

Western Australian State Government Response to the Independent Review into the Department of Communities' Policies and Practices in the Placement of Children with Harmful Sexual Behaviours in Residential Care Settings (the Review)

Prepared by the Commissioner for Children and Young People and tabled in Parliament on 15 September 2021

Hon Simone McGurk, MLA, Minister for Child Protection; Women's Interests; Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence and Community Services.

As the Minister for Child Protection, I make the following submission in relation to the findings and recommendations of the Review, which was tabled in Parliament on 15 September 2021.

On behalf of the Western Australian (WA) government, I acknowledge the victims and survivors of all forms of child sexual abuse. I recognise their strength and courage. I recognise their pain and suffering. I recognise the people who help them carry the burden of their experience. I recognise the tragedy of those who have lost their lives.

I also proudly acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which I live and work, the Whadjuk people of the Noongar nation, and recognise their continuing connection to land, waters and communities. I pay our respects to Aboriginal cultures and to elders past, present and emerging.

I would like to take the opportunity to acknowledge the work undertaken by the former Commissioner and his office in completing the Review, and the immense courage of the young people involved for sharing their experiences.

All children and young people in care have the right to feel protected and safe.

The WA Government welcomes the findings and the wide-ranging recommendations set out in the Review. We are resolutely committed to improving child safety in our community, including through implementation of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

Since March 2017 when the young people at the centre of the Review were placed together in residential care, significant work has been undertaken to strengthen child protection practice, including assessing and responding to children with harmful sexual behaviours.

We have also commenced significant reform to enhance the reporting safety nets including expansion of mandatory reporting of child sexual abuse through the *Children and Community Services Amendment Act 2021*, and introduction of a Reportable Conduct Scheme, as set out in the Parliamentary Commissioner Amendment (Reportable Conduct) Bill 2021, introduced to Parliament in November 2021.

Background and terms of reference

On 30 October 2020, the Minister for Child Protection requested the Commissioner for Children and Young People (the Commissioner) undertake a review of the case to identify ways to improve responses to harmful sexual behaviours and safeguard children and young people in Western Australia's (WA's) residential care homes.

The Minister's office and senior representatives of the Department of Communities (Communities) worked together with the Commissioner to develop and agree the terms of reference for the review.

Communities then provided the Commissioner with access to the case files for Macie and Lee¹ and relevant policies and procedures guiding responses to harmful sexual behaviours and the placement and management of children in residential care. A senior member of Communities' staff assisted the Commissioner's investigation by providing contextual information about child protection and residential care practices.

The agreed Terms of Reference were:

- Identify systemic issues arising from the experience of Macie that affect the wellbeing of children and young people in residential care more broadly, including:

¹ The children's names were changed to protect their identity.

- The extent to which the Department’s own policy and practice settings regarding harmful sexual behaviours and the safety of children and young people in residential care were met in the case of Macie.
- The extent to which any systemic issues, including Departmental policies, practices and services regarding harmful sexual behaviours of children and young people in residential care, are consistent with recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (Royal Commission).
- Identify short, medium and long-term changes that may be required based on findings of the Independent Review.

On 19 July 2021, Communities was provided with a draft of the Review to check the accuracy of representation of policy and process.

On 30 July 2021, Communities provided its response to the Commissioner.

The Commissioner provided the review to the Attorney General under s.48 of the *Commissioner for Children and Young People Act 2006*. The Review, which was tabled in Parliament on 15 September 2021 by the Commissioner, made nine recommendations. The WA Government’s response is outlined below.

On 26 November 2021, the Minister for Child Protection and Mr Mike Rowe, Director General of Communities, wrote to the Commissioner providing a detailed submission outlining the extensive work undertaken by Communities since the young people at the centre of the Review were placed together in residential care.

WA Government Response

Introduction

Communities is progressing a range of reforms to contemporise and safeguard out-of-home care, including by improving the identification, assessment of, and responses to, harmful sexual behaviours.

The essential foundation and guiding blueprint for this work, is the implementation of the recommendations of the Royal Commission.

