairperson, Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care
Prof Lyn Littlefield	Executive Director, The Australian Psychological Society
Ms Libby Lloyd	Chairperson, National Council to Reduce Violence Against Women and Children
Dr Bob Lonne	National President, Australian Association of Social Workers
Mr Paul Mason	Commissioner, Commission for Children and Young People Tasmania
Dr Chris McAuliffe	Australian General Practice Network

Mr Andrew McCallum*	CEO, Association of Child Welfare Agencies
Dr Jenny Proimos FRACP	President, Paediatrics and Child Health Division Royal Australasian College of Physicians

Dr Luke Rumbold	CEO, Upper Murray Family Care, Family Relationship Services Australia
Dr Fiona Arney	Australian Centre for Child Protection, University of South Australia (standing in for Dorothy Scott, Chairperson and Director)
Mr Simon Smith	Executive Officer, Homelessness Australia
Dr David Thomas	Australian Medical Association
Mr David Templeman	CEO, Alcohol and Other Drugs Council of Australia
Mr Alan Woodward	General Manager, Lifeline Australia

Also in attendance:

Dr Lance Emerson, CEO, ARACY
Ms Sue Ludwig, Programs Manager, ARACY
Dr Geoff Holloway, Research Manager, ARACY
Ms Jaya Negi*, Research and Project Officer, ARACY
Ms Tracy Mackey*, Branch Manager, Children's Policy, FaHCSIA
Ms Tracy Feeney*, Section Manager, National Projects, FaHCSIA

* Do not appear in group photograph

Apologies:

Ms Pam Cahir	CEO, Early Childhood Australia
Ms Gillian Calvert	Commissioner, NSW Commission for Children and Young People
Ms Debra Cerasa	CEO, Royal College of Nursing Australia



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Ms Belinda Ruth Epstein-Frisch	Institute for Family Advocacy and Leadership Development
Ms Lesley Fraser	President, Australian Guidance and Counselling Association AGCN Alternate: Mr Tony Harris also an apology
Professor Ian Hickie	Executive Director, Brain and Mind Institute
Mr Paul McDonald	Executive Director, Children Youth & Families Division, Department of Human Services, Victoria
Professor Dorothy Scott	Chairperson and Director, Australian Centre for Child Protection, University of South Australia
Dr Joe Tucci	CEO, Australian Childhood Foundation