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| Family Preservation and Reunification Response |
| Information for service providers |
| OFFICIAL |

# Background

The Victorian Government committed $46.2 million to increase capacity of the child and family services sector to provide support to children and families during the COVID-19 pandemic, as part of the *“*[*More Support to Keep Families and Children Safe*](https://www.premier.vic.gov.au/more-support-keep-families-and-children-safe)*”* <https://www.premier.vic.gov.au/more-support-keep-families-and-children-safe> budget package.

In 2020-21, this included funding for the delivery of the Family Preservation and Reunification Response (the Response) - an innovative approach to delivering relational, evidence-informed and coordinated support to vulnerable children and families through a strengthened partnership with Child Protection.

The Response enables progress toward the Victorian Government’s vision of the [*Roadmap for Reform: Strong Families, Safe Children*](https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/publications/roadmap-reform-strong-families-safe-children)<https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/publications/roadmap-reform-strong-families-safe-children> (*the Roadmap)* and *Wungurilwil Gapgapduir Aboriginal Children and Families Agreement* to support children and young people to reach their full potential and advance Aboriginal self-determination.

In the 2020-21 State Budget, the Victorian Government announced $335 million over four years to continue the transformation of the children and families service system, to focus on early intervention and prevention, including the expansion of the Response.

Through the expansion, several previously funded placement prevention and reunification programs were transitioned into the Response, increasing the number of evidence-based, outcome-focused services, while reducing complexity of referrals and improving service collaboration and coordination.

This transition also allowed for:

1. an ability to offer an Aboriginal-specific Response in each of the 17 areas across the State
2. the expansion of the Response to reach an increased number of children and families across Victoria
3. the extension of Intensive Family Services to reach a broader group of children and families in need of more intensive support.

Phase 2 significantly increased the number of funded CSOs and ACCOs delivering the Response. There are now 34 funded CSOs and ACCOs, in partnership with Child Protection, delivering the Response in 17 areas across Victoria. This includes an Aboriginal Response in each area

# What is the Response?

The Response is an innovative approach providing children and families with the right support, when and where they need it and with the right team of people. It provides relational, evidence-informed and targeted support to children and families through a collaborative and coordinated partnership between child and family service providers and Child Protection.

Families receive an initial phase of rapid, intensive and flexible support, followed by sustained support and transitions to other services, as needed.

The Response works with Aboriginal families and communities to advance Aboriginal self-determination, promote culturally safe and inclusive services to support cultural healing and acknowledges the unique needs, preferences and history of Aboriginal children and families.

The key objectives include building capacity of parents, carers and community to keep children safe through:

* family preservation – creating safety at home and preventing removal and placement in care
* family reunification – safely and rapidly returning children to their home.

# What are the key features of the Response?

At the **system level**, the Response seeks to engage across systems to:

1. *Advance Aboriginal self-determination* through *culturally safe and inclusive* work with Aboriginal people and organisations in practice, service delivery and governance of the Response.
2. *Embed evidence-informed approaches* demonstrated to improve outcomes for specific groups of children and families and incorporate *mobile implementation teams* to train, coach and support implementation.
3. *Enhance local area governance* arrangements and strengthen collaboration and coordinated practice of service providers, Child Protection and relevant professionals working with children and families.
4. *Build the evidence base* for what works in the delivery of child and family services in Victoria to inform future policy and program design.

At the **practice level**, the Responses seeks to work in partnership with children and families to e*mbed a relational approach to support* where service providers, Child Protection, leaders and practitioners engage children, parents and caregivers in child focused and empowering ways to*:*

1. Connect:
	* + Find children and families at the right time, supported by Child Protection Navigators.
2. Understand:
	* + Engage and plan with children and families.
		+ Build families’ motivation and capacity to make and sustain change.
3. Link -up:
	* + Support connections of children to early childhood education, care and school and young people and parents to education and employment.
		+ Connect and coordinate services for families, including within community.
		+ Cultivate collaborative and coordinated practices and a strengthened partnership approach between Response providers, Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care (ACAC) and Child Protection.
4. Build safety and empower:
	* + Provide rapid, intensive and flexible responses based on the unique needs of children and families, delivered through a lead practitioner model and care team approach.
		+ Build safety for children and young people with assertive support to address identified risks.
		+ Improve health and wellbeing of children, young people and families.
		+ Improve parent child attachment and interactions.
		+ Address trauma and promote healing, including impacts of colonisation, past policies and racism for Aboriginal people.
		+ Strengthen cultural identity and cultural connection of Aboriginal children, young people and families.
		+ Strengthen cultural identity and connection of all children, young people and families.
5. Create opportunities:
	* + Build self-sufficiency and empower families to lead and self-manage change.
		+ Increase connectedness and participation in community for children, young people and families to improve their life opportunities.

