

Progress against past inquiries

This document provides an update on the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing's responses to our recommendations from *In our own words: Systemic inquiry into the lived experience of children and young people in the Victorian out-of-home care system* (2019) and the Commission's assessment of progress made in 2022-23.

The Commission will continue to annually assess and report on progress made against these recommendations.

In our own words

Systemic inquiry into the lived experience of children and young people in the Victorian out-of-home care system

Progress against past inquiries: *In our own words*
continued

Rec #	Action	Recommendation	Initial government response	Department status	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
1	a	<p>That, in line with <i>Roadmap for reform: strong families, safe children</i>, the Victorian Government develop, resource and implement an integrated, whole-of-system investment model and strategy for the child and family system.</p> <p>The investment model should identify the resourcing levels needed for a safe and quality out-of-home care system by taking into account:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • drivers of demand • key data and analysis relating to children and young people in the out-of-home care system • the need to reverse the increasing numbers of Aboriginal children and young people entering out-of-home care. The investment strategy should focus on maintaining safe and quality services in line with demand while also investing to reduce the number of children and young people entering care and improve outcomes. 	Accept in principle	Propose to retire	<p>The Victorian Government provided funding for the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing to further develop its capacity to model and provision for demand – this is intended to progress throughout 2023.</p> <p>This work will drive and inform the department’s investment strategy for the children and families service system that will give clear advice to both government and external stakeholders about where investment in the children and families system should be focused to deliver established reform priorities, achieve best value for money and support the best possible outcomes for the children and families experiencing vulnerability.</p>	Progress made – ongoing systemic effort required	This recommendation requires a whole-of-system investment model and strategy for the child and family service system. The Commission will keep this recommendation open until further progress has been made, noting the department advises that it is ‘currently developing a reform and investment strategy for consideration by government in late 2023 or early 2024’.
1	b	<p>The investment strategy should focus on maintaining safe and quality services in line with demand while also investing to reduce the number of children and young people entering care and improve outcomes.</p> <p>Strategies to reduce demand should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • targeted earlier intervention and prevention, prioritising the most vulnerable cohorts, including those with chronic and complex issues and children exposed to cumulative harm 	Accept in principle	Propose to retire	<p>This work will drive and inform the department’s investment strategy for children and families service system that will give clear advice to both government and external stakeholders about where investment in the children and families system should be focused to deliver established reform priorities, achieve best value for money and support the best possible outcomes for the children and families experiencing vulnerability.</p>	Planned for implementation	As above.

Rec #	Action	Recommendation	Initial government response	Department status	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
1	c	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a focus on Aboriginal children and young people 	Accept in principle	Complete	The department continues to invest in Aboriginal children and young people. Since 2018, this government has invested over \$191 million of new money to implement Wungurilwil Gagapduir. Much of this funding is ongoing for programs like Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care (ACAC).	Significant progress made – ongoing systemic effort required	Evidence has recently been provided to the Yoorrook Justice Commission about the drivers and extent of Aboriginal over-representation in the child protection and care systems. Further work is still needed to progress this recommendation, particularly in relation to keeping Aboriginal children and young people safe with their families.
1	d	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> resources to work with children and young people in care and their families where reunification is in the child’s best interests. 	Accept in principle	Complete	The action to acquit this recommendation was completed in 2021–22 with the implementation of the Family Preservation and Reunification Response and Care Hubs. However, in addition, the 2023–24 State Budget invests \$548.4 million over four years to deliver improved outcomes for children in residential care, \$140 million over four years to support Stronger Families – Closing the Gap, and \$11.2 million to continue embedding family services in universal settings trial.	Significant progress made – ongoing systemic effort required	The Commission welcomes investment to date, in particular the Family Preservation and Reunification Response, and notes ongoing effort and investment is likely to be necessary in line with the investment strategy recommended above.
1	e	<p>Strategies to improve outcomes for children and young people in out-of-home care should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> more suitable care placement options that are tailored to meet the needs of children and young people in care 	Accept in principle	Complete	<p>As noted in the 2022 update, previous Budgets provided funding for 19 new two and three bed residential care, six KEYS homes and a trial of the Care Hub. These were all implemented.</p> <p>In addition, the 2023-24 Budget provides funding for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the continuation of 19 two and three bed residential care homes which was to lapse 30 June 2023. delivery of an additional six two and three bed residential care homes. access to therapeutic specialists for all young people in four-bed residential care homes. Implementation planning for this initiative is underway. <p>The department has achieved the intent of this recommendation and considers it complete/acquitted.</p>	Significant progress made – ongoing systemic effort required	The Commission welcomes the significant ongoing effort and investment to improve residential care and make targeted care packages available. We will continue to monitor the implementation of this important reform, particularly the 2023–24 investment.

