

NUKARA



FIBRE 8 SOCIAL DETERMINANTS

FIBRE 8

Social determinants: commitment to working across portfolios to address the social determinants impacting Aboriginal children and families.

Nukara is the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre's community-led strategy and action plan for implementing the **Tirrina** model and transferring responsibility for Aboriginal child safety to the Aboriginal community.

Our vision is for all Aboriginal children living in Lutruwita to be safe and well in the care of their families, proudly connected with and strongly supported by their community, culture and country.

Tirrina is the Tasmanian Aboriginal community's model for achieving this vision.

The eight fibres of **Tirrina** provide a strong foundation for the structure of every part of the model, interwoven with the principles of self-determination and truth-telling. While adapted for local application, the fibres are consistent with the eight focus areas of the Safe and Supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan 2023-2026 (Our Safe and Supported Action Plan).

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Social determinants: commitment to working across portfolios to address the social determinants impacting Aboriginal children and families.

Social determinants can be described as the intersecting, non-medical factors that influence health and wellbeing outcomes. These include the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age, and include the broader set of systems that shape the conditions of our daily lives. The forces and systems that contribute to social determinants include socioeconomic policies, systems and political agendas, and social norms, policies, ways of thinking and accepted behaviour.

Harmful social determinants may include: insecurity of food, housing and basic needs; low levels of income and social protection; inadequate education; unemployment, job insecurity and poor working conditions; social exclusion and discrimination; structural conflict; and unequal access to quality legal services.

The combination of these factors creates an environment in which Aboriginal children face the risk of significantly poorer life outcomes. Poverty, family disadvantage, poor health, systemic exclusion and historical trauma can perpetuate a cycle of intergenerational disadvantage that contributes to family situations in which children are more at risk of coming into contact with the child safety system and being separated from their families.

Fibre 8 recognises that to keep Aboriginal children safe, it is critical to tackle the root causes of these conditions through genuine, cross-portfolio partnerships between the Aboriginal community and Tasmanian Government. This will help to ensure that Aboriginal children in Lutruwita are able to live, grow and thrive in a fairer, more culturally safe and inclusive environment.

This document summarises the findings of consultation and research, highlighting the importance of working across Government agencies, private and non-government organisations (NGOs) to:

- leverage Lutruwita's Combined Peak and Government Closing the Gap Policy Partnership group and forum to develop and implement strategies to combat the negative impact of social determinants
- work with government, private and NGOs (e.g. child safety, housing, foster care, legal, education, health) to improve services to meet the specific needs of Aboriginal children and families, including measures to challenge and transform entrenched ways of thinking and doing.

CURRENT SITUATION

The Tasmanian Government has committed to and is progressing strategies and actions in response to the requirements, targets, findings and recommendations of significant national and state-level initiatives, including the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*, the *Commission of Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government's Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Institutional Settings* (Commission of Inquiry) and *Safe and Supported: The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children*.

Of particular relevance to this fibre of the *Nukara* strategy and action plan is Action 8 of the *Safe and Supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan 2023-2026*, which is to:

'actively work across portfolios impacting children and families to address the social determinants of safety and wellbeing for Aboriginal children and families'.

The Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre (TAC) currently delivers a holistic range of programs that consider and aim to address the detrimental impact of social determinants that limit or obstruct the rights and capabilities of Aboriginal families to keep their children safe and well in the family home. At times, that includes supporting basic needs for food, housing, health care and other essential items. This practical 'prevention in action' approach is embedded in TAC's focus on reducing the number of Aboriginal children and families in contact with the state's child safety system.



A summary of TAC's current service offerings is provided below.

