

● Agenda for Change

Ensuring a safe and supportive out-of-home care system for children and young people in New South Wales

● ● **About**

The Centre for Excellence in Therapeutic Care (CETC) is a division of Australian Childhood Foundation, a known leader in the provision of therapeutic care for children and families recovering from abuse, neglect and violence, and this practice base is at the heart of what we do.

CETC was founded on this very simple vision that out-of-home care could better meet the needs of children and young people who had experienced developmental trauma due to abuse, neglect or violence. A partnership between Australian Childhood Foundation and Southern Cross University, CETC is an Australian first intermediary organisation. We were established in 2018 and tasked with mobilising knowledge about “what works” in out-of-home care.

The CETC seeks to build and disseminate the right information to carers, practitioners, policymakers and other key stakeholders at the right time and in the right format to shape practice, build the out-of-home care sector capacity and influence debate, policy, program and system design. The CETC’s activities are underpinned by a dynamic understanding of the ways in which people know, learn and act within complex systems of change.



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● ● Introduction



The NSW out-of-home care system is in a deep crisis. It is retraumatizing the very children it is designed to protect and care for. Too many children face high levels of instability. Too many children are not experiencing the permanency that they are desperate for and should be entitled to....

Dr Joe Tucci, CEO, Australian Childhood Foundation

The current NSW system has insufficient capacity to meet the quantity and complexity of cases in the out-of-home care system. Research and commission papers have documented the impact of placement breakdown, the impact on carers who leave due to a lack of support, and the failure to provide adequate support to those who remain. The traumatic experiences of these children are often compounded by the fact that their carers themselves may have their own traumas to contend with.

Our research and evaluation show that 60% of kinship and foster carers have their own historical trauma and that support that meets the need of the children and the carer must address the trauma needs of both ([Our Space Outcomes Report, 2022](#)). In residential care, our two-year reform report on the implementation of intensive Therapeutic Care highlights a significant need for trauma-informed skills and knowledge to be further embedded into practice ([Intensive Therapeutic Care Survey Outcomes Report, 2021](#)). The relationship between carers and young people is an essential element of a therapeutic approach. For relationships to be important, there needs to be relational stability. An ongoing focus on workforce recruitment, retention and capability should remain central to an effective and trauma-informed out-of-home care system.

NSW is failing to improve outcomes for children in out-of-home care. The recent inquiries into the welfare of children in out-of-home care, including the report on the child protection and social services system ([The NSW child protection and social services system report, 2022](#)), highlight the urgency of addressing this issue. The new government needs to invest in significant reform that is beyond the political cycle to make sure that the experience of being in out-of-home care is no longer a risk factor for further danger and traumatisation.

Dr Joe Tucci
CEO, Australian Childhood Foundation

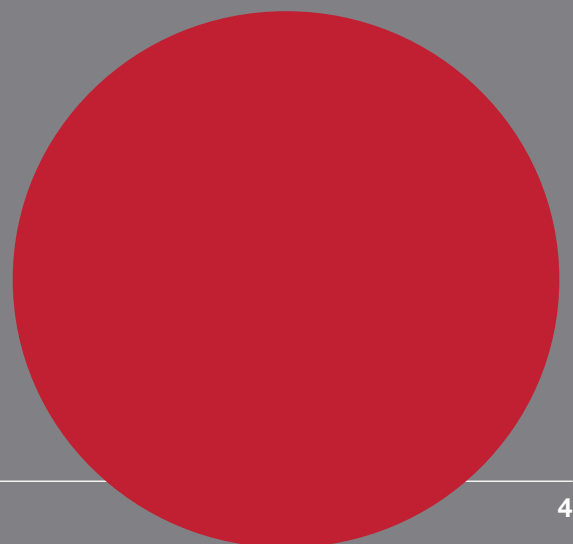


A system in crisis: A call for transformation

The out-of-home care system in NSW should be a safe haven for children, young people, and families. It is a system in crisis. Children, young people, and families are not receiving the safety and support they desperately need to heal, recover, and thrive. The experiences they have in out-of-home care have a lifelong impact that echoes not only through their lives but also those of future generations.

It is time for the new NSW Government to make a change. The out-of-home care system needs to become a place of hope, healing, and opportunity for children and young people unable to live with their birth families. We must build a safe system that is held to high-quality standards.

By implementing the following six fundamental changes, the system can be transformed into the best possible environment for our most vulnerable children and young people.



● Agenda for Change – Transforming the

● NSW Out-of-Home Care System

The Centre for Excellence in Therapeutic Care is calling on the NSW Government to support the following six critical actions:

Action 1. Plan for generational change

- ☐ Commit to generational change in the out-of-home care system with a central focus on addressing the impact of trauma on children, young people and their carers.

Action 2. Improve the availability and quality of specialist trauma services for children and carers

- ☐ Increase funding for accessible outreach and specialist trauma services for children and carers through the OurSPACE Program run by Australian Childhood Foundation.
- ☐ Ensure kinship and foster carers can access intensive and timely child-centred, restorative, therapeutic and trauma-informed training and support regardless of geography, culture, and resources.
- ☐ Recognise lived experience and cultural wisdom as a critical resource and qualifier to engaging a First Nations workforce to support Aboriginal children and carers.

Action 3. Resource a trauma-informed out-of-home care system with staff that are adequately trained and supported

- ☐ Implement standardised, accredited trauma-informed training for case workers, residential care workers, and others in the out-of-home care system to alleviate confusion and provide consistency for children and young people who engage with multiple professionals with varied approaches.
- ☐ Plan for an ongoing trauma-informed and continuous improvement approach by investing in in-house expert consultation to better use evidence-based knowledge in therapeutic care.
- ☐ Implement standardised carer assessments overseen by an independent body to ensure consistency, fairness and accountability.

Action 4. Keep children and young people safe and out of Alternative Care Arrangements

- ☐ Increase transparency of the scope of the problem, the number of children entering alternative care arrangements (including those transitional arrangements under other names), their ages and needs, and the quality of care received.
- ☐ Implement a coordinated and sustained program to reduce and eliminate the need for children and young people to be placed in motels and other alternative care arrangements.

Action 5. Invest in state-wide research and evaluation to review and improve the quality of out-of-home care services

- ☐ Ensure that any incidents of harm are addressed swiftly, effectively and transparently by an independent provider to ensure that children are not harmed whilst in the care system.
- ☐ Fund an independent review of the existing child abuse and critical incident reporting framework to assess its capacity to respond to the increasing complexity and risk of children and young people entering and already in the system.

Action 6. Strengthen oversight and accountability

- ☐ Ensure that any incidents of harm are addressed swiftly, effectively and transparently by an independent provider to ensure that children are not harmed in the care system.
- ☐ Fund an independent review of the existing child abuse and critical incident reporting framework to assess its capacity to respond the increasing complexity and risk of children and young people entering and already in the system.