Progress against past inquiries: *In our own words*

continued

Rec #	Action	Recommendation	Initial government response	Department status	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
1	f	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> more focused placement planning to minimise placement changes 	Accept in principle	In progress	The department is currently developing draft Placement Planning Guidance, and will be consulting with key stakeholders through mid-2023 and finalising by late 2023.	Progress made	The Commission looks forward to the introduction of new Placement Planning Guidance later in 2023.
1	g	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> additional service supports to assist sibling groups to stay together or help them reunify while still in care, especially for larger groups of siblings in kinship care 	Accept in principle	Complete	<p>Implementation of the Care Hub trial in the Loddon area is completed.</p> <p>Funding was provided to continue the trial for a further two years through the 2022-23 Budget.</p> <p>Funding was provided in the 2021-22 Budget to continue the Keeping Connected Sibling and placement support model in the South Division on an ongoing basis.</p> <p>Further roll out of these models is subject to budget.</p>	Progress made – ongoing systemic effort required	The Commission welcomes the investment and effort to date, but notes that only 66 children at any one time benefit from the Care Hub and that statewide expansion is budget dependent.
1	h	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> supports to help carers maintain placements, including during times of crisis or difficulty 	Accept in principle	Complete	<p>A new Care Support Helpdesk commenced in October 2022, providing practical supports to foster and kinship carers. The Helpdesk staff provide a dedicated contact point for kinship and foster carers who need assistance to navigate child protection processes or to raise placement vulnerabilities.</p> <p>This is in addition to the range of financial, respite, training and other resources available to support carers and maintain placement stability for young people.</p> <p>Further investment to support carers will be considered as part of the investment strategy outlined in recommendations 1a and 1b.</p>	Progress made	The Commission notes progress made, however notes that allowances have still not increased despite the recommendations of the VAGO report into kinship care and the continued concerns of carers.

Progress against past inquiries: *In our own words*

continued

Rec #	Action	Recommendation	Initial government response	Department status	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
1	i	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> measures to ensure children and young people are provided with appropriate and supported opportunities to participate in decision making processes that impact on them 	Accept in principle	In progress	<p>The department implemented the SAFER children framework (SAFER) in 2021. SAFER places emphasis on the 'voice of the child' requiring the child's voice, views and wishes to be captured and included in planning and decision making forums, such case plan and care team meetings across all child protection phases. Tools to support the voice of the child include MY VIEWS, which was implemented electronically in November 2021.</p> <p>A number of practice advice pages in the Child Protection Manual have been updated to reflect and embed participation by the child and young person in decision making and to ensure their voice is heard, in all phases of child protection intervention, case planning, reunification, cultural plans for Aboriginal children and leaving care.</p> <p>The recently passed <i>Children and Health Legislation Amendment (Statement of Recognition, Aboriginal Self-Determination and Other Matters) Act 2023</i> includes a strengthened legislative framework around decision-making principles for Aboriginal children and young people and engagement and participation of the child, family and community.</p>	Progress made	<p>The Commission strongly welcomes the development of new guidance and will monitor implementation and training to ensure the new guidance translates to practice change.</p> <p>The Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Child Protection) Bill 2021 included proposed amendments that would have, if passed, required the Secretary or a community service to give a child the opportunity to participate fully in the decision-making process whenever they made a decision in relation to that child. The Bill lapsed and has not been re-introduced. The Act referenced in the department's update did not include these provisions. The Commission awaits the re-introduction of important legislative amendments to require decision-makers in the out-of-home care system to support children's participation.</p>

