

Communiqué – Meeting 10 and 11 October 2012, Adelaide

The Australian Children's Commissioners and Guardians' (ACCG) second meeting for 2012 was held in Adelaide on 10 and 11 October.

The ACCG aims to promote children's rights and participation and ensure the best interests of children are considered in public policy and program development across Australia.

The meeting began with a welcome to country from Kurna Elder Auntie Josie Agius.

Psychotropic Medication Use

The ACCG again discussed the importance of consistent clinical guidance on the management of psychotropic medication to vulnerable children and young people, particularly those in out of home care. There may be an opportunity to link this issue with health assessments under the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children.

The ACCG will convene a roundtable discussion in 2013 in Melbourne to bring together interested parties with expertise, responsibilities and influence in this area, with the aim of progressing consensus on practice.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People

The wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Children is a priority area of interest for ACCG.

To progress this work the meeting agreed to convene a half day discussion about the wellbeing and treatment of Aboriginal children and young people in contact with the juvenile justice system, to coincide with the next ACCG meeting in Hobart.

Children's Rights

The ACCG will prepare a charter of rights for young people in juvenile justice detention for consideration at the next ACCG meeting.

National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children

Following an invitation from the Federal Minister for Community Services for further discussion on the progress of action on the plan, ACCG discussed its major interest

in child protection workforce trends, information sharing across jurisdictions, and application of common assessment tools.

Moving from Out of Home Care to Independence

Resolving issues for young people leaving care is a priority area of action for the ACCG.

The ACCG will request a briefing from the Department of Education, Employment and

Workplace Relations on the outcomes of the 2011 review of the Transition to Independent Living Allowance. At its next meeting the ACCG will also consider the key findings from a comprehensive review conducted by the Victorian Commissioner into the circumstances for a small group of young people at high risk, if available.

Monitoring Conditions for Young People who are Detained

The ACCG discussed future United Nations and national monitoring of Australian detention facilities following the Australian Government's ratification of the Optional Protocol for the UN Convention Against Torture. This issue is of particular interest to ACCG because of their varied jurisdictional responsibilities for monitoring conditions for young people who are detained. It was agreed that ACCG write to the Commonwealth Attorney-General to express interest in contributing to the development of the National Preventative Mechanism which will oversee the monitoring and reporting on conditions for all people who are detained.

Information sharing when children are at risk

The ACCG received an update on implementation and application of the South Australian Information Sharing Guidelines for Promoting the Safety and Wellbeing of Children, Young People and their Families and the benefits of a process that enables information sharing for early intervention among agencies. There is potential for such a process to apply to information sharing across jurisdictions.

Improving Educational Outcomes for children in Out of Home Care

Educational outcomes for children in out of home care continue to be a priority for the ACCG. The ACCG discussed case audits and other data collection conducted in some jurisdictions, different approaches to outcomes measurement and the inclusion of the voice of young people in the determination of outcomes. Further discussion at the next ACCG meeting will consider examples of legislative reform, audit findings and a summary of related activity in states and territories.

Working with children checks

Discussion focused on a comparison of systems for undertaking Working With Children checks. Recent legislative changes in NSW and implications for agencies, volunteers and paid staff were highlighted. The ACCG discussed the work of the National Operators Forum associated with the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children, how safeguarding is enhanced by pre-employment checks, and the importance for consistency in promoting child safe and child friendly practice.

Homelessness and Child Protection

The ACCG discussed child protection and homelessness and the interaction between related service systems. Consideration was given to the benefit of protocols between services, centralised referrals and accreditation of providers.

Next meeting

The next meeting of the ACCG will be held in May 2013 in Hobart.

For further information on the ACCG and the work of Children's Commissioners and Guardians from across Australia, please contact the ACCG National Convenor, Elizabeth Fraser, on 07 3211 6992.