

Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory

An alliance of the CLC, NLC, CAALAS, NAAJA and AMSANT

NT Royal Commission Response Background Paper 3.4 (a)

Comprehensive and culturally appropriate assessment across Child Protection and Youth Justice

Why is it needed?

- Children and young people who come into contact with both systems have complex and overlapping vulnerabilities, needs, challenges which are not being addressed
- Children, young people and their families are 'siloed' through individual agency processes and forced to navigate their way through complex systems
- Decision makers and service providers don't have enough information to make decisions that will make sure a child or young people gets the supports and responses they need to get a better outcome
- Currently in the NT, there is no coherent, comprehensive process to assess the needs of vulnerable children and their families.

The evidence shows that young people in either system will get better outcomes through a therapeutic and holistic approach. In the case of youth offending, a targeted therapeutic approach and early intervention will reduce offending and re-offending (see Background Paper 1.6 Making the Community Safer). A holistic, comprehensive assessment will enhance the likelihood of appropriate responses.

Where did the idea come from?

Comprehensive, holistic, culturally appropriate assessment is a key part of the New Zealand approach that has delivered positive results. New Zealand has developed a tool called Tuituia which is based on detailed work to develop and validate measures across domains that are important in directing action to support, service and hold young people and families accountable. Information about the NZ approach is available at <https://practice.mvcot.govt.nz/policy/assessment-and-decision-making/resources/understanding-the-tuituia-domains-kaitiaki-mokopuna.html>

How would it work?

Every child or young person's needs, strengths and risks need to be assessed at an early point of contact with child protection or youth justice. The assessment will:

- identify risks affecting the child or young person that make them more vulnerable to abuse and neglect, or more likely to have conduct problems, offending, and poor life outcomes.
- Identify the strengths and resources available to the child or young person within family and community.
- Look at the hopes and dreams of the child or young person.

Such an assessment will allow the system to respond in ways that reduce risks of abuse and neglect and reduce the likelihood of conduct problems and offending continuing. It can inform the work and

planning of the Family Group Conferencing process in Background Paper 3.4(c) Family Group Conferencing Mechanism.

The assessment should be undertaken or updated at various decision points during the child or young person's contact with the system.

If a child or young person has further or ongoing contact with the system, the assessment will remain with them and can be updated if circumstances change.

What would the assessment look like?

The specific tool will need to be developed and validated for the NT context in consultation with families, communities and experts.

Based on the NZ model and our knowledge of risk and protective factors, the key features might include:

- response to trauma
- response to grief and loss
- emotional wellbeing
- suicide risk (over 5 years old)
- self-harm risk (over 5 years old)
- physical wellbeing and development
- behaviour (pro-social behaviour, self-control, understanding right from wrong, takes responsibility for own actions, concerning or harmful sexual behaviour etc.)
- identity and culture
- friendships (empathy and respect, peers/friends/intimate relationships)
- learning and achieving (cognitive development, motor skills, skills and interests, self-care and independence, goals and aspirations)
- education (early childhood education, school engagement, school attendance, school achievement, vocational training and employment)
- networks of support (social and community relationships, cultural connectedness, community services)
- resources available (basic needs)
- family (extended family connections and relationships, stability).

