



Putting Queensland Kids First – Consultation Draft

Youth Advisory Council

The Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC) engaged the QFCC Youth Advisory Council to provide feedback on the consultation draft and gather perspectives from young people who have experience navigating and engaging with the systems reflected in the *Putting Queensland Kids First* consultation draft. The QFCC recognises the importance of seeking independent reviews and opinions from young people when providing feedback to the *Putting Queensland Kids First* consultation draft.

The Youth Advisory Council engaged in a thorough discussion of the consultation draft. Members expressed a need for greater clarity regarding the proposed steps outlined in the draft, highlighting further detail or explanation was required for a comprehensive understanding around action items and which government agency would take control. Concerns were raised regarding the limited feedback from broader out-of-metro communities, emphasising the importance of ensuring inclusivity and representation across diverse geographical areas. The council highlighted that incorporating perspectives from all corners of the State was necessary to ensure the strategy adequately addresses the needs and concerns of youth across different contexts.

“I think it is vague but has good themes and ideas. We need more logistics around it especially in regional and remote areas. I think there needs to be a bigger focus on what comes next as to what’s already done. I know a lot for are unheard of where I live but would be really cool if they existed here.”

Youth Advisory Council member

“I think it should be actionable. An action, a commitment, and who will be in charge of the consultation. The draft should definitely include a focus of consulting with young people – either through public submissions, a dedicated YAC, or some other mechanism, young people should be at the centre of a plan for young people. This could be something the draft highlights – saying that youth participation and voices will be sought by departments and agencies which deal with children the most (Education, Housing, Child Safety).”

Youth Advisory Council member

The Youth Advisory Council provided valuable recommendations aimed at enhancing the consultation draft to better serve the needs of young people. Among their suggestions were the implementation of additional education and TAFE opportunities tailored to diverse interests and career paths, providing greater flexibility and accessibility for youth to pursue their educational goals. They also emphasised the urgent need to address issues surrounding child and teenage sexual abuse and harassment, advocating for comprehensive policies and support systems to ensure the safety and well-being of young individuals. The Council also noted the importance of increasing the availability of bulk-billed doctor services; they expressed that the cost of medical care upfront was often a barrier to accessing health services and emphasised the critical role of accessible healthcare in promoting physical and mental well-being among youth.

Putting Queensland Kids First Consultation Draft - Guiding Questions

The *Consultation draft* speaks to the implementation of strengths-based approaches, emphasising the promotion of equity and acknowledgment of the diverse needs, lived experiences, and cultural safety of all children, young people, and families. The draft strategy notes the importance of focusing on equity in outcomes for all individuals, including marginalised groups such as First Nations peoples, people with disabilities, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and those residing in rural and remote areas. While the draft articulates these principles, further detail as to the service delivery modelling to implement *Putting Queensland Kids First* through regional, remote, and very remote areas is needed to best understand how this strategy will support children and families living outside of major towns or densely populated areas.

The six principles outlined in the *Consultation draft* align with the goals of the QFCC regarding commitment to promoting the wellbeing and rights of children, young people, and families. This includes actively seeking and incorporating their voices and experiences into decision-making processes, as well as upholding child-safe principles and child rights. Recent policy publications such as the Queensland Government's *Child and Family Reform Action Plan*¹ demonstrate this commitment to centring the needs and perspectives of children and young people.

Core principles for holistic child wellbeing should include promoting equity, recognising diversity, and ensuring cultural safety in service delivery. Principles in a holistic strategy should focus on strengths-based approaches, collaborative partnerships between government, service providers and communities, and should empower families to actively participate in decision-making processes regarding their child's wellbeing. Key protective factors in maintaining positive trajectories for children and young people include strong family and community support networks, access to quality education and healthcare services, positive relationships with caring adults and opportunities for meaningful engagement in extracurricular activities. To further boost these protective factors, efforts should be made to strengthen community connections, enhance access to mental health services, provide opportunities for skill-building and personal development, and address social determinants of health such as poverty and housing instability.

The QFCC recognises the diverse needs and cultural safety of all children, young people, and families and is committed to achieving equity in outcomes for marginalised groups, including First Nations peoples, people with disabilities, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and those living in rural and remote areas. Given recent publications such as the Queensland Government's *Multicultural Queensland Charter*² and the *Local Thriving Communities Action Plan*³, the *Putting Queensland Kids First* strategy must be intentional in partnerships with lived-experience persons, groups, and organisations to understand the needs for all children, young people, and families.

In addition to the outlined priorities in the *Putting Queensland Kids First* draft, it is important to consider the intersectionality of issues affecting children, young people and families, such as addressing the specific needs of children with disabilities, children and young people living in out-of-home care or in contact with the youth justice system, LGBTQI+ youth, and those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Priorities should also

¹ Queensland Government (2019), *Supporting Families Changing Futures 2019-2023*.

