PeakCare Election Commitments Submission

On behalf of Queensland's Child and Family Sector

July 2024

PeakCare

Children | Young People | Futures

Acknowledgement of Country

PeakCare acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Australians. We recognise their cultures, histories and diversity and their deep connection to the lands, waters and seas of Queensland and the Torres Strait.

We acknowledge the Jagera and Turrbal people as the Traditional Custodians of Meanjin (Brisbane), the lands on which we meet, work and learn, and acknowledge all of the Traditional Custodians of every lands across Queensland.

We pay our respects to Elders past and present and strive each day for true reconciliation for all First Nations children, young people, families, carers and communities.

We must do better. Now more than ever.

Artwork by Bigi Nagala. *Burn Off Dot Art.*

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TOM ALLSOP

Chief Executive Officer

Introduction & Background

PeakCare is a not-for-profit peak body for the child and family sector in Queensland, providing an independent voice representing and promoting matters of interest to non-government member organisations.

PeakCare is intent on improving the wellbeing of Queensland's children, young people, and families by:

- championing innovation,
- creating impactful partnerships,
- anchoring our actions in evidence,
- driving forward-thinking advocacy, and
- amplifying the voice of our members and the sector.

Our vision is that Queensland children, young people and families in all their diversity are thriving with access to support when and where it's needed.

PeakCare is calling on all political parties to commit to the key priorities outlined in this submission. These priorities will enable PeakCare, and the Queensland child and family services sector, to deliver our vision where every child thrives.

Across Queensland, PeakCare has almost 100 member organisations. These member organisations include small, medium and large, local, statewide and national non-government organisations which provide prevention and early intervention, generic, targeted, and intensive family support to children, young people, adults, families and communities.

Support for the child and family community care sector is vital to providing support to the broader community with a focus on those who face disadvantage and need supports to keep children and young people safe.

Our member organisations operate at the frontline with children, young people and their families providing the workforce that delivers the support needed with empathy and a professional focus.

Our 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.

PeakCare's membership has been broadly consulted on these priorities and are supportive of the policy platforms around the rights and entitlements of children, young people and their families to safety, wellbeing and equitable access to life opportunities.

PeakCare advocates for all parties to commit to these future proofing priorities for children and families which places them and Queensland communities on the pathway to prosperity.

Executive Summary

PeakCare, as Queensland's leading advocate for child and family services, operates on three foundational pillars that guide our advocacy and service delivery priorities. These pillars are integral to fostering a safe, supportive, and thriving environment for children and families across Queensland.

Early Interventions: Addressing the root causes of social challenge and disadvantage is critical in our approach. We focus on early childhood support, family interventions, and access to essential services like health including mental health, early education, and disability support. By investing in these areas, we aim to mitigate risks and empower families to thrive, thereby preventing future involvement in the child protection and justice systems.

Child Safety and Protection: Our initiatives under this pillar aim to provide comprehensive support systems for children at risk and those in care, ensuring their holistic development and successful transition into adulthood. Key priorities include expanding the Hope and Healing training, enhancing educational opportunities, and advocating for a 'Housing First' principle to secure stable housing for vulnerable families.

Youth Justice: Central to our efforts to Do Detention Differently with the transformation of youth justice through evidence-based, therapeutic models that prioritise rehabilitation and community reintegration. We seek to reduce reliance on detention, promote early intervention programs, and support educational and vocational pathways to empower young people and rebuild community trust.

Looking ahead, PeakCare calls upon political parties to commit to sustained and targeted investments over the next four years. Our priorities include bolstering the care sector workforce, enhancing support for children and young people in care, and investing in early intervention programs to foster prosperity from an early age. We advocate for programs designed in collaboration with First Nations communities, prioritising their unique needs and aspirations.

By prioritising these initiatives, Queensland can lead the way in transforming care and justice systems, ensuring every child thrives. Together, we can build stronger communities where children are safe, families are supported, and futures are bright.

Election Commitments Submission

PeakCare has three core pillars as the peak body for child and family services in Queensland. These pillars provide the foundation for the priorities we deliver on and request the government of the day to support and align with.

Child Safety and Protection

Delivering:

- Support for young people in care
- Support for children at risk of entering child protection or youth justice systems
- Support for young people transitioning from care – setting every young person up for success
- Expansion of Hope and Healing training for parents, kin, foster, residential, pathway training for NDIA/S approved workforces, healthcare, police, justice
- Residential Care Workforce Strategy
- Addressing educational gaps (including literacy, numeracy, digital literacy and financial literacy)
- Support for service providers (cultural safety, workforce support)
- Support for 'Housing First' principle for access and availability to safe and secure housing for families and young people

Youth Justice

Delivering:

- Support for Doing Detention Differently – evidence-based, holistic therapeutic rehabilitative model
- Support for young people transitioning from youth detention
- Reduction of young people in watchhouses
- Evaluated evidence of successful early intervention and prevention programs
- Support for public safety as paramount and building back community confidence
- Support for therapeutic designed supports for young people
- Support for rehabilitative and restorative focused programs for young people
- Support for young people to reconnect to education and employment
- Alternative responses for young people under 14 years

Early Interventions

Delivering:

- Support for the 0-8 years of a child's life, including;
  - Pre-natal supports to health services
  - Post natal support to health and education access for parents and children
  - Connection to community and culture
- Support for families and young people to address alcohol and substance abuse
- Support for families and young people experiencing domestic, family and sexual violence
- Support for families and young people into safe and secure housing
- Support for access to NDIS and disability services
- Support for access to mental health and wellbeing services
- Support addressing root causes of crime as a public health issue not a criminal response, including;
  - Addressing poverty, cost of living supports etc.
  - Focus on mental health support for young people including young mothers and children
  - Access to early health screening
  - Reduction of school disciplinary absences

