

Structure of the Report

This Report of the Board of Inquiry into the Child Protection System of the Northern Territory is contained in two volumes and includes an Executive Summary, a consolidated list of the recommendations and a number of appendices. The Report is available for downloading from the Inquiry website.

For those who may not have the time to read the full Report, a Summary Report is available for downloading. The Summary Report also contains a full list of the recommendations.

Chapter 1 begins with a review of the background to the Inquiry and outlines how the Board approached the task, as well as the values and principles that guided our approach.

Chapter 2 provides a sampling of data about the Northern Territory which reflect its unique geographic and demographic characteristics. Key statistics in this chapter highlight both the absolute levels of disadvantage experienced by the Northern Territory's Aboriginal population and the relative disadvantage they experience in comparison with the non-Aboriginal population.

Chapter 3 provides a conceptual discussion about child protection systems. This chapter highlights the trend over the past few decades of such systems becoming focussed on the legal and forensic aspects of protecting children (such as assessing whether abuse has occurred and determining if legal orders are needed), rather than providing support to struggling families in order to help them provide appropriate care for their children.

In Chapter 4 we explore the needs of Aboriginal children in particular and place these within an historical context. This chapter also covers key aspects of practice relating to vulnerable Aboriginal children and families, as well as the need for services controlled and/or operated by Aboriginal people.

Chapter 5 provides an overview of the statutory child protection system in the Northern Territory, along with key data about children and services.

Chapter 6 focuses on the service needs of vulnerable children and families at different points in the continuum of needs and calls for a significant new government investment in the development of prevention and therapeutic services, particularly in the remote areas of the Northern Territory.

Chapter 7 is the first part of an examination of statutory child protection services, focusing on the critical processes of intake and investigation. The second part in Chapter 8 explores the range of other statutory functions, including case management, permanency planning and services for at-risk youth.

In Chapter 9 we look at a range of issues relating to out-of-home care services, the program area that is the most costly and, arguably, the most complex part of the statutory child protection system.

In Chapter 10 we look at legal and related practice issues that arose in the course of the Inquiry and include a number of suggestions for amendments to the *Care and Protection of Children Act 2007* (NT).

Chapter 11 explores the pivotal issue of interagency collaboration, a practice imperative that must be developed and formalised if child protection is truly to become 'everyone's business'. The chapter concludes with major recommendations relating to the reform of child protection decision-making and interagency collaboration.

This is followed in Chapter 12 by an examination of the challenging areas of workforce and workplace. These areas have been highlighted as key contributing factors behind many of the problematic practice issues that have arisen in recent years.

Chapter 13 outlines a number of review, oversight and accountability functions that will need to be in place to ensure the service system is meeting its objectives and to promote service quality.

Finally, Chapter 14 outlines the steps required to be taken to enable the implementation of the suggested reforms contained in the Report.

Formal recommendations are generally listed following the related discussion in each chapter. The recommendations are also provided in a consolidated list attached to the Executive Summary. Each recommendation has an 'urgency rating' relating to its implementation.

It should be noted that the recommendations are usually in a succinct form that focuses on the action/s required. A full and accurate understanding of the recommendations and their intent can only be ascertained by reference to the associated discussion.