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Dear Ms Smart

Anglicare Australia welcomes the opportunity to respond to  
*Australia's children: safe and well.*

We are pleased to see the federal government taking a national leadership role in this important area. Anglicare Australia supports a collaborative approach across and between governments and the community sector to create an integrated system of supports and protections for Australian children and their families.

The key areas in which a national framework for protecting Australia's children should deliver are:

- effective, collaborative and well resourced prevention and early intervention strategies, but not at the expense of continuing investment in tertiary interventions to protect children at risk of, or experiencing, harm
- a national research agenda that identifies best practice, both in Australia and internationally, and provides an evidence base for Australia's efforts in protecting children from harm
- a focus on building and strengthening the capacity of Indigenous communities to look after their children well
- nationally consistent child protection definitions, standards and performance indicators for each jurisdiction, that are based on best practice, not the lowest common denominator
- independent monitoring and reporting on governments' progress in keeping Australia's children safe and well, across the primary, secondary and tertiary intervention domains.

Detailed comments against the discussion paper's six key areas for activity are attached.

Yours sincerely



Kasy Chambers  
**Executive Director**





Anglicare Australia welcomes the Rudd government's leadership in tackling child abuse and neglect in Australia and the opportunity to respond to *Australia's children: safe and well*. Australia needs a national strategy that focuses on protecting children wherever they live or move, or whoever they are.

The national strategy needs to clearly articulate what issues will be given priority, what actions will be taken and the timeframes for completion. Roles and responsibilities need to be clearly stated and jurisdictions held accountable for policies and actions to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all children in Australia. The strategy needs to set out the partnership arrangements to operate between governments and with the community sector to meet the goals and targets a robust national strategy will contain.

### ***Stronger prevention focus***

Anglicare Australia considers the federal government should, in cooperation with states, territories and community sector organisations, conduct a mapping exercise of all activities that aim to strengthen families and prevent harm to children to ensure that a more integrated system of supports is available that avoids gaps and overlaps.

Any new initiatives, such as increased accessibility of child care places for stressed parents, or more support for newly arrived migrants and refugees, should build on or extend supports and strategies already in place.

Enhancing Centrelink's capacity to identify and respond to the needs of vulnerable children and families should be embedded in a culture of strong local partnerships with community services providers and with state/territory child protection workers.

Anglicare Australia is less convinced that targeting alcohol related issues alone is an effective strategy. It would perhaps be more fruitful to take a more holistic view of the complexity and inter-relationship of issues that impact on parents' capacity to provide care. Messages around alcohol consumption, pregnancy and child rearing need to be incorporated in broader public health campaigns.

Families experiencing stress benefit from circuit breakers, such as the provision of child care or other forms of formal and informal respite. Anglicare agencies report that there is too little respite available. Easier access for parents or other family carers to affordable respite options can lead to fewer children being at risk of, or experiencing, harm.

### ***Better collaboration between services***

Along with many other groups, Anglicare Australia has a strong moral objection to measures which in any way undermine individuals' self determination. We do however understand that the Rudd government is interested in following this path and therefore offer the following caution. We have reservations about the efficacy of this approach and recommend that wider implementation of quarantining measures not occur before the results of the NT emergency response and trials in Western Australia and on Cape York have been analysed.

Income management should be a last resort option, and tailored to individual families' circumstances. Wherever income management is used, it will be most successful where it is a voluntary, not mandatory measure. It should also be time limited, and accompanied by strategies and supports that help people take or regain control of their lives.

Anglicare Australia welcomes the inclusion of checks and appeals processes in income management measures.

Anglicare Australia supports the immediate initiatives to be undertaken in the Nation Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and Children. These are initial steps only and a longer term strategy needs to be developed that builds on analysis of what has worked (or not) with the initial steps and research findings.

#### National work plan and research agenda

Anglicare Australia supports an integrated planning and research basis that leads to a better knowledge base to guide actions. A better understanding of the prevalence of child abuse and neglect, based on common definitions, of the factors leading to abuse or neglect and of interventions that work will contribute to a more robust strategy.

There is capacity to link the work under the Nation Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and Children into this research agenda.

#### ***Improving responses to children and young people leaving care***

Anglicare Australia supports national standards and monitoring of out of home care for children and young people to ensure consistency and that all children, regardless of where they live, experience quality of care and outcomes.

We also support more consistency across the nation in the financial and other supports available to both formal and informal foster carers to support them in their roles. Anglicare Australia agrees this should include an examination of incentives and disincentives to becoming foster carers (particularly kinship or informal carers). Issues to be examined would include access to services and supports that provide respite and/or support in dealing with family issues and help carers continue with their caring roles and the impact of welfare to work participation requirements.

There is a strong link between being in care and becoming homeless. Young people in the care system need support to build their resilience, to keep them connected to school, family and community and to provide the skills they will need for independent living. They should also be able to access an active support system, providing financial, emotional and other support, when they leave care, to help them make a successful and sustainable transition to independent living.

#### ***Improving responses to Indigenous children***

Anglicare Australia agrees that particular priority should be given to dealing with abuse and neglect of Indigenous children. Approaches to dealing with current issues of abuse and neglect in Indigenous communities need to take into account the multiple disadvantage and increased vulnerabilities of these communities.

It is important that governments work with Indigenous communities, to build and strengthen their capacity to look after their children well, rather than adopting punitive approaches.

Addressing adults' needs (e.g. access to health care, drug and alcohol services, affordable and appropriate housing) can help protect children.

The Rudd government needs to take stock of the results of the NT emergency response in its first twelve months to analyse how well or poorly Indigenous communities have been included in, and supported by, the interventions. This will provide an evidence base for further action (or if need be, changing the approach) to address the needs of remote Indigenous children and communities.

Anglicare Australia agrees that community-specific models are needed and that a range of approaches should be trialled to identify what works for Indigenous children. Out of home and respite care provided for Indigenous children should be culturally appropriate, and wherever possible, keep children connected to their families and communities, while protecting them from harm.

All jurisdictions should monitor the effectiveness of their mainstream and Indigenous programs for effectiveness in improving Indigenous children's health, safety and wellbeing. They should give attention to building the capacity of Indigenous organisations to meet the needs of vulnerable children and families.

Progress should be measured and reported nationally, based on the federal government's commitments in the *Closing the Gap* measures in the 2008-09 Budget.

### ***Attracting and retaining the right workforce***

Anglicare Australia agrees with the discussion paper's proposals for strengthening and reorienting the child protection and child welfare workforces. We also support training for a wider range of professions, and would suggest that in addition to child care workers, GPs and those working in the court system, particular attention be given to workers in mental health, drug and alcohol and homelessness sectors.

Agencies report finding and retaining staff to be difficult, especially in regional, rural and remote areas. Anglicare Australia considers that issues such as career paths and appropriate remuneration for skills and competencies should be examined.

### ***Improving child protection systems***

#### Child wellbeing indicators

Anglicare Australia supports the development of an agreed set of child wellbeing indicators, that builds on the work already underway. Consideration should be given to specific indicators for Indigenous children, the children of newly arrived migrants and refugees, children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and children with disability.

#### National standards and reporting

Anglicare Australia supports the development of nationally consistent child protection definitions, standards and performance indicators, that are based on best practice, not the lowest common denominator.

We would also like to see independent monitoring and reporting on governments' progress in keeping Australia's children safe and well, across the primary, secondary and tertiary intervention domains.

Outcomes for Indigenous children and communities should be separately reported.