Progress against past inquiries: *In our own words*

continued

Rec #	Action	Recommendation	Initial government response	Department status	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
1	j	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> funding for ACCOs to grow the transfer of Aboriginal children to be managed by an ACCO 	Accept in principle	Complete	<p>The 2023–24 State Budget has provided \$140 million over four years to improve outcomes for Aboriginal children. Aboriginal people know the unique needs of their communities best and this funding will help Aboriginal-led organisations provide vital child protection services and support to keep families together. This investment, combined with a previous \$190 million to implement Wungurilwil Gaggapduir, will enable approximately 88 per cent of Aboriginal children on a final order to be managed by an ACCO by 2027. The 2023 Transitioning Aboriginal Children to ACCOs; Rights and Aspirations Report also provides detailed modelling by area of the current investment that supports the transition and where further investment or reattribution of investment is required.</p> <p>Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care (ACAC) is funded by the department for \$15.5 million a year ongoingly.</p>	Complete	The Commission notes action on this recommendation.
1	k	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> significant ongoing training and development for Child Protection staff including in therapeutic and trauma informed approaches to children and young people. 	Accept	Complete	The Framework for trauma-informed practice was published and disseminated in February 2023 to the child and family services sector and family violence services.	Complete	The Commission welcomes the significant work that has been done to ensure practitioners have an understanding of trauma and its impacts.
2		That the department explore how accountability and governance measures can be strengthened at a regional and local level to lift the quality and implementation of legislated processes to support connection to culture for Aboriginal children and young people in care.	Accept	In progress	<p>DFFH is legislating all five elements of the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle (ACPP) through the Statement of Recognition Bill 2023. Policy will be developed to support implementation.</p> <p>The department has demonstrated implementation of the intent of the ACPP with resources and service models, such as the Family Preservation and Reunification Response.</p>	Progress made	The Commission welcomes progress made, noting further work is planned.

Progress against past inquiries: *In our own words*
continued

Rec #	Action	Recommendation	Initial government response	Department status	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
3		That the Victorian Government continue to support Aboriginal people's right to self-determination including through increased investment in community-led services and the gradual transfer of responsibility for the case management and case plan of Aboriginal children and young people in care to ACCOs.	Accept in principle	In progress	Self-determination underpins the ACAC program. Aboriginal people, who know what is best for Aboriginal children, should be responsible for the safety and protection of Aboriginal children. There is a pilot program that is being implemented, with the passing of the Statement of Recognition Bill 2023, which will allow some ACCO's to conduct their own investigations and early intervention. In addition, the 2023–24 State Budget has provided \$140 million over four years to improve outcomes for Aboriginal children. Aboriginal people know the unique needs of their communities best and this funding will help Aboriginal-led organisations provide vital child protection services and support to keep families together. This investment, combined with a previous \$190 million to implement Wungurilwil Gaggapduir, will enable approximately 88 per cent of Aboriginal children on a final order by managed by an ACCO.	Progress made	The Commission welcomes progress made, noting further work is planned.
4	a	That the department review and revise all existing guidance, training and tools to embed children's participation in decision making. This review should apply to existing guidance relating to all staff working with children and young people in care, including contracted agency staff. The development of tools should: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> include paper-based and digital resources that can be used by practitioners during home visits to promote the inclusion of children and young people's views in decision-making 	Accept in principle	Complete	The department continues to support implementation of the client voice framework for community services, which seeks to promote the voices of people with lived experience including children and young people. Young Voices, which promotes the voices of children and young people in policy and service design and implementation, is available to all department staff and was made available to the sector in July 2022 (https://www.vic.gov.au/young-voices).	Complete	The Commission notes action on this recommendation.