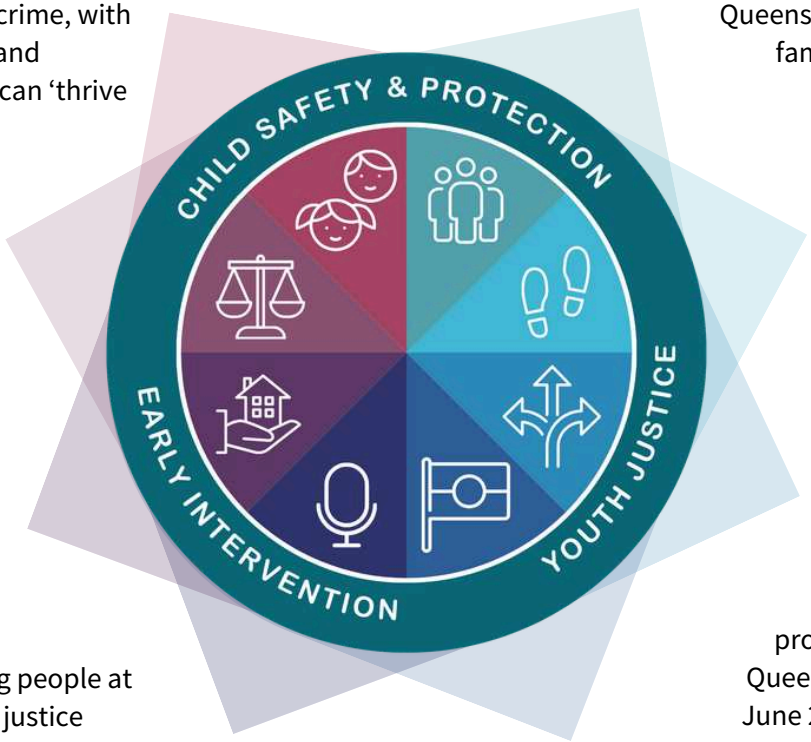
To deliver for the Queensland care sector for the next four years, PeakCare is seeking a commitment from political parties to provide focused and sustainable investment in the delivery of these services to children, families for the future of communities. Key priorities that need to be addressed include:

Providing a 'pathway to prosperity' focused investment in early intervention and prevention programs that address the root cause of disadvantage and crime, with a clear and direct impact on the 0-5 cohorts and families of these children so that every child can 'thrive by five'.

First Nations family focused and co-designed programs to support families in staying together, and provide wrap around supports for health, education, training and employment for First Nations families.

Provide access to affordable, sustainable and appropriate housing for families and young people in a 'Housing First' approach then connecting to other services and programs as needed.

Prevention and diversion programs for young people at risk of entering the child protection or youth justice system including supports for families to address domestic and family violence, sexual violence, drug and substance abuse, disability, and mental health supports.



Sustainable care sector workforce and strengthened support for Foster and Kinship carers across Queensland to meet the growing needs of children and families involved in the child protection and youth justice systems.

Voice of children and young people enshrined in decision making and co-design of programs and support plans that reflect their lived experience, needs and hopes for the future.

Providing improved access to services and conditions for children and young people who are currently in care including pathways to transition through education, training and into employment.

'Do Detention Differently' targeted intervention programs to reduce the number of young people in Queensland watchhouses and youth detention. By 30 June 2025, Queensland is not the jurisdiction with the highest number young people in detention.

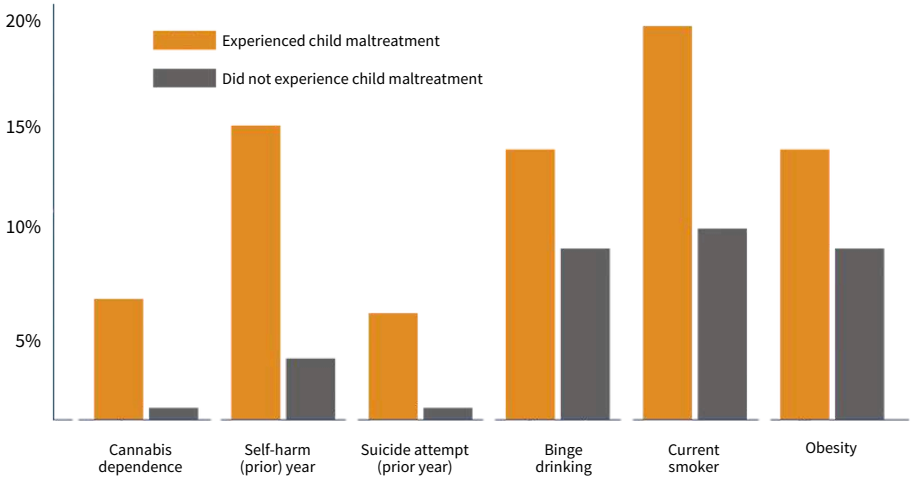
Priority One

Providing a pathway to prosperity: focused investment in early intervention and prevention programs that address the root cause of disadvantage and crime, with a clear and direct impact on the 0-5 cohorts and families of these children so that every child can "thrive by five"

Commitment: Ongoing investment

Rationale: Investing in early support for families is both economically sensible and beneficial for long-term outcomes. Strategies like Putting Queensland Kids First – Giving our kids the opportunity of a lifetime provides a welcome investment of $502 million in delivering the best start for our children. While the announcement is a positive start, effective delivery is crucial. Our regional child and family, health, education, and early years sector workforce will be essential in turning these commitments into real outcomes for children and families.

Comparisons of health risk behaviours amount young people aged 16-24 with and without experiences of child maltreatment



Australian Child Maltreatment Study 2023

Workforce challenges are critical across all sectors, especially in regional Queensland, where attracting and retaining a qualified workforce is difficult. PeakCare calls for a detailed workforce strategy and implementation plan focused on employment attraction and innovative retention programs in regional Queensland. As the leader of the Residential Care Workforce Strategy and a key government partner, PeakCare can assist in delivering these action plans in collaboration with stakeholders from early childhood, health, mental health, and disability support sectors to create sustainable, innovative workforce strategies.

The Australian Child Maltreatment Study 2023 found that almost 40% of young people aged 16 and over were exposed to domestic and family violence in childhood. This has devastating, long-term impacts on children and communities. Children exposed to violence need ongoing support, not suspension, exclusion, or incarceration.

Among all **Australians** aged 16-65 years and older

32.0% experienced: physical abuse

28.5% experienced: sexual abuse

30.9% experienced: emotional abuse

8.9% experienced: neglect

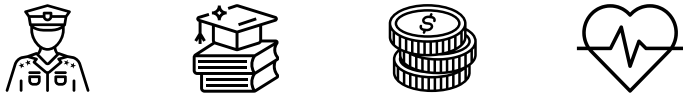
39.6% experienced: exposure to domestic violence

Mathews B, Pacella RE, Scott JG, Finkelhor D, Meinck F, Higgins DJ, Erskine HE, Thomas HJ, Lawrence D, Haslam DM, Malacova E, Dunne MP. The prevalence of child maltreatment in Australia: findings from a national survey. Med J Aust 2023; 218 (6 Suppl): S13-S18.

The Putting Queensland Kids First Strategy places children and young people at the centre of our policy decisions. This strategy clearly aligns the key portfolios of health, early education, education, Aboriginal and Torres Strait partnerships, communities, child safety and Queensland Police who will need to work cohesively to implement the strategy. A strong partnership with the non-government sector is critical, and PeakCare, as the peak body for children and families across the care sector, is naturally aligned to work closely with the government to deliver this strategy.