² Queensland Government Department of Environment, Science and Innovation (2022), *Multicultural Queensland Charter*, [Multicultural Queensland Charter | Department of Environment, Science and Innovation, Queensland \(des.qld.gov.au\)](https://www.des.qld.gov.au/multicultural-queensland-charter).

³ Queensland Government Department of Treaty, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Communities and the Arts (2022), *Local Thriving Communities Action Plan 2022–24*, [LTC action plan \(dtsip.qld.gov.au\)](https://www.dtsip.qld.gov.au/ltc-action-plan).

include addressing systemic barriers to accessing services and resources, promoting early childhood development and education, and ensuring a trauma-informed approach to service delivery.

Supporting connection to culture and community for children, young people, and families involves acknowledging and respecting diverse cultural identities, providing opportunities for cultural learning and expression, and fostering partnerships with First Nations communities and elders. Implementing culturally appropriate programs and services, supporting Indigenous-led initiatives, facilitating access to traditional cultural practices and ceremonies, and ensuring that Indigenous perspectives are integrated into policies and decision-making processes is central to delivering an inclusive and robust system response. Communication and coordination between government agencies, non-government organisations, schools, healthcare providers, and the community must be intentional and sustained to identify and address the needs of children, young people and families comprehensively.

Best practice models reflect prevention and early intervention services to achieve better outcomes for children and families. By investing in a mix of universal, targeted, and intensive supports, this approach aims to address issues proactively and prevent crises from occurring. An integrated service delivery model provides improved access to support and services for Queenslanders, particularly where other barriers to engagement exist and in circumstances of early childhood screening and exploring suitable supports for families with additional needs. This involves partnering and collaborating across government agencies, non-governmental organisations, and community groups to provide holistic and person-centred support.

Wellbeing from conception and the earliest years of life

The *Putting Queensland Kids First* strategy focuses on intervention and support at key junctures in children's lives, to positively influence their life trajectories. A child's wellbeing is rooted in various factors, including their family, community, culture, and broader environment. Early development thrives when children form secure attachments in nurturing environments, allowing them to explore safely.⁴ Recent research found that most Queensland children have someone who supports them, with 80 per cent of young children reporting they have a grown-up who listens and helps them when they feel upset, and 89 per cent describing that their parents make them feel happy.⁵ Caregivers require support to navigate the challenges of parenthood, including financial, social, and health aspects, while also acquiring the skills to nurture their child's wellbeing. For First Nations families, culturally responsive support is essential, recognising the value of Indigenous cultural knowledge in child-rearing. The QFCC supports the enhancement of existing initiatives to provide greater support to expectant parents, and new parents to navigate parenting especially in early childhood.

Providing expectant parents with high-quality, holistic care throughout pregnancy and post-pregnancy provides Queensland children with the best opportunity to reach early milestones and young children are better resourced to address additional needs as they present. Recent research conducted by the QFCC highlights that 96.4 per cent of Queensland parents attended five or more antenatal visits. The QFCC found that 91.3 per cent of Queensland babies were born at full term (after 37 weeks' gestation) and that 93.6 per cent of babies were born at a healthy

⁴ Queensland Family and Child Commission (2022), *The extent of infant mental health disorders*, [Att 5 The extent of infant mental health disorders UPDATED \(qfcc.qld.gov.au\)](#).

⁵ Queensland Family and Child Commission (2024), *Growing up in Queensland*, [Growing Up in Queensland 2024 | Queensland Family and Child Commission \(qfcc.qld.gov.au\)](#).

birth weight.⁶ This research supports the need for accessible antenatal care which is culturally responsive and available in the community, particularly for parents residing in regional and remote areas, for First Nations families, and for families where additional supports are needed. The Queensland Family and Child Commission's (QFCC) *Growing up in Queensland*⁷ report reflects research of pregnancy and early childhood and the prevalence of risk indicators for Queensland parents and children; in some regions throughout Queensland up to 20.4 per cent of expectant mothers smoked during pregnancy and 7.5 per cent used alcohol before 20 weeks. Given the information available regarding the risks of substance use during pregnancy, these statistics highlight the need for consistent and comprehensive antenatal and postnatal services to be available for all families across the state.