Progress against past inquiries: *In our own words*

continued

Rec #	Action	Recommendation	Initial government response	Department status	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
4	b	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> include ways to record views effectively and include them in practitioners assessment of planning decisions. 	Accept	Complete	The department implemented the SAFER children framework (SAFER) from 20 November 2021. SAFER provides practitioners with tools and resources to guide effective and evidence informed assessment and management of risk, safety and the needs of children involved with the Victorian child protection program. SAFER places emphasis on what is referred to as the 'voice of the child', requiring the child's voice, views and wishes to be captured and included in planning and decision-making forums, such as case plan and care team meetings across all child protection phases. Tools to support the voice of the child include MY VIEWS, which was implemented electronically in November 2021 with hard copies provided to child protection in July 2022. The use of MY VIEWS is promoted through professional development and the Child Protection Learning Hub (CPLH).	Complete	The Commission notes action on this recommendation.
4	c	That the department establish mechanisms to ensure that workers are allocated caseloads which allow them regular face-to-face contact with children and young people in order to build trust and rapport and to facilitate genuine opportunities for children and young people to participate in decision-making about them.	Accept in principle	In progress	The department is undertaking a review of the Child Protection Operating Model with the aim of developing a contemporary child protection program which supports recruitment, retention and service delivery to children and their families.	Progress made	The Commission welcomes the proposed review of the Child Protection Operating Model and stresses the importance of achieving a model that supports appropriate workloads to enable practitioners to engage directly and consistently with children.

Progress against past inquiries: *In our own words*

continued

Rec #	Action	Recommendation	Initial government response	Department status	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
4	d	<p>That the department amend relevant program requirements and guidelines relating to the placement of children and young people in care to ensure that, unless exceptional circumstances exist, children and young people are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • informed about the proposed placement prior to the placement • where possible, provided with the reason for any decision made by Child Protection or contracted agencies to place them in or remove them from a placement against their expressed wishes. 	Accept in principle	In progress	The department has developed draft Placement Planning Guidance and will be consulting with key stakeholders through mid-2023 and finalising by late 2023.	Progress made	The Commission looks forward to the finalisation of this guidance.
5	a	That the department ensure that there is a single point of contact or key worker for all children and young people in care, with authority and access to resources to make day-to-day decisions related to implementing the child or young person's case plan and helping to navigate the system.	Accept in principle	In progress	There is active oversight of all children involved with Child Protection. All children are assigned to a team overseen by a team manager with case planning responsibility who has overall responsibility for actively reviewing, monitoring and managing cases, including allocation decisions. The department notes the comment made by the CCYP and the intent of the recommendation which is to ensure consistency in relationships with children and young people. Noting the difficulty of achieving full case allocation, DFFH will work internally and with the CCYP to explore options to give effect to the intent of this recommendation.	Progress made	<p>The intent of this recommendation was to ensure that children had a known, consistent worker who was able to spend time and build rapport with them and facilitate access to funds and supports they needed.</p> <p>Information provided to the Commission in June 2023 for its inquiry into the educational experiences of children and young people in care by DFFH indicates that almost one in five (18.5%) children in care who are case managed by child protection have no allocated worker.</p>

Progress against past inquiries: *In our own words*
continued

Rec #	Action	Recommendation	Initial government response	Department status	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
5	b	That the department consider whether funding packages can be administered to follow the child or young person as they move through different placements and be available regardless of where they live.	Accept in principle	Complete	<p>The department has considered the recommendation and our view is that the current approach is appropriately child centred – with funding and other supports informed by case and care plans, while also reflecting differences in care and placement models. Every child and young person has a case and care plan regardless of the placement type and based on the needs of the child or young person. There is flexible funding available to support a child or young person whilst they are in a placement, directed by the child or young person’s case and care plan, managed by the Department and our funded service providers. These include in addition to targeted care packages (already outlined):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fortnightly care allowance payments • Client expense funding • Placement support brokerage • Education and health brokerage. 	Complete	The Commission notes that the department has considered whether access to funding packages can be made more child-centred and that the department has concluded no changes are required. The Commission will continue to advocate for improvements in the information available to children, young people and carers about access to funding packages, and for improved processes by which funding can be accessed.
6		That the Victorian Government establish an independent, specialised child and young person centred complaints function to receive complaints from children and young people in care, including concerns about their immediate safety or ongoing concerns about their wellbeing while in care.	Accept in principle	In progress	<p>The <i>Health Legislation Amendment (Statement of Recognition, Aboriginal Self-Determination and Other Matters) Act 2023</i> will amend the <i>Commission for Children and Young People Act 2012</i> to enable the Commission to advocate for and provide advice, information and support for children and young people in care. While this new advocacy function does not cover complaints resolution, it is intended that the Commission can support children and young people in care to raise their concerns with the relevant complaints body. The department continues to explore options to strengthen and promote complaints management for children and young people.</p>	Progress made	The Commission welcomes the legislative amendments to give the Commission the powers to advocate for individual children and young people in care, and looks forward to being provided resources so that these new functions can be implemented.