Investing in increased support for teachers and students in pre- and primary schooling years will help reduce school suspension and exclusion rates, particularly for children with disabilities, First Nations children, and children in care. Keeping children in school, engaged in learning, and feeling safe is key to reducing future youth offending rates. Expanding these programs to ensure every primary school in Queensland has a GP, Behaviour Management Support Officers, and specialist allied health professionals is essential. A commitment to 'suspension as a last resort' would be welcomed.

Early intervention produces cost savings in:



Crime **Education** **Welfare** **Health**

Brighter Beginnings: The first 2000 days of life. New South Wales Department of Health

Benefit: The New South Wales Government Brighter Beginnings: The First 2000 days of life, found investing in early childhood intervention programs produces a return on investment of $13 for every $1. Children who develop within nurturing environments are more likely to become happy and productive members of society. The evidence is clear; early intervention is smart investment.

Priority Two

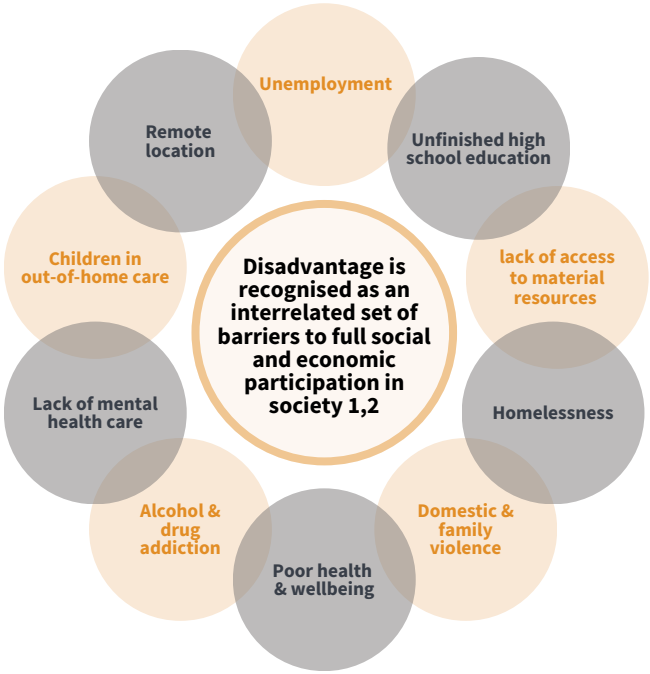
First Nations family focused and co-designed programs to support families being able to stay together, provide wrap around supports for health, education, training, and employment that can support First Nations families.

Commitment: $1 million for PeakCare and a coalition of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations such as QATSICPP, Queensland's youth justice peak body, to deliver culturally safe and specific training programs to service providers working with First Nations families and young people to ensure appropriate and cultural safe practices are in place.

Commitment: $250,000 for PeakCare working with Community Controlled Organisations to support a brownfield expansion of the Federal Government's Justice Reinvestment Program in either Cairns or Mount Isa.

Rationale: Ensuring First Nations voices are not just represented but are central to decision making processes is critical to the success of any program supporting First Nations young people and families. Now is not the time to politicise First Nations outcomes. It is a time to humanise.

Disadvantage is about more than your income, and it is cyclical



Centre for Policy Development – Report Partners in Crime : The relationship between disadvantage and Australia's criminal justice system 2020

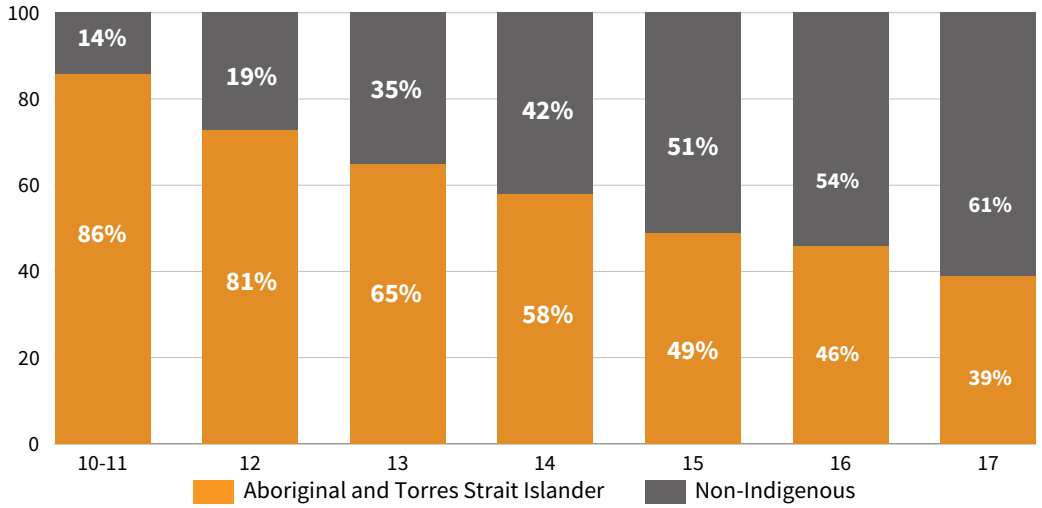
Australia continues to fail in Closing the Gap for First Nations children. In Queensland's annual report on Closing the Gap implementation snapshot 2023, only four of 17 outcomes are on track. We continue to fail in reducing the over-representation of First Nations people in the criminal justice and child protection systems. It is time to improve the research data collection for First Nations communities and collect and use data in a culturally appropriate way, as recommended by the Queensland Family and Child Commission Child Death Review Annual Report 2022-2023.

The introduction of Free Kindy in 2024 and the expansion to 30 hours in discrete communities is beginning to provide a stronger start for First Nations children, highlighted as one of the Closing the Gap targets that has been met is increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children enrolled in Year Before Fulltime Schooling (YBFS) early childhood education to 95% by 2025.

What is yet to be realised is a correlating increase in the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) domain improvement for First Nations young people.

Breaking down the barriers for First Nations people so they are part of the decisions for their young people and connecting non-government, government and families together for positive outcomes. This investment will see delivery of face-to-face training programs, supported with culturally appropriate online training as part of the Hope and Healing expansion.

Proportion of child defendants by First Nations status, age at the time of offence (Queensland, 2021–22)



Source: Queensland Children's Court Annual Report 2021-22, using data obtained from the Department of Children, Your Justice and Multicultural Affairs (former). 'Other' includes whose who don't identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait islander, or whose status is unknow or not stated.

The Queensland Family and Child Commission *Growing up in Queensland Report 2024* identified nearly 30% of young people had been treated unfairly because of their race or culture. In 2021 there were less than 50% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents or caregivers actively engaged with schools to support their child's learning. Ongoing generation educational trauma is reflected in these numbers.