The Royal Commission provided a systematic analysis of the prevalence and impact of child sexual abuse perpetrated in care institutions and the conditions and circumstances that enabled this abuse to occur. It presented the stories and experiences of survivors and contemporary evidence about preventing and responding to child sexual abuse in the future.

The final report comprising 17 volumes, two supplementary reports and 409 recommendations, spoke to the range of reforms that need to occur to provide appropriate safety and safeguards for children and young people in WA to protect them from sexual abuse.

In delivering its findings and recommendations, the Royal Commission provided a blueprint for how governments, services and organisations must work together to prevent child sexual abuse in our institutions and communities and protect and respond to victims and survivors.

Of the 409 recommendations made by the Royal Commission, 310 are the responsibility of the WA Government. We are addressing the findings and recommendations by:

- **Healing Past Hurts** for victims and survivors of child sexual abuse through redress and reparation, counselling, advocacy and support.
- **Protecting Children Now** by embedding safeguards in our institutions to identify children early who are at risk of, or experiencing, child sexual abuse. By identifying and reporting workers early if they exhibit behaviours that indicate they may be a safety risk for children. And by creating safe, accessible and trauma informed civil and criminal justice systems that are responsive to the unique needs and vulnerabilities of victims and survivors of sexual abuse.
- **Preventing Further Harm** by establishing a new standard for how organisations and institutions operate to prioritise the rights, safety and wellbeing of a child. By improving identification of and responses to harmful sexual behaviours and by safeguarding our care environments with a particular focus on out-of-home care (child protection) and youth detention.

The WA Government is four years into a 10-year implementation and has completed 45 per cent of the recommendations. As set out in the Review, it is through comprehensive implementation of the Royal Commission recommendations that Communities will embed the safeguards required to protect children now and prevent further harm. Implementation of the Royal Commission recommendations is the essential foundation for addressing the recommendations of the Review.

Review Recommendation 1

Recommendation 1 - Prioritise the full implementation of the 33 Royal Commission recommendations identified (outlined in detail within **Appendix A**).

This recommendation is **accepted** and implementation is **in progress**.

In making this recommendation, the Commissioner noted that ‘...comprehensive implementation of these recommendations will assist the Minister to ensure Communities is meeting child safe standards...’.

In 2021, Communities, working with partner agencies across government, the community services sector, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, religious organisations and private industry, continued to progress implementation of Royal Commission recommendations. Sixteen new recommendations were completed and the foundations for delivery of recommendation 1, and its associated recommendations were established. These foundations are discussed in detail in the remainder of this document in relation to recommendations 2-9 of the review.

Review Recommendation 2

Recommendation 2 - Establish and resource an independent advocacy function for children and young people in the CEO’s care to ensure they are supported to speak out when they feel unsafe, their views are heard and responded to, and they are able to meaningfully participate in decisions about their lives.

This recommendation is **accepted in principle**.

Providing the opportunity for children and young people in the CEO’s care to speak out when they are feeling unsafe, through processes that ensure their concerns are heard and responded to, is essential for preventing and responding to abuse, particularly in institutional settings.

Consideration will be given to the establishment of an independent advocacy function for children and young people in the CEO's care. This will need to be considered in conjunction with the work being undertaken to develop a model for independent oversight of National Principles for Child Safe Organisations, being led by the Department of the Premier and Cabinet.

While this is occurring, Communities has progressed a range of changes to improve children and young people's access to complaints and formal review processes, and has strengthened practice guidance to require that case managers speak to children in care, away from their carer, on at least a quarterly basis.

While not an independent role, Communities has an Advocate for Children in Care. The Advocate is functionally separate from service delivery. Their responsibilities include:

- Listening to young people, helping young people say what they want to say and helping adults to listen.
- Giving information and advice about what young people are entitled to and how they should be treated.
- Supporting young people if they want to have a decision reviewed or complain about things they believe are wrong.
- Speaking to people in authority about what young people think works or doesn't work for children and young people in care.
- Advocating for the best interests of children in care.