Progress against past inquiries: *In our own words*
continued

Rec #	Action	Recommendation	Initial government response	Department status	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
7	a	<p>That the department:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> in consultation with children and young people with a lived experience of care, design good practice guidelines and training on how to support children and young people to participate in decision making about contact with parents, siblings, extended family and friends. Guidance should include how best to incorporate children and young people's views about contact into their case plan 	Accept in principle	Complete	<p>The department implemented the SAFER children framework (SAFER) from 20 November 2021. SAFER provides practitioners with tools and resources to guide effective and evidence informed assessment and management of risk, safety and the needs of children involved with the Victorian child protection program. SAFER places emphasis on what is referred to as the 'voice of the child' requiring the child's voice, views and wishes to be captured and included in planning and decision-making forums, such as case plan and care team meetings across all child protection phases. Tools to support the voice of the child include MY VIEWS, which was implemented electronically in November 2021 with hard copies provided to child protection in July 2022. The use of MY VIEWS is promoted through professional development and the Child Protection Learning Hub (CPLH).</p> <p>The 'Young Voices' resource has been published and looks specifically at the principles and considerations for safe, active, and informed engagement with children and young people. It is on the Victorian government website for all government departments and community services sector use – https://www.vic.gov.au/young-voices. The department continues to support implementation of the client voice framework for community services, which seeks to promote the voices of people with lived experience including children and young people.</p>	Complete	The Commission welcomes the introduction of new tools and resources intended to embed the voice of the child in Child Protection's decision-making.
7	b	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> revise the case planning template and advice to include the requirement for planned activity towards reuniting separated sibling groups in care or clearly state the rationale as to why this should not occur 	Accept in principle	Planned for implementation	The case plan template will be reviewed in relation to the needs of sibling groups to identify any opportunities for strengthening.	Planned for implementation	The Commission looks forward to seeing action on this recommendation.

Progress against past inquiries: *In our own words*
continued

Rec #	Action	Recommendation	Initial government response	Department status	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
7	c	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> review the adequacy of contact supports for children and young people in care with a disability, including a developmental delay or intellectual disability. 	Accept in principle	In progress	The department has reviewed existing practice advice and developed a draft to strengthen this advice, including highlighting contact support resources for parents. Further consultation and refinement of the draft is underway.	Progress made	The Commission welcomes the work done to date and looks forward to the revised advice being finalised.
7	d	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> amend current case planning guidelines to improve planning and support for children and young people in care to develop and sustain safe, appropriate and positive friendships 	Accept in principle	Acquitted	N/A	N/A	
7	e	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> review the effectiveness of the current carer authorisation policy to maximise the participation of children and young people in care in activities in their community 	Accept in principle	Propose to retire	This recommendation will be incorporated as part of department's planned review in response to Out of Sight recommendation 2.3.	Planned for implementation	The Commission notes that work on this recommendation has not been progressed since last year's annual report.
7	f	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> review the adequacy of the current budget allocation to support children and young people in all forms of care to engage in activities both inside and outside of their homes. 	Accept in principle	Planned for implementation	No further progress has been made on this recommendation. The client funding review will be prioritised when resourcing is available.	Planned for implementation	The Commission notes that this recommendation is still planned for implementation.
8		Consistent with the <i>Strong carers, stronger children</i> strategy, that the department ensure that foster and kinship carers can readily access respite and other supports when required with a particular focus on supports required to maintain placement stability.	Accept in principle	Complete	The department previously noted the work to expand kinship respite supports. The department notes that foster carers are well supported by foster care agencies, including in relation to supporting access to respite. Foster and kinship carers are eligible to receive up to three 28-day periods of respite each year, with both the primary and foster or kinship carer being paid.	Complete	The Commission acknowledges the work completed to expand respite supports for kinship carers.