When adults have had a poor educational experience themselves, they are less inclined to engage with the education process for their children. Continued work with schools and education to break down barriers to the school site and create opportunities for stronger engagement - not just with students, but with parents and families too.

Indigenous young people in juvenile detention

One of the factors affecting the higher proportion of Indigenous Australian in prisons is the way juvenile offenders are treated by the justice system.

59%

of people in juvenile detention are Indigenous

Indigenous children are 26 times more likely to be in juvenile detention than non-Indigenous children.

Young Indigenous people in juvenile detention are 74% more likely to end up in adult prisons who are diverted into alternative forms of rehabilitation.

Source: https://theconversation.com/data-gaps-mean-indigenous-incarceration-rates-may-be-even-worse-than-we-thought-63044

PeakCare calls on political parties to commit to Justice Reinvestment as a long-term, community-led approach to preventing crime, improving community safety and reducing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults and children in custody. Justice Reinvestment is 'evidence-based' implementing approaches known to be effective for reducing contact with the justice system, including changes to policing and criminal legal system administration and reliance on early intervention and prevention.

Benefit: To Close the Gap there needs to be a fundamental shift in the way governments work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. First Nations peoples are best placed to develop solutions and lead decision-making relating to their community, country and what impacts them.

Priority Three

Provide access to affordable, sustainable and appropriate housing for families and young people with a 'Housing First' approach, then to assist in connecting other services and programs to support as needed.

Commitment: Develop a 'Housing First' strategy.

Rationale: We are experiencing unprecedented population growth which impacts housing availability. The pipeline of construction continues to fail to keep pace with the need. Brisbane now has the second highest median house price in the nation. Positive work has commenced under the Homes for Queenslanders plan, but there is still work to be done. PeakCare acknowledges the positive announcement of the LNP Securing our Housing Foundations Plan released on 13 June 2024. Both plans are positive steps to a 'Housing First' strategy.

The *2022 Living Affordability in Queensland Report* by Queensland Council of Social Service (QCOSS) reveals the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on low-income earners in Queensland. Families with one full-time worker and two children, as well as single unemployed parents with two children, face weekly deficits of hundreds of dollars in some areas. These households are paying more than 30% of their income in rent, triggering housing stress. The *Real Estate Institute of Queensland (REIQ) Residential Vacancy Report* for the March 2024 quarter said vacancy rates were as low as 0% in Queensland, with rental availability remaining critically low across much of the state. Ongoing housing stress is being felt right across Queensland forcing more and more families into homelessness.

Initiatives undertaken during the COVID-19 pandemic illustrated that with a shift in community perception, housing insecurity can be viewed and responded to as a public health issue and not a social one. In March 2020 Queensland was able to provide safe and secure social housing for all people experiencing homelessness. Analysis of articles published in The Courier Mail on the topic of social housing showed that in the two years prior to March 2020 62.5% of articles were critical towards social housing, and in the two years from March 2020 82.5% of articles published were supportive of social housing.

The Australian Child Maltreatment Study 2023 has shown that children are less safe than we thought. We know that there are also more impacts for young people who identify diversely and accessing supports for these young people are critical. Over 12% of young people in Queensland who identify as LGBTIQA+ feel that they have been treated unfairly. If a young person identifies as LGBTIQA+, and an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, they often have to choose one of those identities to seek support from services. Services must be accessible and accepting of diversity and cultural identity congruently.

The *Breaking Cycles Action Plan 2023-2025* tells us that nearly 20% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are living in overcrowded housing compared to 5.2% of non-Indigenous people. Prioritise housing and all other supports and services can follow.

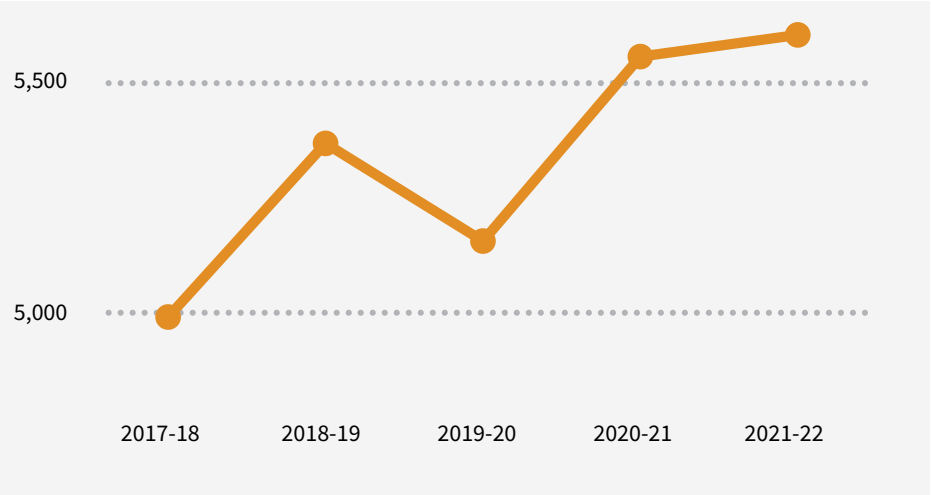
The Queensland Family and Child Commission *Growing up in Queensland Report 2024* identified that over 5,500 young people aged 15-24 years have accessed specialist homelessness services due to experiencing homelessness. Of the young people who responded to the report 11% were worried about having a safe place to stay and over 6% had experienced not having a fixed address, living in a refuge or transitional accommodation. There are over 46,000 people on Queensland's social housing register, with 90.8% of all applications been assessed as having a 'very high' need. This represents an increase of 152% from 2017.

The work identified under Extended Post Care Support would provide training to our sector member to assist in meeting the diversity challenges and provide capability uplift to meet the needs of the community. Many young people (under the age of 18) are unable to access domestic and family violence (DFV) shelters, even if they are a victim, as they are seen as part of the child protection system and not individually.

QShelter through their policy and investment framework - *Better Together: A Framework for Addressing Housing Need and Homelessness in Queensland 2024-2025* clearly articulates the importance of early intervention as preventative priorities to improve outcomes for young people specifically around housing and homelessness.

PeakCare agrees with QShelter's call to prioritise system and service integration across government and non-government agencies, such as domestic and family violence, youth justice, child safety, health, and education to prevent young people exiting care into homelessness.

Young people aged 15-24 years accessing specialist homelessness services, FY18-FY22



2024 Growing Up in Queensland report tells the story of child and family wellbeing in Queensland

Young people are significantly represented among Australia's homeless population. 23% of all homeless people enumerated in Australia in 2021 were aged between 12 and 24.

PeakCare calls on political parties to develop a 'Housing First' strategy with targeted investments in safe and secure social housing for young people between 12-24 years of age.