Observations in the QFCC report, *Lessons from the life-story timelines of 30 Queensland children who have died*, demonstrated that families engaged with Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) in early years were more likely to have a more comprehensive service network available to them and meet any additional needs, than families who were not linked to ECEC, including improved engagement with medical and allied health care services.⁸ The review illustrated that children enrolled in ECEC services had more frequent and sustained engagement from support systems to meet their needs than children who were not enrolled with an ECEC.⁹ This includes services for parents to support family wellbeing in the home. The QFCC understands that while ECEC is not always the precursor for secondary service engagement, in this review children and families linked with an ECEC service experienced higher rates of service engagement including more direct touchpoints from secondary services than children who were not enrolled with an ECEC service.¹⁰ The review found there is an opportunity for further collaboration between ECEC and child protection policy makers, regulators, and service providers to contribute to the body of evidence of the impact ECEC can have on the safety and wellbeing of children who have additional needs. Early Childhood Education and care services are a valuable part of a comprehensive child-wellbeing framework.

The QFCC acknowledges the substantial investment of \$645 million in free kindergarten for four-year-olds in Queensland from 2024. This initiative reflects the value of early childhood education and care, not only in providing early years education to young children but as an access mechanism for additional support networks for the entire family. It remains crucial that the early childhood and family support sectors engage a coordinated approach to provide tailored and sustained assistance for families in need.

The strategies proposed in *Putting Queensland Kids First* will require robust accountability measures to ensure resources are utilised efficiently, and that the strategies and services employed are effective in meeting the needs for children. Prioritising early intervention programs, maternal health initiatives, and equitable access to essential resources will improve opportunities for parents to engage meaningfully with the service sector to address presenting needs, and access necessary supports to provide best opportunities for children to thrive.

⁶ Queensland Family and Child Commission (2024), *Growing up in Queensland*, [Growing Up in Queensland 2024 | Queensland Family and Child Commission \(qfcc.qld.gov.au\)](#).

⁷ Queensland Family and Child Commission (2024), *Growing up in Queensland*, [Growing Up in Queensland 2024 | Queensland Family and Child Commission \(qfcc.qld.gov.au\)](#).

⁸ Queensland Family and Child Commission (2023), *Lessons from the life-story timelines of 30 Queensland children who have died*, [Lessons from the life-story timelines of 30 Queensland children who have died \(qfcc.qld.gov.au\)](#).

⁹ Queensland Family and Child Commission (2023), *Lessons from the life-story timelines of 30 Queensland children who have died*, [Lessons from the life-story timelines of 30 Queensland children who have died \(qfcc.qld.gov.au\)](#).

¹⁰ Queensland Family and Child Commission (2023), *Lessons from the life-story timelines of 30 Queensland children who have died*, [Lessons from the life-story timelines of 30 Queensland children who have died \(qfcc.qld.gov.au\)](#).

Supporting families and strengthening communities

The QFCC recognises the vital role that families and communities play in promoting the health and wellbeing of children and young people. When families have access to sufficient material basics such as food and housing, their children are physically healthier, their social and emotional development is more likely to be on track and they do better at school. There has been a sharp increase in the cost of living in recent years which is having a negative impact on children, young people, and families. Evidence recently presented in the QFCC *Growing Up in Queensland*¹¹ report highlights that over the past 12 months food prices have increased by 7-8 per cent and utility prices have increased by 12-14 per cent. This has led to greater stress on parents and carers to afford material basics for their families, with 61 per cent reporting that they find it hard to pay for day-to-day expenses such as food and bills.¹² Families living in rural and remote locations feel the effects of rising costs of living more than those living in metropolitan areas due to reduced access to services. Recent reviews conducted by the QFCC found that children, young people and families residing within 50 kilometres of a major city will be linked with more services and have more direct contact touchpoints with support than those residing further from metropolitan areas.¹³ These reviews found that families living in Sunshine Coast and Central Queensland, North Queensland and Far North Queensland reported higher rates of difficulty paying for day-to-day expenses (64 per cent, 68 per cent and 66 per cent respectively).¹⁴

The QFCC recognises the proposed Putting Queensland Kids First strategy highlights the need to support families to deal with adversity, disadvantage and develop financial resilience and independence, but consideration should be given to ensure that it supports all Queensland families. Programs such as the school food program should be comprehensively launched in schools throughout Queensland to assist all children and young people in need, including those in remote and rural communities.

The Youth Advisory Council expressed that family was the main ingredient from childhood that contributes to a successful life. Understanding culture, heritage and history was paramount in defining ones-self and maintaining a family identity. Initiatives aimed at supporting families and strengthening communities must be culturally safe and responsive for culturally and linguistically diverse and First Nations families and recognise the strength of cultural knowledge in raising children. Key opportunities include empowering parents and caregivers, ensuring stable housing, providing access to information and support for life challenges, promoting health, living free from violence, and facilitating economic participation for financial resilience and independence.