DOMAIN	DESCRIPTION
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Aboriginal Health Service provides a range of integrated health services operating across Lutruwita, with health clinics located in major population areas: Nipaluna / Hobart, Pataway / Burnie and Launceston. There are also several outreach clinics in other areas. Services include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Aboriginal Health practitioners - General Practice medicine (doctors and nurses) - Paediatric medicine - Antenatal care - Immunisation and clinics - Physiotherapy - Speech therapy - Occupational therapy - Diabetes management and specialist care - Ear health screening for children - NDIS advisory services for health-related needs - Alcohol and other drug support and counselling - Smoking cessation support and advice - Integrated care coordination for people with chronic health conditions.
Children and families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ TAC's Families Team currently works with children and families through Family Support, Intensive Family Engagement Services and Takariliya Taypani. Current funding levels limit the amount of support that can be provided. ▪ Other services for children and families include school holiday programs, parenting groups, family gathering days, puppetry, playgroups, early learning, early home visits and preparing for success at school. ▪ Connected Beginnings works with children 0-5 years to improve readiness for school.

DOMAIN	DESCRIPTION
<i>Social and emotional wellbeing</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Rana Payngana Paliti Rrala is designed to meet the community's social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing needs, employing qualified counsellors and community-based workers, with services ranging from one-on-one counselling to group creative arts therapy. ▪ Takamuna Pakana supports community members of all ages with equitable access to participation in club and representative sport through financial assistance with memberships and sporting equipment. ▪ Culture Care Connect is a program that aims to improve mental health and suicide prevention outcomes.
<i>Culture</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Rrala Milaythina-ti is a project for helping community members spend time on country to improve their social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing. ▪ Pakana Rangers and fire practitioners focus on the management of Aboriginal country and the cultural environment, including land and water. ▪ Children may join the Muylatina Milaythina Junior Rangers program. ▪ Palawa Kani and Palawa Kipli continue to revive traditional languages, food, culture and knowledge. ▪ Regular cultural events include camps, festivals and rallies.
<i>Employment</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Palawa Employment Service is a statewide program that focuses on skill acquisition and wellbeing support for Aboriginal people 15 and over.
<i>Skills and training</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ TAC is a Registered Training Organisation (RTO), offering a limited range of occupation-based training courses and qualifications.
<i>Aged care</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Aged Care Program supports independent living for older people.

While the service programs offered by TAC contribute to achieving greater equity across a range of social determinants, this work – and the outcomes achieved – is impacted by the limitations and inadequacy of government funding and access to other resources. The expansion of these and other programs and strategies to address social determinants, in partnership with the Tasmanian Government and non-government organisations, is critical in keeping Aboriginal children safe and achieving more positive life outcomes.

CONSULTATION FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Voices of the weavers

Community voices

Community consultation revealed the need for more – and more coordinated – efforts, including investment of time and money in collaboration across portfolios to improve social determinants for Aboriginal children and their families. Some community members have lived experience of the negative influence that life circumstances, such as poverty, insecure housing and unemployment and systemic racism, can have on Aboriginal families' capacity to keep their children safe and well. Community recognises the benefits of TAC's 'prevention in action' programs.

Despite limited funding and resourcing, community praised the existing scope of services provided by TAC to target and address community needs. Aboriginal youth are vocal in calling for more programs that foster stronger connections. Examples provided during consultations include cultural camps and on-country programs. Community also highly commends the work of TAC's Aboriginal Health Service and the role the service plays in prevention and early intervention.

Consultation highlighted the need for more support through statewide programs to support social and emotional wellbeing and mental health, including targeted programs to overcome issues involving substance abuse and family violence. These problems are frequently identified as areas in which preventative measures can have profound impacts in breaking cycles of harm.

When exploring social determinants, community expressed clear views that a critical component of Aboriginal health and wellbeing is connection to community, culture and country. This is seen as fundamental to the safety of Aboriginal children. Community members continue to emphasise that truth-telling fosters a strong sense of identity, belonging and resilience. Members are emphatic that Aboriginal children should be encouraged to develop a strong sense of who they are, where they come from, and their place within community and country.

At the consultation forums, community provided examples of areas in which TAC could provide an expanded range of services, such as: housing; parental support; programs to encourage the development of new and different life skills for young people and new parents; and youth groups.