Benefit: A 'Housing First' strategy ensures access to secure and appropriate housing and flexible supports, to significantly reduce homelessness. The cost of homelessness on additional services such as health, child protection and justice as opposed to housing young people is represented by over $13,000 per year saving to community.

Priority Four

Prevention and diversion programs for young people at risk of entering the youth justice system including supports for families to address domestic and family violence, sexual violence, drug and substance abuse, disability, and mental health supports.

Commitment: $2 million over four years for the inclusion of Safe and Sound in the Hope and Healing package and support for training for child safety officers.

Commitment: $300,000 to lead consultations with the non-government care and justice sector to develop additional early intervention models.

Commitment: $750,000 per annum (plus $250,000 if in an area without a Hope Hub) to deliver Hope 4 Life Program in five locations across Queensland.

Rationale: The statistics around young people in the youth justice system are concerning:

- 81% have used at least one substance
- 71% are First Nations
- 53% are impacted by domestic and family violence
- 48% are not enrolled in education, or in training or in employment
- 44% have one or more disabilities
- 39% have one or more mental health disorders
- 38% of youth in custody have used ice/ methamphetamine in the past
- 30% are in unstable and/ or unsuitable accommodation
- 25% have a parent who has been in custody
- 16% have one or more psychological behavioural issues

A Safer Queensland – Queensland Youth Justice Strategy 2024-2028

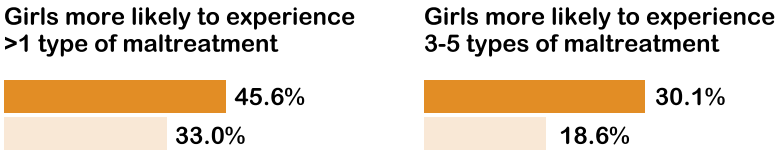
To address the root causes faced by at-risk young people, prevention and early intervention programs must support families and young people experiencing disadvantage.

A stronger focus on addressing violence against women and domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV) is needed. DFSV training programs for care workers and a DFSV framework for young people, incorporated into the respectful relationships curriculum are essential.

The 2023 Australian Child Maltreatment Study revealed the prevalence of maltreatment among 16-24 year-olds:

- 28.2% experienced physical abuse
- 25.7% experienced sexual abuse
- 34.6% experienced emotional abuse
- 10.3% experienced neglect
- 43.8% were exposed to domestic violence (EDV)

4 in 10 young people experienced > type of maltreatment



Australian Child Maltreatment Study 2023

The number of incidents of domestic and family violence impacting young people is increasing. ABC News noted “Queensland's Police Commissioner Steve Gollschewski expects the service will have responded to nearly 200,000 domestic and family violence incidents by the end of this financial year. That is upwards of 500 call outs per day. And that's only those reported - police believe the real figure to be five times higher”.
(ABC News 7 June 2024).

Beyond DV Hope 4 Life is an evidence-based education program working with young people aged 8-13 to reduce impacts of DFV through three pillars of recovery: social connection and support; health and wellbeing; education and training. The underlying success of this program is instilling a strong sense of hope for the young person’s future. Hope 4 Life provides the belief in the young person until they can find that belief in themselves.

With the introduction of the Putting Queensland Kids First Early years strategy focused on 0-8 year olds, and the education reform packages focused on secondary students, Hope 4 Life is a stepping stone to other successful programs such as Project Booyah. PeakCare is seeking a commitment from all parties to actively address the issue of domestic and family violence on our young people. Through a partnership with PeakCare and Beyond DV, deliver Hope 4 Life to young people at risk of disengagement from education, and engagement with youth justice to tackle the complex cause of DFV as one of the key causes of youth offending.

PeakCare, in partnership with Project Paradigm and the Queensland Family and Child Commission, has delivered *Safe and Sound in Queensland: Enhancing safety for young people who go missing from care*. This toolkit is the first of its kind in Queensland, providing evidence-based best practice guidelines for workers addressing risks related to child sexual abuse and exploitation experienced by children who go missing from care.

The opportunity to develop a suite of training materials from this toolkit and expand it to include managing risk of criminal exploitation, for use by child safety officers, school guidance officers and teachers, and outside-hours staff is critical to reducing risks of harm for young people who go missing from care.

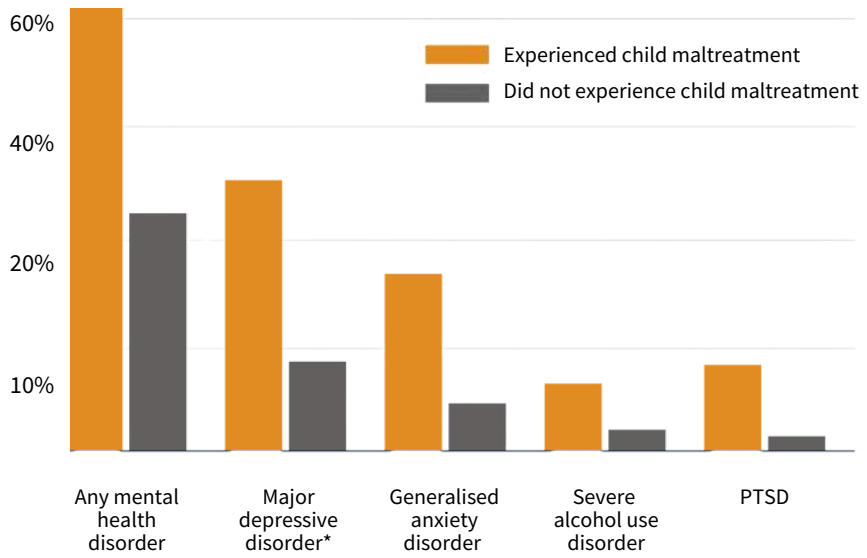
From June 2021 to June 2023, Australia's unemployment rate averaged below 4%, bringing Australia closer to full employment than any time over the last 50 years. Despite this, the Queensland Family and Child Commission *Growing Up in Queensland Report 2024* highlighted that over 60% of parents and caregivers struggle with day-to-day expenses.

Additionally, 5% of Year 4 students reported going without meals. Across Queensland that would represent approximately one child in every Year 4 class. The expansion of school food programs to include lunches could not have come at a more important time. PeakCare welcomes schools being able to provide access to food programs including breakfasts and lunches as a means to support students to engage with education for improved long term learning. Nourished students learn better.

Young people face increasing mental health disorders, exacerbated by social media. Queensland Health's report noted a three-fold increase in hospitalisations for self-harm among girls aged up to 14 years, rising from 19.1 per 100,000 in 2008-09 to 70.5 per 100,000 in 2020-21. Dr John Gerrard, Queensland's Chief Health Officer, has declared a public health alert over the rise in mental health issues among young people. PeakCare emphasises the inclusion of young people in out-of-home care in discussions on legislating social media use.