A child's environment and experiences have a lasting impact on health, learning and wellbeing outcomes. Early intervention services that support families with children to obtain and sustain housing can achieve long-term outcomes for the family, including reducing the risk of young people experiencing homelessness. Recent analysis identified that there has been a 42.9 per cent increase in rental costs across Queensland over the past 3 years. This increase in rental costs and cost of living more broadly has resulted in approximately 8,291 young

¹¹ Queensland Family and Child Commission (2024), *Growing up in Queensland*, [Growing Up in Queensland 2024 | Queensland Family and Child Commission \(qfcc.qld.gov.au\)](#).

¹² Queensland Family and Child Commission (2024), *Growing up in Queensland*, [Growing Up in Queensland 2024 | Queensland Family and Child Commission \(qfcc.qld.gov.au\)](#).

¹³ Queensland Family and Child Commission (2023), *Lessons from the life-story timelines of 30 Queensland children who have died*, [Lessons from the life-story timelines of 30 Queensland children who have died \(qfcc.qld.gov.au\)](#).

¹⁴ Queensland Family and Child Commission (2024), *Growing up in Queensland*, [Growing Up in Queensland 2024 | Queensland Family and Child Commission \(qfcc.qld.gov.au\)](#).

Queenslanders (aged 0-24 years) being homeless on census night in 2021.¹⁵ This housing crisis has endured with 41,819 children and young people recorded as living in public housing in Queensland in 2022, and a further 19,741 children and young people recorded on the Queensland public housing register.

There is a need for housing supports for families to be enhanced under *Putting Queensland Kids First*. The QFCC welcomes the Queensland Government's *Towards ending homelessness for young Queenslanders* initiative and introduction of more Youth Foyers throughout Queensland, recognising that in 2022-23, 10.8 per 10,000 specialist homelessness service clients were young people presenting alone and 4.0 per 10,000 were children in contact with the child protection system (either leaving care or children on protection orders).¹⁶ Acknowledging that in 2022-23 approximately 44 per cent of specialist homelessness services clients in Queensland were families,¹⁷ the QFCC welcomes the expansion of the *Immediate Housing Response for Families* scheme which provides temporary accommodation and specialist homelessness services to families experiencing or at risk of homelessness. These current policies and initiatives provide a foundation for Queensland to further develop its support system for children and young people experiencing homelessness, however the QFCC recognises the importance of expanding these services to enable greater access for families in rural and remote locations throughout the state, providing services which can accommodate larger family groups, and ensuring that all housing strategies are culturally appropriate for Queensland families.

The *Putting Queensland Kids First* strategy acknowledges that the wellbeing of a child is fundamentally rooted in their family, kinship, personal relationships, community, and cultural context. During their early years, children thrive through secure attachments in nurturing environments that allow for exploration and understanding of the world around them. The overall health and wellbeing of the entire family significantly impact a child's healthy development, necessitating support for caregivers to navigate various aspects of parenthood. Analysis of family units underscore the need for promoting parental and family health and wellbeing to support children and young peoples' healthy development. The QFCC understands that whole-of-family health and wellbeing is integral to supporting children and young people's healthy development. The recent *Growing Up in Queensland* report identified that only 53 per cent of two-parent families and 38 per cent of one-parent families rate their health as excellent or good. Similarly, it was found that psychological stress was high amongst parents, with 35.6 per cent of one-parent families and 14.8 per cent of couple families reporting high stress.¹⁸ Given the important role played by parents and caregivers in promoting children's health and wellbeing, ensuring parent and caregiver healthcare needs including their mental health needs are met, is essential for promoting children's healthy growth and development. There is necessity for practical supports to assist parents, caregivers, families, and communities to live safe and well.

For First Nations families, culturally responsive support is crucial. Strategies must respect and engage with communities, employing the appropriate cultural knowledge. More than half (59 per cent) of respondents to the

¹⁵ Queensland Family and Child Commission (2024), *Growing up in Queensland*, [Growing Up in Queensland 2024 | Queensland Family and Child Commission \(qfcc.qld.gov.au\)](#).

¹⁶ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2023), *Specialist homelessness services annual report 2022-23*, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/specialist-homelessness-services-annual-report/contents/about>

¹⁷ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2023), *Specialist homelessness services annual report 2022-23*, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/specialist-homelessness-services-annual-report/contents/about>

¹⁸ Queensland Family and Child Commission (2024), *Growing up in Queensland*, [Growing Up in Queensland 2024 | Queensland Family and Child Commission \(qfcc.qld.gov.au\)](#).

QFCC Community Perspective Survey 2023¹⁹ agreed that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people were supported to stay connected with their culture. A further six in 10 respondents (60 per cent) to the *Statutory Systems Workforce Survey*²⁰ agreed that culturally and linguistically diverse children and young people attending their organisation were supported to preserve their cultural and linguistic identity. The QFCC Youth Advisory Council members commented that the expansion of existing initiatives to include the inclusion of cultural activities in schools would assist young people to engage with their culture, including suggestions for specific lessons on First Nations and culturally diverse traditions to be included.