Child friendly complaints processes

Children in care can make a complaint by:

- speaking to a staff member at a Communities' District Office – such as a Case Manager, Team Leader, Aboriginal Practice Leader, Assistant District Director, District Director or any staff member the child feels comfortable with
- speaking with a staff member where they live
- completing an online complaint form
- calling the Complaints Management Unit on 1800 333 325 (1800 FEEDBK).
- filling in the 'Children and young person's complaint kit' and giving it to the reception staff at any Communities' District Office or to their case manager

- speaking with the Advocate for Children in Care, or
- contacting CREATE WA or the Ombudsman WA.

Communities' webpage details 'how to make a complaint if you are a child or young person' (<https://www.wa.gov.au/organisation/departments-of-communities/how-make-complaint-if-you-are-child-or-young-person>). All of these mechanisms enable children and young people in care to choose how they wish to communicate their views or complaints, depending on their age and level of development.

Following assessment of Communities' complaints processes using the Commissioner's self-assessment tool, Communities is undertaking work to improve the complaints process to make it more child friendly.

Work undertaken to date includes surveying children and young people to seek their views about accessible complaints processes and consulting with key stakeholders including CREATE. The end product will include new complaints policies and procedures, easy read guides for children and young people and associated communication materials for children and young people promoting complaints processes.

It is anticipated that these materials will be displayed in Communities' offices including residential care homes.

Seeking children's views through case management

Children and young people in care can also talk to professionals who advocate on their behalf including CREATE WA and the Ombudsman WA. Additionally, processes and tools are embedded in case management activities throughout the life of a case to promote active engagement with children and young people in care.

These include:

- annual Viewpoint survey
- myView – a new app for young people in care to access information, ask for help or raise worries or concerns
- Sortli – an app named for the phrase 'sort out your life', managed by the CREATE foundation
- quarterly care and requirement to speak with the child on their own, and
- annual care planning process.

The myView app offers new pathways for young people in care to connect with their care teams about day-to-day matters and to contact other people in Communities, such as the Advocate and the Complaints Management Unit. It is hoped that using the app will make it easier for young people to seek assistance, and to be supported by Communities.

The app offers general relevant information for young people in care, emergency contact details and a digital memory box that allows them to securely store photos and memories throughout their time in care.

The app has a 'read aloud' function to ensure all young people can access it, even when they have literacy difficulties.

The goal of the Sortli app is to provide young people in care, transitioning out or have left care, with a confidential information portal to help them manage practical life challenges. It has information, step-by-step guides and short video clips on:

- finding a job
- managing and budgeting money
- securing a rental property
- managing health needs
- getting a driver's license, and
- getting legal advice and knowing your rights

Care Plan Review Panel

Communities has also progressed improvements to the operation of the Care Plan Review Panel (the Panel) to support more effective engagement with children, young people, their families and carers in the review process, and to ensure Panel members have relevant expertise and diversity as well as a clear understanding of their role and responsibilities in undertaking reviews of care planning decisions for children in care. This includes:

- continuing to increase Aboriginal representation on the Panel - following two recruitment processes during 2021, there are now six Aboriginal Panel members
- provision of induction training for new members and workshops for all members - the workshops support Panel members with their understanding of the legislation,

Communities child protection policy and practice frameworks, and promote maintaining the best interests of the child at the forefront of the review process

- strengthening governance through holding six monthly meetings between the Panel's Chairperson and a senior Communities leader, and
- training for staff on the Panel review process, which has been delivered via the Learning and Development Centre and other forums. A standalone entry for the Casework Practice Manual has been drafted and is pending finalisation.

The function of the Panel has been communicated through external stakeholder groups to promote the opportunity for children and young people, families and carers to seek review of care planning decisions if they do not believe the decision is in the best interests of the child/young person.

Review Recommendation 3

Recommendation 3 - Commission the scoping of work for the implementation of an information management system fit for the functions of the Department required under the CCS Act.

This recommendation is **accepted** and scoping work is **underway**

Communities is planning to implement a fit for purpose case management system and is developing a business case to seek funding from the Government's Digital Capability Fund.

As part of business case development, Communities is examining case management systems used in child protection agencies in other states and territories across Australia.