Improved educational connections for young people who are disengaging from education is critical to addressing disadvantage. The investment in youth reengagement programs and primary school behaviour specialists is a positive step, but more needs to be done. Around 7% of young people in Queensland have a student disciplinary absence (SDA). However most frighteningly this number rises to nearly 15% for First Nations students, 15% for students with a disability and 24.5% for children from out-of-home care. These SDAs are a direct pathway to having students disengage from education and puts children at direct risk of coming into contact with the youth justice system.

Prevalence of mental disorders among young Australians aged 16-24 years with and without experiences of child maltreatment

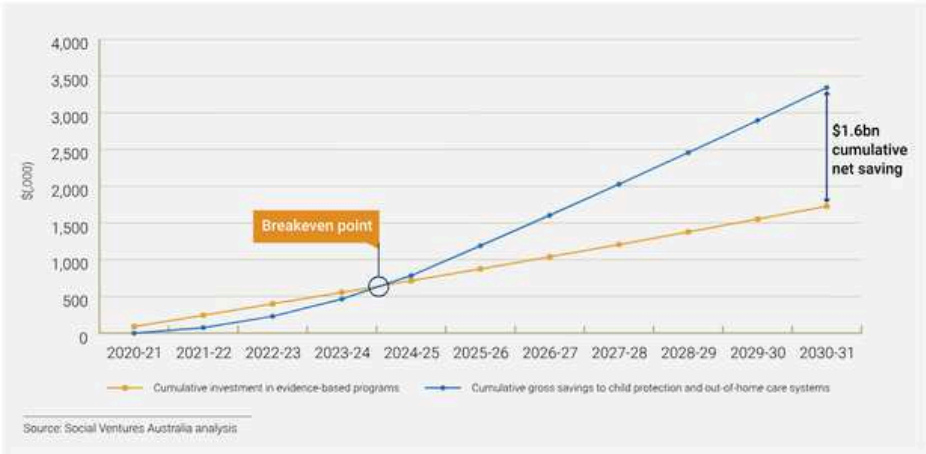


Australian Child Maltreatment Study 2023

Studies including Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) 2015 report *Better Systems, Better Chances: A Review of Research and Practice for Prevention and Early Intervention* shows for offenders with complex needs, the lifetime costs to government across all services (justice, health, housing, employment etc.) can be between $900,000 and $5.5 million for one individual.

Benefit: Significant social and economic benefit by investing in evidence-based early intervention programs addressing the root cause of crime, not just working with the young people. Providing wrap around supports to family members to help them reduce the impact of disadvantage with safe and secure housing, employment, education engagement is critical to the success of any program delivered.

Savings from investment in evidence-based early intervention programs



Priority Five

Sustainable care sector workforce and strengthened support for foster and kinship carers across Queensland, to meet the growing needs of children and families involved in the child protection and youth justice systems.

Commitment: $1.8 million over four years to deliver workshop facilitation for Extended Post Care support (EPCS), training courses development and delivery.

Commitment: $3.25 million of additional funding above current support funding for:

- Framework and training development for kin carers – $700k (with specialised face to face train the trainer option)
- Ancillary Services Hope and Healing adaptation - $700k
- Three digital masterclasses at $200k each modelled on Positive Behaviour Support and Managing High Risk Behaviours approach for residential care
- Adaptation of masterclasses for foster care $100k each ($400k total)
- Hope and Healing Continual Professional Development series of webinars, talks and toolkits - $200k per annum

Commitment: Accept and fund the 10 opportunities identified in PeakCare's Queensland Foster Carer Demographic Insights Report 2024.

Rationale: To ensure the whole care sector workforce - including residential care, housing support, child protection, youth workers and transition staff within the non-government sector - are involved in achieving critical actions from Queensland's Residential Care Roadmap. Supported by ongoing investment in training and facilitation programs led by PeakCare and in partnership with QATSICPP.

Establishing and Facilitating Community of Practice for EPCS

A Community of Practice for for Extended Post Care support (EPCS) will be established and facilitated, providing staff support for multi-modal training packages and the development of action plans and best practice models for the EPCS workforce. Workforce challenges are the top issue across all sectors in Queensland, particularly in regional areas where attracting and retaining staff is increasingly difficult. Investment in innovative employment strategies and cultural change management is necessary as traditional working models are no longer effective.

PeakCare is leading implementation actions from the Residential Care Roadmap, following the Queensland Government's 2023 Residential Care Review. Continued funding is essential for the implementation and re-evaluation of the residential care model.

Expansion of Hope and Healing Training

PeakCare's successful Hope and Healing training which will include parents, kin, foster carers, NDIS, and health practitioners working with children in out-of-home care, provides crucial training and support. From 1 May 2023 to 30 April 2024 survey data shows 98% of foster carers have stated they would apply learnings from the program to their daily care practices.

Current Statistics and Future Needs

As of 31 December 2023, the number of children in care increased by 1.5% on the previous year to 11,679, with 6,155 carer households. The gap between the number of foster and kinship carers and the demand for child protection services is widening, necessitating an increase in residential care services. December 2023 data shows 1,829 children are in residential care, with 794 identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, and approximately 600 being under 12 years old. The highest of any state or territory in the country.

Innovative Residential Care Models

PeakCare, as a lead partner in the Residential Care Roadmap, is supportive of the Department of Child Safety piloting non-traditional residential care models, including a reunification house in far North Queensland, a family stay house in the Sunshine Coast and Central region, and a short-stay house in North Queensland. These innovative models will inform the redefined delivery model of residential care, in collaboration with the Department of Child Safety, Seniors, and Disability Services.

Queensland Foster Carer Demographic Insights Report

Until recently, Queensland foster carer numbers have remained relatively stable, but latest Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) data shows residential care numbers have more than doubled in the last five years – higher than any other jurisdiction in Australia. Support for Foster and Kinship carers needs to be sustainable and equal. The 10 recommendations from the report highlight the need for systemic reform, the report calls for greater financial and logistical support for foster carers and agencies, and innovative models of foster care. It also emphasises the state's need for an improved approach to recruitment and retention recognising the critical role foster carers play in child protection.

Benefit: Communities of Practice to reduce workload and duplication and create a best practice model for Extended Post Care services.

Benefit: A capability uplift for the whole care sector workforce, leveraging proven training models such as Hope and Healing, to deliver improved outcomes for children by professionally enriching workers.

Benefit: Better support foster and kinship carers including attraction and retention, and provide more flexible and professional models of foster care.

Priority Six

Voice of young people enshrined in decision making and co-design of programs and support plans that reflect their lived experience, needs and hopes for the future.

Commitment: $1 million over four years which would include renumeration for young people to provide lived experience voice including their time and advice.