“In New Zealand, we have mandatory Maori classes where we learn the language and about their culture, lore, myths. I firmly believe that when kids and children are connected to culture through this way, we are able to progress more as a society.”

Youth Advisory Council member

Identifying and responding to needs for healthy development and positive life courses

The *Putting Queensland Kids First* draft details that young Queenslanders with developmental delays require early access to appropriate identification, interventions, and support for improved long-term outcomes. Without proper support, these children may encounter challenges in education, employment, mental health, and are at greater risk of involvement in the justice system later in life. Early identification and intervention during the early years of life are essential for preparing children to transition into school confidently and achieve their potential. Opportunities for systemic improvements for early identification and supported transition to schooling include enhancing access to universal health services, supporting families in accessing integrated and specialist supports, improving inclusive services for children with disabilities, providing early access to interventions for children with developmental conditions, and ensuring inclusive education and social support for children with disabilities and developmental conditions.

The QFCC supports the introduction of inclusive education and social supports for children and young people living with disability and developmental conditions, including through the *Student Wellbeing Package* which is delivering enhanced wellbeing outcomes for students through the employment of health and wellbeing practitioners in schools, including through the *GPs in Schools Pilot*. Having general practitioners (GPs) onsite at school improves access to comprehensive health care services, including timely assessment, intervention, and referrals for various health concerns. This initiative not only promotes physical health but also addresses the holistic needs of students, supporting their healthy development and positive life courses. It has had success in its pilot schools, with young people who attended the GP at St George State High School reporting they feel safe attending the school-based GP clinic and that having the doctors there once a week encourages them to get health matters seen to that they might otherwise ignore.²¹ The QFCC acknowledges the early positive indications from the pilot of this program and supports the consideration for a more comprehensive implementation across Queensland schools, particularly in rural and remote regions.

¹⁹ Queensland Family and Child Commission (2023), *Community Perceptions Survey 2023*, [Community Perceptions Survey Report 2023 \(qfcc.qld.gov.au\)](https://qfcc.qld.gov.au/reports-and-publications/community-perceptions-survey-report-2023).

²⁰ Queensland Family and Child Commission (2023), *Statutory systems workforce survey*, [Statutory Systems Workforce Survey Report \(qfcc.qld.gov.au\)](https://qfcc.qld.gov.au/reports-and-publications/statutory-systems-workforce-survey-report).

²¹ Queensland Family and Child Commission (2024), *Growing up in Queensland*, [Growing Up in Queensland 2024 | Queensland Family and Child Commission \(qfcc.qld.gov.au\)](https://qfcc.qld.gov.au/reports-and-publications/growing-up-in-queensland-2024).

The QFCC recognises the importance of early identification of additional needs and responding holistically through supported access to services to address emerging needs and provide children with the best opportunity to thrive. Initiatives such as *Queensland Health's Primary School Health Nurse Readiness Program*, focusing on vision screening, and specialist health services including immunisation and dental health access and treatment have shown great promise in the success of integration between health and education services to promote engagement and support access to services.

"I think it would be nice to see more connections between Queensland health and Queensland Education especially when supporting people with disabilities, mental health issues and neurodivergence. I think there should also be more connections between regional sectors and the state department of education, I think a lot of rural places often miss out more on better educational opportunities/programs that provide early interventions".

Youth Advisory Council member

Collaboration between the health and education services has been a valuable utility in providing access to health services where children, young people and families may have difficulty accessing regular health networks or meeting their health milestones. The existing utilisation of the Dental Van and *Queensland Health Child and Adolescent Dental Health Services* are positive examples of integrated health access promoting engagement in regular annual screening and treatment, and facilitating access to health services where children may otherwise experience barriers. With research indicating that one in three Queensland children aged 5-6 years had never visited the dentist and more than half (53.7%) of children aged 5-14 years in Queensland had teeth

affected by dental decay²², access to integrated health care at school supports children to engage in proactive health management. Similarly, the *Queensland Health School Immunisation Program* facilitating vaccination access through schools has played a key role in safeguarding the health of young Queenslanders by providing timely access to vaccination. These initiatives have had great success for young Queenslanders, with 93 per cent of 5-year-olds fully immunised²³ and not only address immediate health needs but also promote preventive care and education to children and families about the importance of regular health and wellness screening.