Other suggestions include the consideration of mechanisms to promote education as a means of encouraging personal growth, a sense of purpose, and pride and achievement at both personal and community levels. The community recognises that education plays a powerful role in breaking cycles of disadvantage. Other suggestions include statewide programs that provide support for primary, secondary and college students, such as transport to and from school, tutoring and homework centres.



Schools and school staff were viewed as playing a critical role in supporting and protecting Aboriginal children, particularly Aboriginal Education Workers. There were also calls to re-establish Aboriginal Parent Associations in schools – or clusters of schools – to ensure that the everyday needs of Aboriginal students are addressed in culturally safe and responsive ways. Collaboration between parents, staff, Aboriginal Education Workers, social workers and TAC is seen as essential for ensuring the overall wellbeing and safety of Aboriginal children.

TAC staff

In consultation forums, TAC staff demonstrated strong awareness of the intersectional impact of social determinants on the safety of Aboriginal children. Staff appreciate the engagement and support they receive across the range of services provided by TAC and acknowledge their combined role in prevention, early intervention and referral to other external services when necessary.

There are concerns, however, that anticipated expansion of the current scope of services will require significant, additional resourcing. Staff concerns about basic needs include:

- lack of available public housing for Aboriginal families
- lack of cultural awareness of acceptable living conditions when public housing properties are inspected, which is frequently and unnecessarily viewed as ‘overcrowding’ and may be reported to the Strong Families Safe Kids Advice and Referral Line (ARL) as child safety risk
- very limited access to emergency accommodation for families and children, with no offers of alternative accommodation given when shelters are at capacity
- no generic Housing Connect or Homes Tasmania contact roles for TAC workers
- children experiencing ongoing personal and/or social issues (for example, autism and trauma) being repeatedly suspended from school or only allowed to attend part-time, compounded by associated employment and financial issues for parents (including risks to employment security and the need to take leave without pay)
- reduction in the number, role, key focus areas and capabilities of Aboriginal Education Workers
- generally low levels of understanding about Aboriginal cultural needs and social determinants among workers in government and non-government services, including the private sector
- issues with some teachers and schools limiting the active involvement of Aboriginal parents and TAC staff in meetings involving concerns about the behaviour of children.

Voices of other stakeholders

Non-Aboriginal stakeholders (child safety, family support and legal service sectors) attending the *Nukara* consultation sessions emphasised the importance of initiatives such as family and community yarns and dedicated men’s programs led by the Aboriginal community. Stakeholders appreciate TAC’s holistic, strengths-based approach, which is seen to have important flow-on effects for the health and wellbeing of the community, offering firm support for government investment in the expansion of on-country programs. Poverty, institutional racism and inequitable access to some essential services and facilities are seen as barriers to improving life outcomes for children and families.

Other stakeholders suggested piloting ‘staff swap’ programs between TAC and government organisations to improve inter-organisational and inter-cultural skills and understandings.

JURISDICTIONAL SCAN AND ANALYSIS

Safe and Supported emphasises the need for nationwide, multi-disciplinary responses to ensure the safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal children with multiple and complex needs.

Concerted efforts are being taken to address the social determinants impacting First Nations communities in jurisdictions across Australia, and in New Zealand, the USA and Canada. Each country has developed distinct frameworks and initiatives aimed at improving the wellbeing of First Nations children, while recognising the specific challenges faced by these communities. Key strategies are summarised below.

Across these countries, significant strides are being made to address the social determinants impacting First Nations families, particularly in keeping children safe from harm. In general, strategies are founded on:

- self-determination and self-governance
- culturally safe and community-driven child safety
- systemic reforms to address poverty, housing instability, and access to education and healthcare.

While progress varies between jurisdictions, the emphasis is on community-led, culturally competent services that seek to mitigate the adverse effects of historical trauma, poverty and systemic marginalisation on the safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal children and their families.

Australia

- The Australian Government's Closing the Gap initiative aims to improve health, education and employment outcomes for Aboriginal people, including children. There are specific targets for reducing the number of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care and working across portfolios to address social determinants impacting the safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal children and their families.
- The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (Placement Principle) ensures that, whenever possible, Aboriginal children are placed with extended family or community members, instead of in state care.