# What does the Response involve?

## Practice and service delivery approach

The Response places children and families at the centre of practice to deliver safe, inclusive, quality and effective services coordinated by the right people, in the right place, at the right time according to the unique needs of each child and family.

The Response is funded to include an intensive intervention phase up to 200 hours for each family, followed by up to 40 hours of step-down support. The 40 hours can be delivered by the Response or integrated family services to promote continuity of relationships, enhanced connection to community and seamless transitions to alternate service pathways.

### Who is involved?

The primary professionals involved in delivering services to children and families include Response Practitioners, Child Protection and Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care (ACAC). Aboriginal Child Specialist Advice and Support Service (ACSASS) will be engaged regarding significant decisions affecting Aboriginal children.

Child Protection Navigator roles provide quality practice leadership and expert and specialist case practice advice to Child Protection and Response teams.

A core aspect of the role includes effective identification of children and families in scope through data and analytics, professional judgement and consultation. Facilitation of timely connections (referrals) by the Child Protection Navigator will enable children and families to receive the Response without unnecessary delay.

Response teams allocate lead practitioners who hold caseloads reflective of the diverse, complex and dynamic needs of children and families. The Lead Response Practitioner will coordinate, facilitate and deliver rapid, culturally safe, flexible and intensive services to the child and family using a care team approach. This includes comprehensive understanding and planning approaches and provision of therapeutic and evidence-based supports that engage the voice and choice, cultural identity and lived expertise of children and their families and carers. They will also use flexible funding for practical needs and specialist services to meet child and family needs and goals.

It is important to acknowledge connections to the Response are for children and young people at imminent risk of entry to care, or recently in care. Therefore, a coordinated response from Child Protection and Response teams will be required to address child safety and family capability.

Allocated Child Protection Practitioners continue to maintain statutory responsibilities as per their role in relation to these children and young people, including risk assessment, investigation, case planning and court requirements.

However, during delivery of the Response and where child safety and case plan goals have been achieved and the care team is engaged, it may be deemed appropriate for Child Protection to close statutory involvement with the child and family. In these instances, the Child Protection Navigator will provide a point of continuity for Response teams, including timely and seamless re-entry to statutory involvement for children and families if required.

### How are children and families connected to the Response?

Children, young people and families can be identified for connection (referral) to the Response by:

* **Child Protection:** CP Navigators in collaboration with CP practitioners involved in intake, investigation and case management, and in consultation with the Aboriginal Child Specialist Advice and Support Service (ACSASS) for Aboriginal children and families.
* **Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care (ACAC):** ACAC practitioners, in consultation with the Aboriginal FPR/FPR Response Team.
* **Child FIRST, Family Services and The Orange Door practitioners -** following a Section 38 consultation with Community Based Child Protection (CBCP) under the *Children Youth and Families Act* 2005 and in consultation with the CP Navigator and Response Team.

Practitioners working with children and families from the three target groups (e.g. maternity, mental health, early years or youth services) can contact Child FIRST or CP where they believe a family may need further support.

## Embedding of evidence-based practice

Family Preservation and Reunification Practice Modules (the Practice Modules), consisting of evidence-informed practice elements, have been developed by the Centre for Evidence and Implementation (CEI) in partnership with the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare (CfECFW) and the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA). These practice modules and elements will be used flexibly to address trauma, build family functioning and improve parent and child interactions.

Aboriginal cultural elements have been developed by VACCA and co-designed with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) for implementation by all Response practitioners to advance Aboriginal self-determination and support cultural healing.

The department, in partnership with the CEI, the CfECFW and VACCA, is providing a suite of implementation support strategies for practitioners to embed these practice modules and elements.

In some locations, practitioners will be trained in evidence-based programs including Functional Family Therapy (FFT-CW), Safe Care or Multi-systemic Therapy (MST-Psych) that have been found to support families to care for their children safely at home.

## A comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework

A comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework will measure the impact of the Response on child and family outcomes in the short, medium and long-term and build the evidence base for family preservation and reunification services. The department will work with service providers and ACCOs to monitor progress against outcomes as well as measure the success of implementation of the Response.

The department will draw on the knowledge and experience of Aboriginal people in the development of monitoring, evaluation and outcome measures to ensure these are culturally safe and to identify a range of measures specific to the Aboriginal elements of the Response.