While this work has commenced, based on the experience of other jurisdictions it will take some time to fully implement. With this in mind, Communities is concurrently developing specific applications designed to integrate with any future system Communities might rollout. The aim of this process is to improve the overall functionality available to caseworkers and others so that service delivery to vulnerable clients over the short term can be improved without waiting for the introduction of a new case management system.

Review Recommendation 4

Recommendation 4 –

- a) Implement a new cohesive evidence informed framework to guide the Department's responses to children and young people with harmful sexual behaviours living at home, and for those living in out-of-home care.
- b) Resource, mandate and deliver harmful sexual behaviours training for all staff working directly with children in care, with a priority given to staff who work with children who have been placed in the residential care system in line with the Royal Commission's Recommendation 12.13. Once in place this training must be continuously reviewed to ensure that the content aligns with contemporary research and best practice and be delivered regularly.

This recommendation is **accepted** and implementation is **in progress**.

In 2021, Communities provided funding for a program of work in response to volume 10 of the Royal Commission 'Children with Harmful Sexual Behaviours'. The workplan comprises four main parts including: workforce development; evidence informed practice; specialist advisory and strategic support; and data capture and measurement.

In 2021, the program of work delivered:

1. a draft Framework for Guiding Responses to Harmful Sexual Behaviours in Children and Young People in the WA Child Protection System; and
2. a jurisdictional scan of evidence-based models for responding to harmful sexual behaviours and accompanying analysis about how learnings from other jurisdictions could be applied in WA.

The draft Framework is a direct response to 'part A' of the Review recommendation. It presents relevant evidence and theoretical underpinnings for understanding harmful sexual behaviours, general practice principles and four key domains for improved practice: building shared knowledge, understanding harmful sexual behaviours across a continuum, key principles or practice and responses to behaviours across the continuum.

The draft Framework was developed in consultation with child protection workers and staff across Communities including residential and secure care, district psychologists, and metropolitan and regional district staff, as well as the Specialist Child Protection Unit.

Improving evidence informed responses to harmful sexual behaviours is a priority focus in 2022. Communities will continue working with its partners to finalise and implement the Framework. Communities will also work to develop and release online, accredited training programs to support practitioner, family and foster carer understanding of harmful sexual behaviours including how to respond in various contexts including residential and out-of-home care settings.

The Standards Monitoring Unit will determine and report whether staff have received harmful sexual behaviours training in residential care and District Offices.

Review Recommendation 5

Recommendation 5 - Implement a system to ensure that before a child with harmful sexual behaviours is placed in residential out-of-home care, the following occurs:

- comprehensive assessment of the child with harmful sexual behaviours, including identifying their needs, therapeutic interventions and appropriate supports to ensure their safety
- establish clear case co-ordination and review processes and a package of support services
- undertake careful placement matching that includes:
 - i. providing sufficient relevant information to the residential care staff to ensure they are equipped to support the child, and additional training as necessary
 - ii. rigorously assessing potential threats to the safety of other children in the placement.

This recommendation is **accepted** and implementation is **in progress**.

Since 2017, significant work has been undertaken to strengthen child protection practice, including assessing and responding to children at high-risk in residential care.

New practice requirements and educational resources have been introduced in the Residential Care Practice Manual to provide guidance to staff on how to identify and respond to sexual behaviours (including harmful sexual behaviours).

It is relevant to note that Communities uses the Sanctuary Model as a basis for how it structures, organises and maintains organisational culture within residential care. Sanctuary was selected as the preferred model for Communities' residential care as it is a recognised organisational change model that incorporates healing for all aspects of the service including the organisation, staff and children. The Sanctuary model recognises that services (organisations and their staff) can be traumatised and ways of working need to align the organisational model with the model of therapeutic care for the children. The Sanctuary Model represents a theory-based, trauma-informed, whole culture approach. It has a clear and structured methodology for creating or changing an organisational culture.