New Zealand

- Whānau Ora is a culturally-based outcomes-focused approach to holistic wellbeing, supporting Māori families to live healthy, safe, and independent lives by connecting them with a range of services. Whānau Ora integrates child safety into broader family support programs, helping to address the root causes of child safety by focusing on poverty, health and education.
- The Ministry of Māori Development leads efforts to increase self-determination and supports Māori families in preventing child harm. The Ministry helps to create policies and programs based on Māori values to support child safety and wellbeing.

USA

- The *Indian Child Welfare Act 1978* was enacted to protect the best interests of First Nations children and promote family stability and security.
- Many Native American tribes have developed their own child safety systems, tribal courts and legal frameworks to intervene in child safety matters, ensuring decisions are made within the context of tribal culture and law.
- Indian Health Services and Head Start Programs aim to improve healthcare, early education and child wellbeing outcomes for Native American children.

Canada

- The First Nations Child and Family Services framework provides culturally appropriate child safety services to First Nations communities. The federal government funds services to support the prevention of child removals and provide community-led care solutions.
- Jordan's Principle is a human rights principle embedded in Canadian legislation, which ensures that all First Nations children can access public services without delay, denial or discrimination. The principle prioritises the best interests of the child and has led to a significant number of First Nations children being able to access services like healthcare and education without unnecessary barriers.
- Canada has supported First Nations' efforts to implement self-governance in child safety, allowing Indigenous communities to create their own systems that are culturally grounded and focused on keeping children with families and communities.

Alignment with national and state commitments and enablers

The *Safe and Supported* initiative, along with other Australian Government and national programs, offers a clear pathway for national and state governments to invest in the Aboriginal-designed and delivered programs of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), with robust monitoring and reporting mechanisms to monitor progress and outcomes. While new investment is necessary to enable the implementation of *Nukara* and *Tirrina*, the redirection of existing streams of funding, currently allocated to government and NGO service providers, is also critical.

The Tasmanian Government has made formal commitments to *Safe and Supported* and other significant national and state agreements and initiatives to address the social determinants impacting Aboriginal children and families. The most relevant of these are summarised in the table below.

INITIATIVE	COMMITMENT
<i>Safe and Supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan 2023-2026</i>	<p>Action 8: Work across portfolios impacting Aboriginal children and families to address the social determinants of safety and wellbeing for Aboriginal children and families</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Strengthen the interface between policies and service systems to address social determinants b) Holistic and coordinated response to achieving Closing the Gap targets c) Partner with Aboriginal communities on specific issues and supports for children, families and/or carers with disability or developmental concerns d) Implement related disability initiatives, including the <i>Disability Sector Strengthening Plan</i> and <i>Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031</i>
<i>Safe and Supported Action Plan 2021-2031</i>	<p>Action 1 (b) to (c)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Replicates Action 8 (a) to (d) above <p>Action 5:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Increase use of existing fee-free or subsidised tertiary education, vocational and apprenticeship training, and targeted employment and transition to work services for young people with out-of-home care experiences b) Review Transition to Independent Living Allowance c) Improve access for children and families to services such as housing, education, income support and health d) Refresh National Out-of-Home Care Standards and Indicators <p>Action 7:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Establish effective interface between child and family service providers and the National Disability Insurance Agency b) Improve early identification, information, supports and referral pathways for children, families and/or carers with disability or developmental concerns