The QFCC acknowledges the importance of supporting and promoting health for all children and young people in Queensland, including those living in out-of-home care. The *Navigate Your Health* partnership between the Department of Health and Children's Health Queensland helps children and young people in care to access health checks and referrals to services that meet their health needs. With 2,262 children subject to an ongoing intervention with Child Safety on a National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) support plan,²⁴ the QFCC recognises the importance of this program, and the considerations for including mental health care needs for children and young people living in out-of-home care. Survey information from Child Safety advises that 68.8 per cent of young people in care reported they felt happy, 68.1 per cent enjoyed their day and 63.9 per cent reported they felt calm.²⁵ While all children and young people experiencing poor mental health need access to appropriate

²² Queensland Family and Child Commission (2024), *Growing up in Queensland*, [Growing Up in Queensland 2024 | Queensland Family and Child Commission \(qfcc.qld.gov.au\)](https://qfcc.qld.gov.au).

²³ Queensland Family and Child Commission (2024), *Growing up in Queensland*, [Growing Up in Queensland 2024 | Queensland Family and Child Commission \(qfcc.qld.gov.au\)](https://qfcc.qld.gov.au).

²⁴ Queensland Family and Child Commission (2024), *Growing up in Queensland*, [Growing Up in Queensland 2024 | Queensland Family and Child Commission \(qfcc.qld.gov.au\)](https://qfcc.qld.gov.au).

²⁵ Queensland Government Department of Child Safety, Seniors and Disability Services (2023), *My Life in Care Survey 2022 Results*, [My Life in Care Survey Summary 2022 \(qfcc.com.au\)](https://qfcc.com.au)

and timely access to supports and services, given the complexity of their health and wellbeing needs, children living in out-of-home care have a demonstrated need for greater access to holistic mental health care.²⁶

Putting Queensland Kids First must ensure that all children, young people, and families in Queensland have appropriate access to early interventions and timely, culturally appropriate healthcare. The current policies and initiatives provide a foundation for Queensland to further develop the system to promote health and wellbeing of our children, but there remains need to expand these services to enable children, young people, and families to access them in rural and remote locations throughout the state. Scope remains to expand these services to include universal access to health care services including intellectual and mental health assistance, occupational therapy, and speech pathology, as well as further equipping Queensland teachers with relevant skills in screening and supporting access and engagement with specialist services.

“It can improve the wellbeing of students who can feel they are properly supported - some students would be able to easily access support because they teachers regularly - relationships are better with teachers sometimes, can make accessing help less scary.”

Youth Advisory Council member

The QFCC consulted the Youth Advisory Council regarding the outcomes if teachers were incentivised to further their education with postgraduate certificates to become guidance counsellors. Eighty per cent of responses were positive. This initiative will require specific input from the Department of Education to further teachers training and professional development.

The QFCC acknowledges that connecting government services enhances the capacity to identify and respond to needs through intentional communication and coordination among various agencies. By removing barriers and facilitating collaboration, connecting government services can optimise resource allocation, minimise duplication of efforts, and ultimately improve outcomes for individuals and communities, promoting healthier development and facilitating positive life trajectories.

Supporting confident transitions into learning, education, and training

Engaging children and young people in education from early ages provides the best start to life-long learning. Recent research indicates that while seven out of 10 parents read to their children at home, and 9 out of ten children are enrolled in a kindergarten program, only around half of children are developing on track in their first year of school.²⁷ There is a need to support children and families in their early years to ensure they have the skills for life-long learning. The QFCC encourages the goals set out in the *Consultation draft* of supporting parents and caregivers as first teachers, promoting quality and safety in early childhood services and strengthening transitions between home and school, and wish to understand further how these opportunities will be achieved.

Confident and successful transitions from home to early childhood settings, school engagement, and subsequent training and employment are vital for personal wellbeing and future prosperity. Positive engagement with learning environments enhances children and young people's happiness at school and improves academic and social skills, setting the stage for better educational and engagement outcomes throughout their schooling and

²⁶ Queensland Family and Child Commission (2021), *Rights, Voices, Stories*, [Queensland Family and Child Commission :: Rights, Voices, Stories project report \(qfcc.qld.gov.au\)](https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/Reports-and-publications/Rights-Voices-Stories-project-report)

²⁷ Queensland Family and Child Commission (2024), *Growing up in Queensland*, [Growing Up in Queensland 2024 | Queensland Family and Child Commission \(qfcc.qld.gov.au\)](https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/Reports-and-publications/Growing-up-in-Queensland).

career paths. Coordination between schools, educators, service providers, and families is crucial in ensuring schools are prepared to meet the diverse learning and wellbeing needs of children.