Prior to and since tabling the Review in Parliament, there have been a number of immediate actions taken by Communities including a practice directive to frontline child protection staff. Communities must not knowingly place a child who is subject to reporting conditions under the *Community Protection (Offender Reporting) Act 2004* in residential care with other children (including their siblings). To support implementation of this important practice directive, practice guidance and supporting material has been developed, with relevant changes made to the Casework Practice Manual on 27 October 2021. As at April 2022, there are no current reportable offenders in residential care.

Both the practice guidance and supporting material highlight Communities' duty of care to other children and that special consideration must be given when making appropriate care arrangements for children who are a risk to others.

Within residential care there has been ongoing refinement and strengthening of practices to identify and respond to children with harmful sexual behaviours, including a strong focus on educational conversations with children about healthy relationships and sexuality, with such action critical to building safety for children.

Each child in residential care has a Residential Care Plan and a Safety Plan developed in conjunction with the child's district care team that identifies the possible risks posed or experienced by the child.

These Plans contain specific strategies to mitigate these risks to self or others. Where children in residential care exhibit harmful sexual behaviours, this is managed through their Safety Plan and multi-agency strategy meetings can be held with relevant stakeholders to understand the level of risk posed by such young people. These meetings inform joint safety planning.

In 2018, a comprehensive review was conducted of the Residential Care and Secure Care Staff Induction package, with a working party formed from both worksites. The induction package was updated to highlight the importance of discussion and notification of concerns particularly in relation to disclosures and boundaries as well as the following:

- discussion with new staff around the importance of reporting all concerns made by children
- how to report suspected misconduct
- highlighting the role of the Integrity Services Unit, and
- discussion about the Code of Conduct.

In 2018, Communities developed the 'Responding to Concerning Sexual Behaviours' training package to further educate staff. The training was delivered to metropolitan and regional and remote Residential Care staff.

In 2021, Communities' Learning and Development, Specialised Care and Accommodation Services and other partners, amended and contemporised the 'Responding to Concerning Sexualised Behaviours' training in line with the recommendations from the Royal Commission. The revised training, titled 'Orientation to Harmful Sexual Behaviours in Out of Home Care', which is targeted at entry-level residential care staff, will be rolled out from March 2022. The key learning outcomes are:

- Develop an understanding of Harmful Sexual Behaviours (HSB).
- Recognise cultural variations and influences on sexual behaviour assessment.
- Understand and apply the continuum of sexual behaviours when assessing and responding to behaviour.
- Develop protective strategies for staff working with Harmful Sexual Behaviours.

In 2019, Communities undertook a review of the Residential Care Practice Manual to improve staff responses to children exhibiting harmful sexual behaviours to align with recommendations of the Royal Commission. Enhancements included:

- a requirement for staff to immediately notify senior Residential Care staff of children with harmful sexual behaviours including any abuse in care allegations.
- a requirement for senior management to undertake an immediate risk assessment and review of the safety plan including measures that address the risk of children remaining in a placement together where the allegation is against another child or young person in the same placement
- a requirement for all allegations of abuse in care to be placed on the child's residential care file, and
- notification to a child's Case Worker, and implementation of a clear after-hours process, where staff notify the on-call Manager in the event of an allegation of an incident occurring while a child is in care.

Supervision is also provided for residential care staff to facilitate discussion of incidents and provide learning opportunities. Group reflection is held following a critical event to enable these to be processed and to identify any learnings.

In June 2020, in line with recommendations made by the Ombudsman WA, Communities undertook a review of practice guidance within the Casework Practice Manual, completed in collaboration with its Residential Care team, to ensure the inclusion of guidance regarding how to effectively identify and manage risks where a child in a care arrangement may pose a risk to another child or children, including where a child or young person displays harmful sexual behaviours. The practice guidance includes strategies to enhance collaborative practice across work areas and instructions on how to conduct comprehensive safety planning to mitigate risk. As part of this process, Communities' strengthened its guidance regarding safety planning, risk assessment and use of alerts on Assist.

The existing Child Sexual Abuse Policy is also being updated to include information about understanding and responding to harmful sexual behaviours.