Rationale: To deliver a truly child and family centred system we need to ensure the voices of children and their families are heard in the policies that affect them. An expert panel of young people who have been in the child protection and criminal justice system should be established and utilised to inform government of the day and Ministers on the decisions that impact them. The establishment of a ministerial youth advisory group for the Minister for Child Safety, Disability Services and Seniors, to give young people in care a greater say about their future is a positive start.

PeakCare would establish a group that would consider not just child protection policy, but also provide insight and advice on health, housing, domestic and family violence, policing and justice systems. This engagement will incorporate a group of young people currently in care or having exited care within the past 12 months, using culturally appropriate methodologies, on where they are, what services they currently access or need to access, any barriers they face and support to help them and the other young people to address and remove these barriers**.** Not only will this group reflect their voices, but PeakCare will also consult with and bring back voices of young people not on the group who are still in out of home care. This includes young people in residential care, foster care, remote and regional communities, youth detention centres, and include vulnerable young people who would not normally nominate to be part of 'expert panel' type consultative mechanisms – to be representative of young people who engage with the systems.

Benefit: The voice of young people who are impacted by policy settings and programs will enable more successful implementation of these policies and programs ensuring young people are part of the decision making.

Priority Seven

Providing improved access to services and conditions for children and young people who are currently in care including pathways to transition through education, training and into employment.

Commitment: Develop a pilot based on the Victorian Government's Raising Expectations program.

Rationale: PeakCare commits to partnering with TAFE Queensland and the higher education sector to develop a program akin to Victoria's Raising Expectations program. This program, funded by the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry, and Regions and delivered by the Centre for Excellence in Family and Child Welfare, supports students with care experience. It builds the capacity and confidence of these students, aids VET and higher education workers in providing tailored support and strengthens transitions to post-secondary education.

Under the Raising Expectations program, TAFEs and university partners offer the following supports to care leavers:

- Bursaries and scholarships for care-experienced students
- Assistance in accessing financial allowances and supports
- Help with navigating applications and enrolments in VET and higher education courses
- Referrals to tuition fee-waivers under the Youth Access Initiative
- Referrals to personal and academic support
- Peer support and mentoring programs

PeakCare will develop a similar program for young people in out-of-home care, leading the partnership with TAFE Queensland and higher education providers. This program will support out-of-home care leavers of any age currently undertaking or considering VET or higher education courses at TAFE or partnered universities. PeakCare would be pleased to provide a business case for the program's development and collaborate with our Victorian partners to deliver a similar initiative in Queensland.

Benefit: Access to quality training programs that keep young people in training and ready for employment. More young people employed and addressing the workforce shortage of all sectors.

Priority Eight

'Do Detention Differently' targeted intervention programs to reduce the number of young people in Queensland watchhouses and in youth detention. By 30 June 2025, Queensland is not the jurisdiction with the highest number young people in detention.

Commitment: Implementation of a pilot of the Diagrama Model to Do Detention Differently.

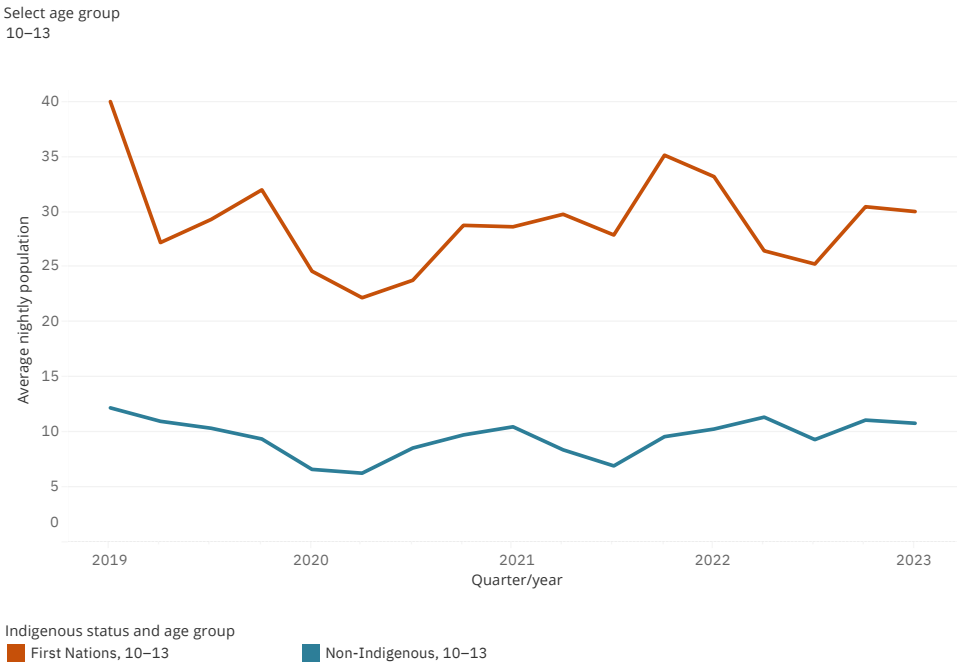
Commitment: Significantly reduce the number of children in watchhouses by 30 June 2025.

Commitment: $500,000 per annum for PeakCare to work with care sector service providers to develop a 12 month transition program, for young people exiting youth detention.

Commitment: $200,000 funded research project in partnership with Nurture Community Services and Department of Youth Justice to identify and address grass root issues for young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who enter the youth justice system, and connect them with mentors in the community.

Rationale: Queensland has demonstrated itself as the nation's leader in locking children up. PeakCare is calling on all political parties to commit to reducing the number of young people in watchhouses and detention by investing in intervention, prevention and diversionary programs. The societal outcomes for children and young people are better, and the long-term financial burdens on governments will be significantly reduced as a result.