A coordinated system approach is described in QFCC's previous works, including *Growing Up in Queensland*²⁸, *Lessons from the life-story timelines of 30 Queensland children who have died*²⁹ and policy submissions to the *Queensland Youth Strategy*³⁰, which stress the importance of positive engagements with learning environments and the need for flexible and individually responsive strategies to meet the diverse needs of children and young people. The use of FlexiSpaces across Queensland schools has assisted to retain students at risk of disengaging from school; the QFCC supports expansion of this initiative across the State. *Lessons from the life-story timelines of 30 Queensland children who have died* highlighted that of the 30 children and young people whose lives were reviewed in the context of their engagement with primary, secondary, and tertiary systems, all children of compulsory school age had disengaged or were disengaging from education; all school-aged children who died by suicide had completely disengaged from education.³¹ Re-engaging children and young people with education through initiatives such as the FlexiSpaces provides an opportunity to support learning and engagement with their community, in an environment more tailored to the individual needs of the student. In *Lessons from the life-story timelines*, the QFCC highlighted that attempts to prevent disengagement and support re-engagement in education should be sustained and coordinated with other service networks and keeping children engaged in schooling should be a shared responsibility across agencies regularly responding to disengaged children. The QFCC emphasises the importance of strengthening engagement with education and connecting families with support services, particularly for those experiencing disadvantage.

The QFCC *Rights, Voices, Stories*³² youth researchers highlighted that children and young people in out-of-home care frequently face challenges with their schooling such as needing to change school if they change placements and having to negotiate departmental processes to obtain permissions, for example, to participate in school camps and formals. As a group they are more likely to struggle to meet academic standards and experience school disciplinary absences. Recent research reinforces this, with NAPLAN results indicating that Queensland children and young people living in care receive significantly lower results in each year level compared to the state average. The report showed 66.5 per cent of children in care met national standards for numeracy in 2022 (compared to 91.4% of all Queensland students), 51.8 per cent met national reading standards (compared to 82% of all Queensland students) and only 44.6 per cent of children in care met national writing standards (compared to 73.7% of all Queensland students).³³ Students living in out-of-home care were also much more likely to be suspended from school, with 24.5 per cent of children and young people in out-of-home care being suspended in 2022 compared to only 7.3 per cent of all students.³⁴ The QFCC recognises the value in providing additional

²⁸ Queensland Family and Child Commission (2024), *Growing up in Queensland*, [Growing Up in Queensland 2024 | Queensland Family and Child Commission \(qfcc.qld.gov.au\)](#).

²⁹ Queensland Family and Child Commission (2023), *Lessons from the life-story timelines of 30 Queensland children who have died*, [Lessons from the life-story timelines of 30 Queensland children who have died \(qfcc.qld.gov.au\)](#).

³⁰ Queensland Family and Child Commission (2022), *QFCC Submission on the Queensland Youth Strategy Discussion Paper*, [QFCC Discussion Paper Policy Submission - Queensland Youth Strategy](#)

³¹ Queensland Family and Child Commission (2023), *Lessons from the life-story timelines of 30 Queensland children who have died*, [Lessons from the life-story timelines of 30 Queensland children who have died \(qfcc.qld.gov.au\)](#).

³² Queensland Family and Child Commission (2021), *Rights, Voices, Stories*, [Queensland Family and Child Commission :: Rights, Voices, Stories project report \(qfcc.qld.gov.au\)](#)

³³ Queensland Family and Child Commission (2024), *Growing up in Queensland*, [Growing Up in Queensland 2024 | Queensland Family and Child Commission \(qfcc.qld.gov.au\)](#).

³⁴ Queensland Family and Child Commission (2024), *Growing up in Queensland*, [Growing Up in Queensland 2024 | Queensland Family and Child Commission \(qfcc.qld.gov.au\)](#).

supports with equitable educational outcomes to children and young people living in out-of-home care, and supports the extension of the *Equity and Excellence Education Strategy* for educational inclusion of all children and young people throughout Queensland, with a recommendation to expand these to regional and remote locations.

The Youth Advisory Council expressed disappointment with the education and transition sections of the consultation draft voicing concerns that the Queensland government's approach appeared to lack sufficient input from students themselves regarding desired learning outcomes. Members highlighted a perceived disconnect between the outlined strategies and the realities faced by students navigating educational pathways and transitioning into various stages of life. The Council emphasised the importance of actively involving students in the decision-making process to ensure that policies and initiatives truly reflect their needs, aspirations, and challenges. They stressed the necessity of incorporating student perspectives into the development of educational frameworks and transition support mechanisms to foster greater relevance, effectiveness, and inclusivity in Queensland's approach to youth development.

“(The draft) is quite vague and doesn't have any actionable items but is a good first step. From a school student perspective, there should be a greater focus on financial literacy and life skills taught at school to enable a smoother transition to life. There also should be a focus on youth-led, student-led advocacy and initiatives in schools”.