INITIATIVE	COMMITMENT
<p>Commission of Inquiry report findings and recommendations</p>	<p>Recommendation 9.15</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement all elements of the Placement Principle b) Adopt and report on measures to reduce institutional racism and support decolonising practices f) Design and establish Aboriginal-led therapeutic residential programs for children in out-of-home care <p>Recommendation 9.22</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tailor out-of-home care processes to address the specific needs of individual children Processes to address the specific needs of Aboriginal children, children with disability and other needs <p>Recommendation 9.23</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure all children in out-of-home care have annual (and more frequently as required) access to timely, holistic assessments across all domains: physical health, trauma and mental health, disability and educational needs Multidisciplinary health teams to provide expert consultation to the Care Teams of children in out-of-home care <p>Recommendation 15.10</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consult with the Aboriginal community to build culturally safe health spaces <p>Recommendation 16</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specialist police units to develop and implement strategies to engage and build trust with Aboriginal people
<p>Closing the Gap</p> <p>National Agreement reforms, targets and sector strengthening plans</p>	<p>Clause 38:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a joined-up approach to five policy priority areas: justice, social and emotional wellbeing, housing, early childhood care and development, Aboriginal languages <p>Priority Reform 2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build the ACCO sector by strengthening the Aboriginal workforce in sectors including early childhood care and development, housing, health and disability <p>Early Childhood Care and Development Sector Strengthening Plan:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The plan considers the intersection of child and family services with the priorities of other plans, including health, housing and disability <p>Disability Sector Strengthening Plan:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement joined-up service delivery across the ACCO sector and ensure all socioeconomic targets include Aboriginal people with disability

INITIATIVE	COMMITMENT
Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uphold the rights, inclusion and participation of people with disability in all areas of life, including employment and financial security, inclusive homes and communities, safety, rights and justice, personal and community support, education and learning, health and wellbeing, and community attitudes
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognises that the foundations of holistic health and wellbeing include cultural and social determinants
National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aims to positively impact all aspects of Aboriginal children's lives
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2023-25 under the National Plan to end Violence against Women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Designed to be culturally-informed to address current needs of the Aboriginal community and lay a strong foundation for long-term change for Aboriginal peoples
Improving Multidisciplinary Responses Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National multi-jurisdictional initiatives that centre on Aboriginal cultural knowledge frameworks and responses for the way child and family services are designed and delivered, including multidisciplinary responses for children and families with multiple and complex needs
Disability Royal Commission	<p>Recommendation 9.1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with Aboriginal communities and groups to co-design principles and guidelines for parenting capacity assessments for Aboriginal parents with disability to ensure they are culturally appropriate <p>Recommendation 9.2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure all Aboriginal children up to five years of age entering out-of-home care are screened using the culturally-adapted development screening <i>Ages and Stages Questionnaire – Talking about Raising Aboriginal Kids</i> tool
Family Matters	<p>Recommendation 3:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a joint federal and state government funded, national program for ACCO-led integrated family support services
National Partnership Agreement on Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence Responses 2023-2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support Aboriginal Family Safety Workers in Child and Family Learning Centres Develop strategies to prevent and respond to family and sexual violence in Aboriginal communities
Tasmanian Housing Strategy Action Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aboriginal housing policy and action plan due December 2025

THE WAY FORWARD

In accordance with the *Safe and Supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan 2023-2026*, all social determinants – including poverty, institutional racism and access to services – must be considered. This requires better connections between ACCOs and the support services provided by Tasmanian Government and non-government organisations, and active efforts in applying the Prevention element of the Placement Principle.

Addressing the social determinants of Aboriginal child safety in Lutruwita requires a multi-faceted and collaborative approach. Fibre 8 proposes to empower TAC to lead and co-design cross-portfolio partnerships and linkages that are locally appropriate and culturally grounded. By improving the accessibility of services, fostering collaboration through technology, and addressing systemic inequities, we can create a safer environment for Aboriginal children in Lutruwita, providing them with the support needed to thrive. The way forward includes to:

- partner with government, non-government organisations, and peak bodies to advance national and state-level initiatives on social determinants
- expand statewide access to services that address social determinants through the TAC
- regularly review government and non-government policies and programs to ensure they meet desired outcomes for Aboriginal child safety and address social determinants.

Next steps

- Leverage Lutruwita's Combined Peak and Government Closing the Gap Policy Partnership group and forum to develop and implement strategies to combat the negative impact of social determinants.
- Collaborate with government agencies (e.g. child safety, education, health, legal) to improve services for Aboriginal children and families and challenge entrenched practices.
- Identify barriers to accessing essential services for Aboriginal children and families.



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