# Further information

For further information on the Response please email: ChildrenYouthFamilies@dffh.vic.gov.au

# Appendix 1: Response Providers by Division - effective 1 August 2021

## East Division

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| Division | Area | Response type | Service provider |
| East | Goulburn | Aboriginal Response | Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative |
| Response  | Children Australia (Oz Child) |
| Goulburn Valley Family Care |
| The Bridge Youth Service |
| Inner East | Aboriginal Response | Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency |
| Response  | MacKillop Family Services |
| Uniting (Victorian and Tasmania) |
| Outer East | Aboriginal Response | Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency |
| Response  | MacKillop Family Services |
| Anglicare Victoria |
| Uniting (Victorian and Tasmania) |
| Ovens Murray | Aboriginal Response | Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency |
| Response  | MacKillop Family Services |
| Upper Murray Family Care |

## North Division

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| Division | Area | Response type | Service provider |
| North | North East Melbourne | Aboriginal Response | Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency  |
| Response | MacKillop Family Services |
| Anglicare Victoria |
| Melbourne City Mission |
| Uniting (Victoria and Tasmania) |
| Hume Moreland | Aboriginal Response | Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency  |
| Response | MacKillop Family Services |
| Uniting (Victoria and Tasmania) |
| Loddon | Aboriginal Response | Bendigo and District Aboriginal Co-operative |
| Njernda Aboriginal Corporation |
| Response | MacKillop Family Services |
| Anglicare Victoria |
| Mallee | Aboriginal Response | Mallee District Aboriginal Services |
| Response | Mallee Family Care |
| MacKillop Family Services |

## West Division

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| Division | Area | Response type | Service provider |
| West | Barwon | Aboriginal Response | Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-Operative |
| Response | Bethany Community Support Consortium *Diversitat, Colac Area Health, Gateways Support Services, Barwon Health, City of Greater Geelong* |
| Barwon Child, Youth and Family |
| Colac Area Health |
| Brimbank Melton | Aboriginal Response | Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency |
| Response | Children Australia (Oz Child) |
| Baptcare |
| MacKillop Family Services |
| Melbourne City Mission |
| Western Melbourne | Aboriginal Response | Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency |
| Response | Children Australia (Oz Child) |
| Anglicare Victoria |
| Baptcare |
| IPC Health |
| MacKillop Family Services |
| Melbourne City Mission |
| Uniting (Victoria and Tasmania) |
| Central Highlands | Aboriginal Response | Ballarat and District Aboriginal Co-operative |
| Response | Child and Family Services Ballarat  |
| Barwon Child, Youth and Family |
| CatholicCare Victoria  |
| Uniting (Victoria and Tasmania)  |
| Wimmera South West | Aboriginal Response | Goolum-Goolum Aboriginal Co-operative |
| Gunditjmara Aboriginal Co-operative |
| Winda-Mara Aboriginal Corporation |
| Response | Bethany Community Support Consortium *Brophy Family and Youth Services, Mpower, Warrnambool City Council* |
| CatholicCare Victoria |
| Uniting (Victoria and Tasmania) |

## South Division

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| Division | Area | Response type | Service provider |
| South  | Bayside Peninsula | Aboriginal Response | Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency |
| Response | MacKillop Family Services |
| Children Australia (Oz Child) |
| Family Life |
| Key Assets |
| Anglicare Victoria |
| Uniting (Victoria and Tasmania) |
| Inner Gippsland | Aboriginal Response | Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency |
| Ramahyuck District Aboriginal Corporation |
| Response | Key Assets |
| Anglicare Victoria |
| Quantum Support Services |
| Queen Elizabeth Centre |
| Outer Gippsland | Aboriginal Response | Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Co-operative |
| Ramahyuck District Aboriginal Corporation |
| Response | Gippsland Lakes Complete Health |
| Uniting (Victoria and Tasmania) |
| Southern Melbourne | Aboriginal Response | Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency |
| Response | MacKillop Family Services |
| Children Australia (Oz Child) |
| Queen Elizabeth Centre |
| Uniting (Victoria and Tasmania) |
| Windermere Child and Family Services |

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| To receive this publication in an accessible format please email the Children, youth and families policy team <childrenyouthfamilies@dffh.vic.gov.au>.Authorised and published by the Victorian Government, 1 Treasury Place, Melbourne.© State of Victoria, Australia, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (September 2021).Except where otherwise indicated, the images in this publication show models and illustrative settings only, and do not necessarily depict actual services, facilities or recipients of services. This publication may contain images of deceased Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.In this document, ‘Aboriginal’ refers to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. ‘Indigenous’ or ‘Koori/Koorie’ is retained when part of the title of a report, program or quotation.ISBN/ISSN 978-1-76096-109-1Available at: [Family preservation and reunification response page](https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/family-preservation-and-reunification-response) on the Providers website <https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/family-preservation-and-reunification-response> |