Youth Advisory Council member

The QFCC recognises the importance of delivering trauma-informed learning for students with complex behaviours and wellbeing needs. The Youth Advisory Council discussed the opportunity for classroom teachers to receive further training in counselling and increase the number of guidance officers available to students, and proposed this initiative would improve the overall wellbeing of students, assist students with accessing mental health supports earlier, and equip teachers with the necessary skills to assist students with mental health difficulties. Youth Advisory Council members emphasised that teachers are often the first point of call for students, but if such initiatives were established mechanisms would need to be in place to ensure that teachers do not blur the boundary between their roles in a classroom and the unique responsibilities of a counsellor - with some Council members suggesting an increase in the number of guidance officers available in schools would support students without blurring this boundary. Through partnerships with communities to deliver trauma-informed, culturally safe learning experiences, and improving responses to complex behaviours impacting engagement in learning, students would be better equipped for confident transitions across key phases of learning, education, and training. These efforts set strong foundations for future learning pathways and contribute to the overall wellbeing and prosperity of children and young people in Queensland.

Partnering for integrated, place-based, and First Nations-led delivery

Youth Advisory Council members recommend the *Putting Queensland Kids First* strategy should involve substantial collaboration with First Nations and culturally and linguistically diverse peoples to ensure that it provides tangible and meaningful results for these groups. One Youth Advisory Council member noted that “there is not enough action when thinking about the magnitude of First Nations issues/diversity. They need to be really specific how they will consult and eventually bring about themes of self-determination. Their needs to be more about the consideration of inter-generational trauma, and systemic racism, how will they do the consult in a safe and helpful way.” Collaborative partnerships with NGOs and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations are necessary to address local needs through place-based responses. QFCC's *First*

*Nations Childrens Report*³⁵ and *Child Rights report*³⁶ highlight the importance of partnerships with NGOs and community-controlled organisations in delivering intentional interventions that respond effectively to local needs.

First Nations co-design and stewardship of delivery is integral to providing culturally responsive services tailored to the needs of First Nations children, young people, and families contributing to closing the gap in outcomes. The overrepresentation of First Nations children and young people in the child protection and youth justice systems remains a central priority of the QFCC. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children comprised approximately 47 per cent of all children in out-of-home care, but only 8.2 per cent of the Queensland population aged 0 to 17 years.³⁷ Similarly, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children accounted for 50.1 per cent of all child defendants who had a charge finalised in a Queensland court in 2021–22.³⁸

“Core principles to support children, young people and families should include youth voices at the forefront, intersectional identities and understanding the issues faced by marginalised communities. I think this report doesn’t quite include the intersectionality of identities and how being a part of multiple minority groups can affect how you affect services/view social issues. In particular, growing up as CALD isn’t really addressed in this report or the challenges faced when violence isn’t necessarily physical”.

Youth Advisory Council member

Programs such as *Community Youth Response and Diversion* and funding for *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Wellbeing Services* provide location-specific and culturally appropriate responses to reduce overrepresentation of First Nations children, young people, and families in Queensland’s statutory systems. These such programs have seen some improvement in the experiences of First Nations children in statutory systems. Recent research suggests that almost seven in 10 children and young people living in out-of-home care agreed that they were ‘always’ or ‘most times’ able to follow their culture where they lived.³⁹ Initiatives employed as part of the *Putting Queensland Kids First* strategy must expand on existing partnerships and develop community-led responses for families.

Various government sectors including health, education, housing, youth justice, child safety, and police have current initiatives aimed at addressing local needs through collaborative partnerships. These such initiatives should be coordinated between the responsible agencies, utilising existing partnerships and promoting an integrated response to sustain community-led initiatives. Local-based solutions must engage local expertise, resources, and cultural knowledge to develop service responses that provide individualised and specific support for children, young people, families, and communities throughout Queensland.

³⁵ Queensland Family and Child Commission (2023), *First Nations Children’s Report*, [First Nations Childrens Report.PDF \(qfcc.qld.gov.au\)](#)

³⁶ Queensland Family and Child Commission (2023), *Queensland Child Rights Report 2023*, [Queensland Family & Child Commission :: Queensland Child Rights Report 2023 \(qfcc.qld.gov.au\)](#)

³⁷ Queensland Family and Child Commission (2022), *Principle Focus*, [Principle Focus Report \(qfcc.qld.gov.au\)](#)

³⁸ Queensland Family and Child Commission (2023), *Annual Report 2022-23*, [Queensland Family and Child Commission : Annual Report 2022-23 \(qfcc.qld.gov.au\)](#)

³⁹ Queensland Family and Child Commission (2024), *Growing up in Queensland*, [Growing Up in Queensland 2024 | Queensland Family and Child Commission \(qfcc.qld.gov.au\)](#).