The revised policy aligns with the definition of harmful sexual behaviours as defined in Volume 10 of the Final Report of the Royal Commission. The policy will include information about:

- assessing whether harmful sexual behaviours have caused harm to either the child exhibiting the behaviours and/or the child victim, the impact of this harm on either child and whether either child is in need of protection; and
- developing, implementing and reviewing safety plans which promote children's safety and reduce the likelihood of child victims being exposed to further sexual abuse and/or harmful sexual behaviours.

Work to improve evidence informed responses to harmful sexual behaviours is an ongoing focus and priority in 2022, as Communities works with its partners to develop and release online, accredited training programs to support participants understanding and assessment of harmful sexual behaviours, therapeutic interventions, and how to respond to the issue in various contexts including residential and out-of-home care settings.

Commissioning Project - Out-of-Home Care Reform

In 2021, Communities substantially progressed reform in the out-of-home care sector by commencing the procurement process for four new types of care, as follows:

- temporary (short term)
- community foster care
- group care
- complex care

Changes to the types of care and design of out-of-home care will enable for improved placement matching for children in care that is informed and guided by the child's unique care needs. To inform service model design and the procurement approach, Communities has been engaging with key stakeholders through a series of design lab workshops. An open tender process to identify suitable providers will commence in early 2022.

The development of the complex care type is most relevant to the Review. The purpose of complex care is to provide safe, stable and therapeutic care arrangements for children with exceptionally complex needs, who pose a significant risk to themselves and/or others. A child can be cared for by an individual and/or in group living (excepting those children who have reporting conditions under the *Community Protection (Offender Reporting) Act 2004*) dependent on the needs of the child or young person. The design and procurement of a complex care service is on track within the original timeframe of completion by 2023.

Review Recommendation 6

Recommendation 6 - Provide comprehensive specialist services to children and young people in out-of-home care who are displaying or have experienced harmful sexual behaviours

This recommendation is **accepted** and implementation is **in progress**.

In WA, therapeutic services for victims and survivors of child sexual abuse and children with harmful sexual behaviours are primarily delivered by the Departments of Communities, Health and Justice including via funding contracts with the community services sector.

Communities funds \$5.2 million annually to Child Sexual Abuse Therapeutic Services (CSATS) and Indigenous Healing Services (IHS) at different locations across metropolitan and regional WA. Work is underway to develop a strategic commissioning plan for the CSATS and IHS service group that will set out a blueprint for progressive reforms toward:

- sustainable funding arrangements
- evidence based, fit for community purpose, service models
- outcomes based contracting
- improved capacity and capability to address harmful sexual behaviours
- culturally informed and culturally secure services for Aboriginal people
- key system reforms for supporting how CSATS and IHS providers, working alongside partner agencies in government and community services, support safety, healing and recovery for children and families in the WA community.

The project will provide an opportunity to contemporise and localise service models and consider the current capability of the broader service system inclusive of health, justice, police, mental health and child protection to provide seamless integrated service delivery. It will also provide a current analysis of need and unmet demand for services.

In 2021, development of the strategic commissioning plan commenced with one to one meetings with CSATS and IHS service providers to enable discussion about service model re-design, sustainability, issues and opportunities. A design lab was held with all service providers in October 2021 which focused on initial discussions about the outcomes that these services are seeking to achieve for:

- children and young people who have experienced sexual abuse;
- children and young people exhibiting harmful sexual behaviours; and
- the families of children and young people who have experienced sexual abuse and/or exhibited harmful sexual behaviours.

The CSATS commissioning work will continue in 2022 with client journey mapping, further design labs, reviews of relevant literature and analysis of need and unmet demand. The Strategic Commissioning Plan including next steps will be produced by the end of 2022.

The Commissioning Plan will provide the evidence and actions required to ensure that specialist services are available for children who have experienced sexual abuse or who are exhibiting harmful sexual behaviours.

Review Recommendation 7

<p>Recommendation 7 - Review and align the risk assessment processes of the Department with the Royal Commission recommendations and the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations.</p>

This recommendation is **accepted** and implementation is **in progress**.

The Royal Commission made several recommendations about how to make institutions safer for children and young people now and into the future.

