

Australian and
New Zealand Children's
**COMMISSIONERS
GUARDIANS and
ADVOCATES**

The Australian and New Zealand Children's Commissioners, Guardians, and Advocates (ANZCCGA) convened from 17-19 February in Boorloo (Perth), Western Australia. Co-Chaired by Ms Sue-Anne Hunter, National Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People, and Ms Jodie Griffiths-Cook, ACT Public Advocate and Children and Young People Commissioner, all jurisdictions (other than New Zealand) were represented at this meeting either in person or virtually.

Individually and collectively, ANZCCGA members promote and protect the rights, safety, and well-being of children and young people in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand and ensure that the best interests of children and young people are considered in public policy and decision-making.

The ANZCCGA welcomed new members, Tracy Beaton (Principal Commissioner for Children and Young People, VIC), Katherine McKernan (NSW Advocate for Children and Young People), and Bianca Dufty (NSW Deputy Children's Guardian), and thanked outgoing member Vanessa Turnbull-Roberts (former ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People Commissioner) for her contributions to the ANZCCGA.

CHILD RIGHTS, SAFETY, AND WELLBEING

ANZCCGA members:

- **Agreed** that the rights and best interests of children and young people *must* be the primary consideration in all decisions affecting their lives, including their right to be heard and have their views taken seriously in decision-making processes that concern them.
- **Committed** to continuing to amplify the views and perspectives of children and young people and supporting youth-led advocacy initiatives and outcomes.
- **Committed** to continued advocacy in support of Australia embedding those Human Rights declarations and covenants to which it is a signatory into domestic legislation.
- **Endorsed** (in-principle) a set of overarching priorities to further guide ANZCCGA collective action.
- **Noted with concern** the dissolution of the rights of children and young people in systems like youth justice, and **committed** to countering the negative narrative, which undermines the social, emotional, cultural, and physical safety and wellbeing of children and young people.
- **Committed** to advocating for the use of holistic Child Rights Impact Assessments by government and non-government agencies when developing legislation, policy, guidelines, programs, and services.
- **Agreed** that children and young people *must* be afforded the same protection from harm as adults, **noted with concern** the continued use of “reasonable chastisement” or “domestic discipline” as a defence against prosecution for the physical assault of a child by a parent

(emphasising the inconsistency of this common law defence given Australia's commitments in respect of family and domestic violence), and **committed** to advocating for legislative reform.

- **Committed** to advocating for the embedding of the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations into legislation in *all* Australian jurisdictions, with effective and adequately resourced oversight, monitoring, and reportable conduct functions in place to ensure the safety of children and young people.
- **Supported** recent and ongoing changes to Working with Children and/or Vulnerable People checks, while **noting** that this is a very small component of the framework to protect children and young people from physical, sexual, emotional, and cultural abuse.
- **Noted with concern** the distressing findings and multiple system failures documented in the Queensland Child Death Review Board's review of system responses to child sexual abuse, and **committed** to continued advocacy for full implementation of recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional responses to Child Sexual Abuse.
- **Noted with concern** the ongoing challenges experienced by young people transitioning from state/territory care and protection systems and **committed** to advocating for timely and effective pre-exit planning and the consistent provision of funding and post-care support for young people across all states and territories to at least 25 years old.
- **Agreed** on the importance of cross-border consistency across systems that exist to protect the rights, safety, and wellbeing of children and young people, and **committed** to exploring means by which ANZCCGA members can positively influence this through their own individual and collective practice.

CULTURAL RESPECT AND RECOGNITION

ANZCCGA members recognise the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders, their communities and cultures throughout Australia, and the Māori peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand. We use the term First Nations to include all Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders in Australia and Māori peoples in Aotearoa New Zealand.

ANZCCGA members support the aspirations of Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders as detailed in the Uluru Statement from the Heart, and the Imagination Declaration developed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

ANZCCGA members also support all efforts to maintain the integrity of the Treaty of Waitangi and an interpretation of the Treaty that supports the best interests of Māori children and young people.