Progress against past inquiries: *In our own words*

continued

Rec #	Action	Recommendation	Initial government response	Department status	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
9		<p>That, in addition to First Supports, provided to families in the first 12 months of the placement, the department develop measures as part of the <i>Strong carers, stronger children</i> strategy to ensure that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> those kinship placements continue to receive supports after this timeframe where required the risk of placement breakdown is identified early so that so that resources can be allocated appropriately. 	Accept in principle	In progress	The department has previously noted the work to expand kinship respite supports. The department notes that foster carers are well supported by foster care agencies, including in relation to supporting access to respite. Foster and kinship carers are eligible to receive up to three 28-day periods of respite each year, with both the primary and foster or kinship carer being paid. In addition, the Care Support Help Desk which commenced in October 2022 provides information, advice and supports to carers including about the support to access respite.	Progress made	The Commission notes the work still to be done in 2023 to ensure access to kinship supports as recommended by VAGO. The Commission also notes the work progressed through the Care Support Help Desk which commenced in October 2022 to provide carers with information, advice and support about access to respite.
10		<p>That the department provide clear guidance to Child Protection, CSO and ACCO workers with case management responsibility that when they have face-to-face contact with children and young people in care, they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ask about their safety not in the presence of their carers provide them with a clear way of contacting their worker if they do have concerns about their safety. 	Accept	Planned for implementation	The Child Protection practice advice in relation to client visits and engagement will be strengthened.	Planned for implementation	The Commission notes that work will commence on this in November 2023, and is concerned this recommendation has still not progressed five years after the tabling of the report. This recommendation relates to a concern raised repeatedly by children and young people themselves about their safety in placement and their ability to raise safety concerns in front of their carers.
11		<p>That the department, as part of its work to improve placement matching, develop and implement guidelines which:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> prohibit the placement of children aged under 12 years with older children or young people unless the older child is a sibling and it is in the best interests of the child provide guidance to improve decisions about the co-placement of children and young people with complex needs. 	Accept in principle	In progress	The department has developed draft Placement Planning Guidance, and will be consulting with key stakeholders through mid-2023 and finalising by late 2023.	Progress made	The Commission looks forward to the completion of this work, noting there continue to be significant numbers of children under 12 years in residential care.

Progress against past inquiries: *In our own words*

continued

Rec #	Action	Recommendation	Initial government response	Department status	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
12		<p>That the department ensure that any interagency protocol to reduce the contact of children and young people in residential care with police and the criminal justice system is developed and monitored in consultation with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • children and young people with an experience of residential care • a representative Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation • the Commission. <p>The implementation of this protocol should be supported by additional training and support for residential care workers in responding to and working with children and young people affected by trauma. This training and support should emphasise the need for consistency and predictability.</p>	Accept	Complete	The 18-month action plan to support implementation of the Framework was formally approved in March 2023. A monitoring and implementation plan to support local and statewide implementation, including a set of performance indicators, is being finalised through the Statewide Implementation Group. This group includes CREATE, VACCA, the Alliance and the Commission. Training for residential care workers in line with the recommendation is being progressed through the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare as part of the 18-month action plan.	Progress made	The Commission notes the 18-month Action Plan was approved in March 2023 and looks forward to seeing concrete actions to implement the Framework.
13		<p>That the department, in consultation with children and young people with an experience of residential care:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develop guidelines about what a home-like residential care environment looks and feels like • conduct rigorous assessments of residential care drawing on these guidelines • ensure these assessments include speaking to children and young people within these units about their views on the extent to which the physical living environment feels like a 'home'. 	Accept in principle	In progress	The department has engaged Monash University, Institute for Safety, Compensation and Research Recovery to support finalisation of the draft design guidelines, with a focus on therapeutic environments for children and young people. Monash University will be engaging young people with lived experience in the development of the recommendations for the design guidelines, including employing a lived experience consultant.	Progress made	The Commission looks forward to the design guidelines being finalised.