The National Principles for Child Safe Organisations (the National Principles) and recommendations about which organisations they should apply to (such as child protection services including out-of-home care) promote safe environments where the rights, needs and interests of children are met. Implementation of the National Principles will prevent abuse into the future and reduce the overall incidence of child sexual abuse perpetrated outside of the family home. Communities is working across government to lead implementation of the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations. A risk management approach has been adopted for this work.

The Standards Monitoring Unit has included the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations into its assessments of Communities' Residential Group Homes, District Offices and out-of-home care services to provide data on the compliance of Communities with the National Principles.

Review Recommendation 8

Recommendation 8 - Commission and publicly release research regarding best practice in relation to models of residential care to inform the future design, resourcing and implementation of evidence based, safe and therapeutic, sustainable model of care for children and young people, including those with HSB.

This recommendation is **accepted** and scoping work is **in progress**.

Communities intends to procure an independent researcher to undertake this piece of work, with anticipated timeframes for finalisation to be provided at the completion of the scoping phase.

In October 2020, Communities established the Specialist Child Protection Unit following extensive consultation with Communities' staff and stakeholders in the child protection sector. The Specialist Child Protection Unit was established to elevate the profile of child protection and provide a leading voice on child protection matters, both within Communities and across the sector. The Specialist Child Protection Unit provides a system stewardship approach to adopting best practice, embracing culturally responsive services and embedding sector-wide continuous improvement, with the aim to improve outcomes for children, young people and their families.

Through the Specialist Child Protection Unit, Communities is building relationships, processes and evidence to keep children safe, enable them to thrive and support their connection to families, communities, Country and cultures.

A key function of the Unit includes working with key stakeholders, including academics to commission research to support best practice in all areas of child protection, including residential care. In follow up discussions with the Commissioner and his office following the release of the report, the Commissioner's office confirmed that the research should have two components:

- Best practice residential care arrangements for children and young people in general (with the intent that WA would adopt best practice elements where they are not already in the current residential care model).
- More specific research regarding best practice residential care models and therapeutic responses for children and young people with harmful sexual behaviours who are placed in residential care.

Review Recommendation 9

Recommendation 9 - Resource and deliver effective sexual education, protective behaviours, respectful relationship, 'speaking up' training and support to all children and young people in residential care, and the staff who provide them with support, to reduce the risk of abuse and exploitation and to those who care for them in line with Royal Commission Recommendations 12.9, 12.10, 12.11, 12.13.

This recommendation is **accepted** and implementation is **in progress**.

Within residential care there has been ongoing refinement and strengthening of practices to identify and respond to children with harmful sexual behaviours, including a strong focus on educational conversations with children about healthy relationships and sexuality, with such action critical to building safety for children.

Communities will explore how to supplement existing practice with more direct and deliberate education programs about sexual education, protective behaviours, respectful relationships and 'speaking up' training.

Once these processes are established, the Standards Monitoring Unit will determine and report whether staff and children and young people in residential care have received sexual education, protective behaviour, respectful relationships and 'speaking up' training'.

A precise and time-bound plan

In parallel to the State Government's consideration of the Review findings and recommendations, Communities has developed a consistent approach to the management of oversight findings, recommendations and progress reporting. Communities has recently established the Reviews and Recommendations Oversight Group (the Oversight Group), to align and streamline relevant activities across the agency.

The Oversight Group was established to endorse themed work packages and oversight the implementation of internal and external recommendations delivered to Communities.

Oversight Group members who represent a number of divisions across Communities and hold decision-making authority, are responsible for developing an environment of continuous practice improvement through the identification of:

- opportunities to inform and drive reforms through regular review of risk themes and practice trends, and
- interdependencies and opportunities to work across business areas to deliver holistic, effective results.

It is through this forum that the findings and recommendations from the Review will be coordinated and monitored to achieve deliverables.

A detailed implementation plan for the first 12 months and specific workplans will be developed by mid-April 2022 to respond to the recommendations and actions outlined in the Review. The implementation plan will include specific timeframes, lead areas and phased actions to be progressed.

Communities will provide annual progress reports to the Commissioner for Children and Young People as outlined in the Review, commencing from September 2022 until the delivery of recommendations is satisfied.