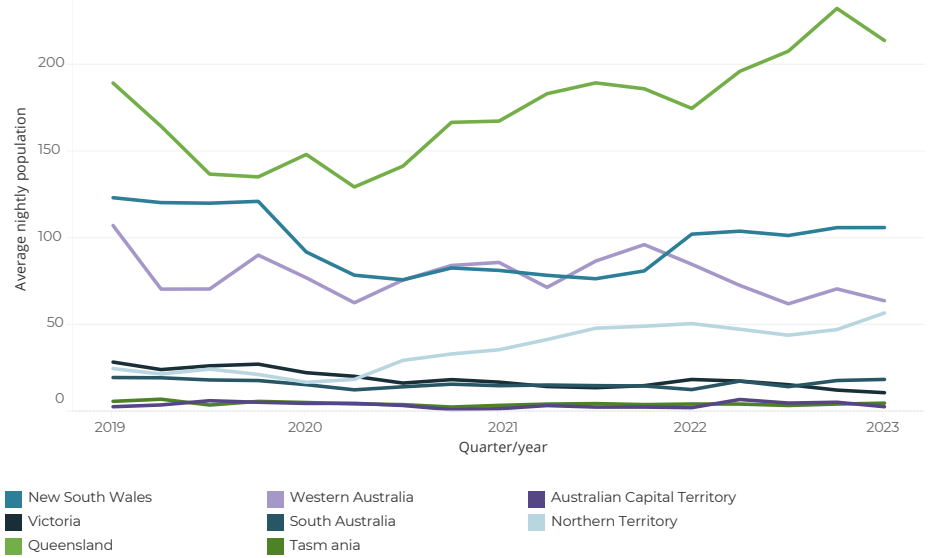
Figure 2.2: First Nations and non-Indigenous people in detention, by age group, June quarter 2019 to June quarter 2023 (number)



Source: https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/youth-justice/youth-detention-population-in-australia-2023/contents/first-nations-young-people

Queensland unimpressively leads the nation with the highest number of young people in youth detention. PeakCare is seeking a commitment from political parties for ongoing investment in early intervention and prevention that will provide a legacy impact to these numbers in stopping the pipeline of young people even encountering youth justice services. Equally, PeakCare calls on improved transition programs for young people exiting detention and continued support and expansion of evidence-based prevention programs for young people already in contact with the youth justice system including programs like Intensive Case Management, Intensive Bail Support, On Country to address young people currently aged 10-17 years.

Figure 2.4: First Nations young people in detention, by state and territory, June quarter 2019 to June quarter 2023 (number, rate and rate ratio)



Source: https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/youth-justice/youth-detention-population-in-australia-2023/contents/first-nations-young-people

PeakCare calls on political parties to commit to the significant reduction of remand rates through Fast Track Sentencing, and other initiatives, from 90% of young people in youth detention, to 10%. This will enable a planned and predictable approach to planning for young people to rejoin their communities after a period in custody.

A commitment from political parties that there needs to be stronger consideration of how to Do Detention Differently. In particular, a focus on therapeutic detention programs such as the Diagrama model from Spain, and that government of the day would engage the Diagrama Foundation in partnership with a community-controlled organisation to pilot the model in Queensland. An opportunity that could be explored without significant additional investment to pilot the program could be through the newly commissioned youth detention centres being built at Woodford and in Cairns due to open in 2026.

Recidivism rates need to be reduced, the community expect it, and young people want to break the cycle of re-offending they just need the support to be able to do it. The Queensland Family and Child Commission report on Exiting Youth Detention shows that the recidivism rate is at an unacceptable high of 96% for young people leaving Brisbane or Cleveland Youth Detention Centre and 84% for young people leaving West Moreton Youth Detention Centre, thus providing evidence that using a more therapeutic approach to detention improves outcomes.

It is now time to acknowledge we need to Do Detention Differently. There are better models from around the world that demonstrate therapeutic re-education centres, rather than “youth detention” working with the young person and their families can reduce recidivism dramatically - notably, Spain’s Diagrama model has around 13% recidivism.

Clearly, we need programs that support young people as they leave detention that help them reconnect with themselves, their culture and their community. These need to be longer than 72-hour transition services that can be hit and miss at the best of times. Wrap around support for young people and their families when a young person leaves detention is essential to reduce the risk of reoffending. This support helps them re-engage with education and training, transition into employment, and maintain protective factors that can break the cycle of offending.

Children are victims too. More than 50% of children in the youth justice system have either been victims of, or witnessed, domestic and family violence.

The best solution addressing youth crime is to target the risk factors like domestic, family and sexual violence, drug and substance abuse, mental health before young people ends up in detention.

Internationally, it has been shown that programs focusing on young people developing positive identities (social, cultural and personal) are effective in preventing and reducing involvement in the youth justice system. Young people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds often experience multiple marginalities, including ecological, historical, structural and social stressors (such as family, school and law enforcement). Combined with skewed media and political discourse using racial and ethnic descriptors to describe incidents involving young people, there is a public perception that young people from CALD backgrounds are responsible for a large proportion of violent crime, despite statistics showing otherwise.

While identity programs with an ongoing mentoring component have been demonstrated to reduce young people's involvement in crime and increase their social networks in other countries, it is important to test their validity in Queensland, in order to make evidence-based decisions about future funding. A research report led by PeakCare would recommend which programs could be applied and in which locations they would have the most impact.

Benefit: The Productivity Commission's report of youth justice services showed that the average cost per day per child or young person in community-based services was $245 in 2021–22, a decrease from $259 in 2020–21. By comparison, the average cost per day per child or young person in detention-based services was $2,086 in 2021–22, an increase from $1,920 in 2020–21. Community-based services are generally more cost-effective than detention-based services. Community-based options, such as diversion programs, probation, counselling and rehabilitation services, offer a more supportive and less restrictive environment for children and young people.

Conclusion

Queensland's commitment to early intervention and prevention programs for families and children is crucial for a brighter future. These initiatives not only promise substantial economic returns but also aim to create a healthier and more equitable society where every child can thrive.

Collaboration among government agencies, NGOs, and community groups is essential for the success of these efforts. PeakCare's leadership in coordinating workforce strategies and partnerships will be pivotal in ensuring these investments translate into tangible benefits statewide.

By prioritising a sustainable care sector workforce and strengthening support for foster and kinship carers, Queensland is poised to meet the complex needs of its most vulnerable populations. These investments will contribute to a resilient care sector that provides optimal support for children in care, regardless of their location in Queensland. This holistic approach underscores Queensland's commitment to safeguarding the well-being and future of its children and families.

Moreover, advocating for a 'Housing First' strategy and reforming detention practices are critical steps toward achieving broader social and economic stability. These approaches not only address immediate needs but also lay the foundation for a more equitable society for generations to come.

It is imperative that political parties commit to doing detention differently by reducing remand rates and investing in programs that are evidenced based.

PeakCare calls for enhanced support systems during the transition from detention, including comprehensive wrap-around services that address education, training, and employment needs. These initiatives are crucial in breaking the cycle of offending and supporting young people in reconnecting with their communities and cultural identities.

PeakCare urges political parties to commit to these priorities, emphasising the importance of long-term, sustainable approaches that empower Indigenous communities and amplify youth voices in policymaking.
By challenging stereotypes and investing in evidence-based programs, Queensland can lead the way in changing the justice system and promote rehabilitation which will reduce recidivism among young people.

In essence, these priorities are pivotal in creating a pathway to prosperity for young people and their families. Queensland community confidence will be returned, and families and children will have the opportunity to thrive in safe, supportive, and inclusive communities.

Development of this submission has been undertaken with consultation from across the child and family sector. These consultations have had representations from across Queensland.

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