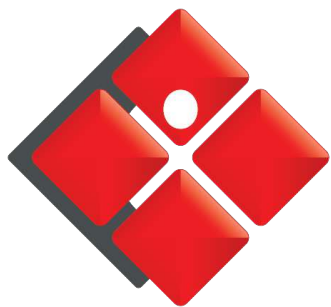


Submission to the
Queensland Government

Putting Queensland Kids First: Draft Strategy

21 February 2024



PeakCare
Queensland Inc.

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INTRODUCTION

PeakCare welcomes the opportunity to contribute feedback on the *Putting Queensland Kids First* draft strategy. We believe ensuring a positive start to life for children is a collective responsibility and this draft strategy presents an important opportunity for a more holistic and wellbeing focused approach to supporting the needs, hopes and aspirations of Queensland's youngest children, their families and communities.

ABOUT PEAKCARE

PeakCare is the peak body for child and family services in Queensland, providing an independent voice representing and promoting matters of interest to the non-government sector.

Across Queensland, PeakCare has more than 70 member organisations which include small, medium and large, local, state-wide and national non-government organisations which provide prevention and early intervention, generic, targeted, and intensive family support to children, young people, adults and families. Member organisations also provide child protection services, foster care, kinship care and residential care services for children and young people and their families who are at risk of entry to, or who are in the statutory child protection system.

A network of associate members and supporters also subscribe to PeakCare. This includes individuals with an interest in child protection, youth justice and related services, and who are supportive of PeakCare's policy platform around the rights and entitlements of children, young people and their families to safety, wellbeing and equitable access to life opportunities.

PEAKCARE'S SUBMISSION

Question 1A: What you think of the ideas described in the draft early intervention package Putting Queensland Kids First is important.

The *Putting Queensland Kids First* draft strategy presents an insightful and proactive approach towards protecting and supporting Queensland's children, young people and families. PeakCare agrees with the core principles outlined in the consultation draft and is supportive of an approach that advocates for supporting children, young people and families through prevention and early intervention. PeakCare strongly supports bringing Queenslanders together through integrated ways of working which are grounded in evidence-based approaches. It is well evidenced that early intervention programs can help address problems emerging for children, young people and families and lead to improving child wellbeing and assist in breaking cycles of disadvantage. We are supportive of the approach for connecting Queenslanders to more holistic services and supports, when and where they are needed, and acknowledge the commitment to evidence-based practices which will ensure interventions are best positioned to deliver positive and sustained outcomes.

We recognise the importance of keeping children and young people's voices at the heart of everything we do. Prioritising a child centred approach is essential for nurturing an environment where children and young people's needs are addressed and voices are heard and valued, a critical requirement for supporting positive child development and wellbeing. The draft strategies commitment to these areas, grounded in solid research and community feedback, exemplifies a strong blueprint for supporting the next generation.

Question 1B: What other core principles do you think should inform our approach to supporting children, young people and families?

Human Rights Framework - in the commitment to maintain high standards of care and development for Queensland's children and young people, we recommend integrating a human-rights based framework across all levels of the *Putting Queensland Kids First* strategy. Incorporating this framework into the strategy not only aligns with international standards but also ensures a comprehensive, ethical, and child focused approach to policymaking and service delivery. It emphasises the importance of viewing children as active participants in society, whose voices and needs are fundamental to the development and implementation of initiatives created for the betterment of their wellbeing.

Family Centred Approach - we recommend the strategy also considers a family centred approach as it is important to recognise that a child's wellbeing sits within a broader frame which includes the wellbeing of their family. Adopting a family centred approach aims to empower families by addressing their comprehensive needs through the provision of resources and supports to account for economic, social, and emotional factors that may be impacting family dynamics. This holistic strategy advocates for services that not only address the child's direct needs but also offers support systems for parents, siblings and extended family members and acknowledges how relationships and environments can contribute to a child's development and seeks to create a nurturing and stable home life for all children to thrive and grow.

Mental Health Focus - PeakCare recommends incorporating a mental health focus within the strategy as we believe psychological wellbeing is equally important as physical health. We believe there is a need for accessible services capable of early assessment, identification and intervention for issues relating to mental health. Providing mental health services that are accessible, developmentally appropriate, comprehensive and integrated into broader support systems will ensure children, young people and their families can receive the support they need, when they need it. This proactive stance on mental health will help to mitigate long-term impacts of mental health and foster more resilient, thriving children, families and communities.

Question 2: Every culture and community has its own approach in raising children so that children and young people grow up feeling connection to country, community and family. *Putting Queensland Kids First* aims to be inclusive so that all young Queenslanders and their families and communities feel supported in ways that work for them, no matter their culture or heritage. How can we best support connection to culture and community for children, young people and families?

PeakCare agrees there are opportunities to further children and young people's sense of belonging and their connection to community, culture and country. We strongly agree that a child's wellbeing is founded in their family, kin and personal relationships, as well as their community and culture. Advocating for approaches that respect and incorporate these aspects within the *Putting Queensland Kids First* initiative aligns with Queensland's cultural diversity and we are supportive of the development of strategies that are culturally responsive and respectful, particularly for First Nations families to ensure every child and young person feels valued and connected, no matter their culture or heritage. Additional suggestions for supporting connection to culture and community for children, young people and families include:

Family and Community Consultation - we recommend genuine and frequent engagement and consultation with First Nations families and community leaders to ensure services and supports are designed and implemented in a way that respects and incorporates cultural knowledge and practices. Through involving families and community leaders in the planning, design, and implementation phases, services can be tailored to meet the specific needs and values of each community more effectively.

