



COMMUNIQUE

The Australian Children's Commissioners and Guardians (ACCG) met in Melbourne on 15 and 16 May 2014. The purpose of the ACCG is to strengthen the quality and effectiveness of strategic advocacy to promote and protect the safety, well-being and rights of children in Australia, particularly the most vulnerable or disadvantaged.

DISCUSSION WITH JUSTICE JENNIFER COATE AND MR ROBERT FITZGERALD - ROYAL COMMISSION INTO INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES TO CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

The ACCG met with two Commissioners for the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse to discuss a range of issues including preventing sexual abuse of children in out-of-home care, Working with Children Checks and child-safe/child-friendly organisations. The ACCG also highlighted the significance of involving children and young people in the proceedings of the Commission.

CHILDREN IN IMMIGRATION AND COMMUNITY DETENTION

ACCG members discussed issues about children in immigration and community detention, particularly access to health and education services and child safety measures in detention centres. A joint submission will be made to the Australian Human Rights Commission's National Inquiry into Children in Immigration Detention 2014.

CHILDREN ADOPTED OVERSEAS BY EXPATRIATES

In light of the Prime Minister's recent announcement of a review of procedures in regard to overseas adoption, the ACCG considered issues specific to circumstances where children have been adopted by Australians living temporarily in other countries. In some situations these countries have not agreed to the conditions contained in the Hague Convention and have no formal agreement with the Australian Government about adoption.

The ACCG noted that the numbers of children arriving in Australia with returning expatriate Australian families is higher than those adopting through standard overseas adoption arrangements. The principle that adoptions will be made in the best interests of the child and that services are to be made available to all adopted children, should apply to all children adopted from overseas.

ABORIGINAL CHILD PLACEMENT PRINCIPLE

The ACCG noted jurisdictional differences and inadequate national adherence to the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle. The Principle requires Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children who are removed from their families to have strong connections to family, community and culture, regardless of their placement.

The Victorian Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People, Mr Andrew Jackomos reported on his forthcoming inquiry into how the Principle is being applied in Victoria.

There will be further discussion of this topic including the outcome of consultation with Aboriginal children and families, at the November meeting of the ACCG in Western Australia.

ABORIGINAL YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE YOUTH JUSTICE SYSTEM

The ACCG considered a briefing paper on protective factors relating to Aboriginal young people in the youth justice system.

The Victorian Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People will consult with Victorian Aboriginal young people on the paper and report back to ACCG members.

THE NATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR PROTECTING AUSTRALIA'S CHILDREN 2009-2020

The ACCG discussed the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children, and is looking forward to on-going discussions with the Commonwealth about ACCG identified priorities in the Framework. The ACCG welcomed the Commonwealth's offer for ACCG to be represented on the National Forum for Protecting Australia's Children (previously the National Framework Implementation Working Group).

2014-2105 COMMONWEALTH BUDGET

The ACCG noted concern about budget announcements which may impact negatively on children and young people, including, in particular, changes to eligibility for the Newstart Allowance and potential impact of reduced funding available for Indigenous children and family centres.

The ACCG will monitor implementation of these, and other, budget initiatives, and will hold further discussions at its next meeting.

The ACCG thanks the Mildura District Aboriginal Service, Australian Red Cross, SNAICC, UNICEF and the Royal Commission for their contributions to particular agenda items.

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