Rec #	Action	Recommendation	Initial government response	Department status	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
14		<p>That the department:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> develop guidelines for contracted agencies to help them determine when it is in the best interests of a child or young person in care to have access to a companion animal support programs or initiatives which utilise a companion or therapy animal. 	Accept	In progress	This will be implemented as part of the proposed review and update of the <i>Program requirements</i> for residential care in Victoria, now planned in the second half of 2023.	Progress made	The Commission looks forward to the recommended policy being implemented later in 2023.
15	a	<p>That the Victorian Government ensure that appropriate supports are provided to deal with trauma, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kinship and foster carers should be supported and encouraged to learn about effective responses to trauma. 	Accept	Complete	<p>The <i>Framework for trauma-informed practice</i> was published and disseminated in February 2023 to the child and family services sector and family violence services.</p> <p>CareKaFE also delivers training to kinship, foster and permanent carers. The program was reviewed and retendered, and from April 2023 is delivered by a consortium of the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, Kinship Care Victoria and VACCA. Program specifications require the consortium to deliver training on trauma, grief and loss, including intergenerational loss and trauma for Aboriginal carers and carers of Aboriginal children. This will include reviewing current training in line with the Framework. Shared Lives training, delivered during foster carer recruitment, also provides training on the concept of brain development and developmental trauma, including its impact on children's feelings of safety and ability to regulate emotions.</p>	Complete	The Commission welcomes the significant work done in relation to providing trauma informed supports to carers.

Progress against past inquiries: *In our own words*

continued

Rec #	Action	Recommendation	Initial government response	Department status	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
15	b	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All contracted agency staff should be required to undertake training in regard to trauma-informed care. 	Accept	In progress	The <i>Framework for Trauma-informed Practice</i> (TIP) was published and disseminated in February 2023 to the child and family services sector and family violence services. Work is underway to update the Program Requirements for Home-based Care in Victoria including strengthening the provision of trauma informed training to all contracted agency staff. Additionally, all staff in foster care agencies undertaking assessments of prospective foster carers are now required to undertake a mandatory registration process which includes a distance learning module designed to assess their understanding of implementing trauma informed practice.	Progress made	The Commission looks forward to full implementation of this recommendation when the Program Requirements for Home-based Care in Victoria are updated.
15	c	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learning and development for Child Protection staff that provides regular updates on evidence-based approaches to children and young people living with trauma. 	Accept	In progress	The redeveloped Child Protection Induction program (replacing Beginning Practice) is on track for delivery in 2023. The new program includes the Framework for Trauma Informed Practice launched in February 2023. The Child Protection Learning Hub was launched in September 2022 to provide child protection practitioners with access to the latest evidence and practice, including trauma-informed practice.	Progress made	The Commission notes progress and looks forward to further implementation of this recommendation later in 2023.
16	a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> That the Victorian Government create and fund a suite of therapeutic options for children and young people in care which support children and young people with complex trauma and challenging behaviours to transition over time to more family-like care environments including: a model of care, support and accommodation tailored to the child or young person's individual needs with continued transition support to facilitate them moving into home-based care 	Accept in principle	Complete	The 2021–22 State Budget provided funding for additional Therapeutic Foster Care Oregon (TFCO) models. The implementation for these additional models is now complete. The 2023–24 State Budget provides funding to continue the provision of targeted care packages, which support children to live in suitable care arrangements and prevent entry into residential care.	Significant progress made – ongoing systemic effort required	The Commission welcomes the effort and investment to date, but notes ongoing reform is required, including through access to professional foster care.