Brain Health Education - providing education on brain health to all family members involved in a child's upbringing can enhance understanding of child development, mental health and the importance of nurturing environments. This holistic approach supports *Putting Queensland's Kids First's* goal of nurturing a child's wellbeing from an early age.

Workforce Diversity - increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation in service delivery ensures culturally informed support, enhancing the initiative's commitment to inclusivity and respect for all cultures.

Culturally Safe Health Navigation - implementing culturally safe health navigation from pregnancy through the first 2000 days of life provides tailored support, crucial for early development and aligning with the initiative's focus on early intervention and holistic care.

Question 3: Taking positive action to empower families and foster wellbeing in individuals and communities is important. By investing in these protective factors, we can reduce the risk of children and young people who experience adversity from, disengaging from school, entering in to offending trajectories, becoming homeless or experience acute or chronic health and mental health conditions. What are the key protective factors in keeping children and young people on positive trajectories, and how can we further boost these?

PeakCare strongly agrees that investing in the protective factors identified by the *Putting Queensland Kids First* initiative is key to empowering families and fostering wellbeing in individuals and communities and will in turn reduce the risk of children and young people facing adversity. Adopting a proactive approach not only assists in preventing negative outcomes such as school disengagement, homelessness, or involvement in the youth justice system, it also promotes overall wellbeing and resilience. Investing in these areas is essential for creating a system that ensures every child and young person in Queensland has the opportunity to reach their full potential.

Education - we believe it is important to recognise the significance of education in guiding children and young people towards successful pathways. It is well researched that a key measure in reducing vulnerability is quality early childhood education and we applaud the commitment to supporting confident transitions into early childhood settings, school engagement and beyond. Quality early childhood education and care is an important protective factor against adverse childhood experiences and can significantly enhance learning and life outcomes for children and their families.

We also believe there is benefit in adopting a more inclusive and supportive educational approach to accommodate for all children, particularly those with unique learning needs, to ensure children remain engaged and supported in their learning environments. This involves not only adapting the school's practices to better meet the needs of children with disabilities but also providing wraparound support that encompasses the whole family. This support could include educational resources for families as well as connecting in with community services to address broader challenges that may affect a child's education. Through the development of a supportive educational environment, children are more likely to stay in school, succeed academically, and develop positively.

Community Engagement - community engagement plays a pivotal role in fostering positive environments for children and young people. Implementing preventative policing models that emphasise presence, connection and relationship building within communities can significantly impact a young person's trajectory. This approach shifts the focus from enforcement to engagement, where police and community members collaborate to create safe and supportive spaces. Building these relationships can help link children and families to social networks and resources, reducing the risk of youth offending. Community based programs that offer mentorship, recreational activities, and educational support provide alternative pathways for children and young people, diverting them away from potential involvement in the youth justice system. Strengthening these community connections promotes a sense of belonging and support which is crucial for the positive development of young people.

Question 4: Putting Queensland Kids First aims to improve the following outcomes: Health, wellbeing and development; Access to education, training and employment; Secure and affordable housing; Safety and connection in family and community; and a reframed relationship and empowered First Nations Peoples. Do you agree or disagree that these outcomes are priority areas to support children and young people in Queensland?

PeakCare agrees with the priority areas outlined in the draft strategy. In addition, we recommend the Government consider including a priority focus on social inclusion and connection. The work of all agencies and individuals supporting children and families in need should focus on a children and families connection with a network of individuals and social supports they can rely on. This includes parents, siblings, other family members and community members, mentors, and community services. Connection heals trauma and increases resilience – any initiative without a focus on connection will be less effective over time, no matter how evidence-based the initiative is.

Question 5: As we develop Putting Queensland Kids First, we will be considering in detail how we can best support prevention and early intervention programs for children and young people. For us to create a better future for children and young people, we know we need to work in real partnerships with you and other Queenslanders. What would it look like for us to work together as partners, all committed to improving outcomes for the children, young people and families?

PeakCare recommends the Government consider a 'public health model' approach as a way of meaningfully connecting all partners around a shared set of outcomes. An example of where this has worked well is Scotland where the public health model has guided the work of all government departments in collaboration with community partners to focus on the health and wellbeing of the community.

Government funding should also be used more flexibly, to assist in reducing siloed service delivery. Rather than each government-delivered and government-funded program attempting to achieve its own outcomes (e.g. education aiming to increase school attendance, housing aiming to reduce homelessness), all partners should be through a stewardship model where funding and support is brokered to best meet the need of the child and family over time from a holistic wellbeing, rather than individual service system perspective. Flexible procurement, governance and reporting methods need to be explored for this to occur.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

To support the effective implementation of this important strategy, PeakCare recommends the government consider the appointment of a dedicated Minister for Children and Family Wellbeing. We also recommend Ministerial Charter Letters be updated to include clear responsibilities for achieving the outcomes of the *Putting Queensland Kids First Strategy* across all Government portfolios.

PeakCare's support the Queensland Family and Child Commission's recommendation to appoint an Independent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commissioner. We believe this would ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's rights and wellbeing are prioritised and that initiatives delivered under this strategy are developed with a deep understanding of cultural nuances and needs. It would also highlight a commitment to genuine partnership with First Nations communities, enhancing culturally informed practices and decision making processes that respect and uphold the rights of Indigenous children across Queensland.

PeakCare looks forward to ongoing collaboration and consultation with the Queensland Government and other stakeholders in refining and implementing the *Putting Queensland Kids First* strategy. Through collective effort and focused investment in prevention and early intervention, we believe we can achieve significant, long-lasting improvements in the lives of Queensland's children, young people and families.

If you have any questions in relation to this submission, please Contact Ms Kate Bjur, General Manager, Policy, Research and Advocacy by phone at (07) 3368 1050 or email at kbjur@peakcare.org.au.

Yours sincerely,



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