Rec #	Action	Recommendation	Initial government response	Department status	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
16	b	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> more flexible placement options, including two bed or single bed placements with tailored and appropriately skilled staff (not through current contingency arrangements) 	Accept in principle	Complete	<p>Previous state budgets have provided funding additional new two and three bed residential care, Keep Embracing Your Success (KEYS) homes and a trial of the Care Hub. These initiatives have commenced service delivery.</p> <p>The 2023–24 State Budget provides additional funding to respond to demand for residential care placements to support children and young people.</p> <p>Implementation planning for these initiatives, as funded through the 2023–24 State Budget, will commence in the second half of 2023.</p>	Progress made – ongoing systemic effort required	The Commission welcomes the effort and investment to date, but notes ongoing reform is required.
16	c	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a form of professionalised foster care. 	Accept in principle	Complete	Further roll out of these models is subject to budget.	Progress made – ongoing systemic effort required	The Commission welcomes the effort and investment to date, but notes ongoing reform is required, including through access to professional foster care.
16	d	That the Victorian Government increase funding and availability of therapeutic placement prevention and reunification supports for children and young people in or at risk of entering out-of-home care.	Accept in principle	Complete	The action to acquit this recommendation was completed in the previous financial year with the implementation of the Family Preservation and Reunification Response and Care Hubs, with Family Preservation and Reunification Response currently funded to assist up to 2,300 families per year and Care Hubs funded for up to 44 children receiving outreach at a time plus 12 placement targets. The 2023–24 State Budget has further invested \$548.4 million over four years to deliver improved outcomes for children in residential care, \$140 million over four years to support Stronger Families – Closing the Gap, and \$11.2 million to continue embedding family services in universal settings.	Significant progress made – ongoing systemic effort required	The Commission strongly welcomes the Victorian Government’s investment in the Family Preservation and Reunification Response. We note this program is not yet funded on an ongoing basis; ongoing funding will be essential to reduce the number of children in care. Recent data suggests the overall numbers of children in care remain high; any reductions are of less than one per cent per annum, and lower still for Aboriginal children. Further, the percentage of children reunified with their families within 24 months has decreased (evidence provided to Yoorrook). The Commission will continue to monitor availability of therapeutic supports to support family preservation and reunification, including capacity of existing programs to meet demand and reduce the numbers of children in out-of-home care.

Progress against past inquiries: *In our own words*

continued

Rec #	Action	Recommendation	Initial government response	Department status	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
16	e	That the department develop the expertise, focus and capacity of Child Protection workers to assist families to achieve reunification, including through case planning.	Accept	In progress	The redeveloped Child Protection Induction program (replacing Beginning Practice) is on track for delivery in 2023. The Child Protection Learning Hub was launched in September 2022 to provide child protection practitioners with access to latest evidence and practice, including in relation to reunification and case planning. Further training programs will be developed for foundation, advanced and expert practitioners in key areas of practice, which will include mandatory programs providing reunification and case planning content.	Progress made	The Commission notes this recommendation was also made in the 2017 inquiry, ' <i>...safe and wanted...</i> ' and looks forward to its implementation.

Progress against past inquiries: *In our own words*

continued

Rec #	Action	Recommendation	Initial government response	Department status	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
17		<p>That the Victorian Government develop mechanisms to track and report on outcomes for children in out-of-home care to ensure that care services, policy and programs are focused on improved outcomes for children and young people in care. This should include the development of key indicators, including but not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • number of placement changes children and young people experience • drivers and characteristics of placement breakdown • frequency of contact with siblings and family members • number of siblings living separately from one or more of their siblings in care • successful reunification of children with their family, • timeliness of kinship care assessments • funded agency workforce capacity and training • contact between children and young people and their workers • number of complaints received from children and young people in care is improved disaggregated by age and care type. <p>An appropriate internal governance body should be established to monitor and track these indicators and ensure that the data collected can inform implementation and sequencing of reform initiatives.</p> <p>The internal governance body should provide regular updates to the Commission on these indicators and on the impact of reform initiatives on the indicators.</p>	Accept	In progress	Monitoring and reporting of kinship assessment compliance has been developed and provided to operational executives. A data tool to facilitate regular reporting is under development.	Progress made	The Commission notes that work is underway to implement this recommendation.