

Commissioner Paul Anastassiou KC  
Child Safety Commission of Inquiry  
GPO Box 783  
Brisbane Qld 4000

Dear Commissioner,

Thank you for your recent meeting with us to discuss the Queensland Commission of Inquiry into Child Safety and how QATSICPP can be of assistance to you as Commissioner in undertaking your very important role. We valued this opportunity to discuss with you how we might work together to ensure the Inquiry benefits from the knowledge and insights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities across Queensland.

Over the past few weeks QATSICPP has brought together leaders from our member organisations across the state to yarn about our collective approach to the Commission of Inquiry into Child Safety (the Inquiry).

The Inquiry represents an opportunity for us as a sector to challenge the current system responses and create a vision for the system that honours our knowledge, practices and wisdom.

From our conversations with member organisations, QATSICPP has developed a summary of key messages, insights and knowledge we want to share with the Inquiry from its beginning.

Acknowledging that QATSICPP and our members will provide further insight and knowledge as the Inquiry runs its course, this outlines some of our key reflections at this stage, as well as some questions we would encourage the Commissioner to explore.

In discussions to date four key themes have emerged, which are reflected in the building blocks of the Family Matters campaign. The building blocks were designed in Queensland and adopted nationally as a response to the Carmody Inquiry to guide how investment and systems should be orientated, to eliminate over-representation and provide a strong framework for the knowledge and insights we want to share with this Inquiry.

**Building Block 1: All families enjoy access to quality, culturally safe, universal and targeted services necessary for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to thrive.**

- There is a harmful over-reliance on residential care, especially for younger children, driven by underinvestment in family support, kinship care, and culturally led alternatives.
- Investing in families reduces the trauma of separation and removal and leads to improved physical health, social, emotional and productivity outcomes over the course of a child's life.
- Culturally safe early intervention programs are not systemically embedded in government referral practices.
- The system must shift from bureaucratic risk management to child and family wellbeing, centred on lived experience.
- Inconsistent Departmental practices across regions and poor information sharing continue to undermine collaboration and delay support.
- The system continues to remove newborn babies without early, proactive support, often failing to meaningfully engage parents or refer to family support services when concerns about children are identified.
- Family Wellbeing Services and Family Participation Programs are proven to keep children safe and reunify families but are underfunded and receive referrals too late.
- There is an urgent need to reform referral pathways, improve cross-agency data sharing, and increase funding to meet demand.
- The last three Family Matters reports have highlighted a failure to sufficiently invest in early support for families so children can live safely at home, whilst over-representation of our children in out-of-home care (OOHC) remains at high levels. We need intentional investment in proven Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled services.

**Key issues the Inquiry should explore in partnership with us include:**

- What system changes need to occur to ensure every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family in need of support receives timely, effective services?
- How will new models of residential care developed for Queensland be tailored to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, including cultural governance, informed healing practice, and connection to Country?

**Building Block 2: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations participate in and have control over decisions that affect their children.**

- Participation is a key element of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle, but is often a key element overlooked in child protection processes, which creates significant barriers to appropriate, early and effective interventions.

- Residential care use has increased by 44% over the past five years, raising urgent questions about the absence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices in decision-making about where children are placed.
- There should be legislative reform to ensure Delegated Authority has the potential to continue to create positive outcomes.
- A co-designed, legislated roadmap is needed to reduce child removals, backed by independent oversight and accountability mechanisms.

**Key questions the Inquiry should explore in partnership with us include:**

- Will cultural authority and decision-making structures be formally recognised in governance systems, not just in advisory contexts?
- How is the Department ensuring culturally safe and self-determined pathways through and out of the system for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children?

**Building Block 3: Law, policy and practice in child and family welfare are culturally safe and responsive.**

- Support must be redirected to a full continuum of culturally safe, family-based responses, ensuring children enter care only as a last resort and remain connected to family, community, and culture.
- On-Country, kin-based residential care models led by ATSICCOs are supported.
- Cultural connection must be central, not secondary, to care and protection.
- Delegated Authority must be supported as it is showing promising outcomes for families, demonstrating the value of ATSICCO-led decision-making.
- The February 2025 commitment to transfer funding from non-Indigenous NGOs to ATSICCOs is welcomed and must be accelerated.
- Outcomes must be prioritised over compliance, to mitigate the fact that the system is perpetuated by a risk-averse, siloed culture, that leads to inconsistent practice and excessive caseloads.
- Cultural and spiritual needs must be recognised as core components of wellbeing, not optional extras.
- We warn against non-traditional adoption as a permanent solution for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children as it can sever cultural and familial ties, which is particularly harmful for Indigenous children. Instead we should look to culturally safe alternatives that prioritise connection to family, community, and culture.

**Key questions the Inquiry should explore in partnership with us include:**

- How will this Inquiry ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are not just ‘cared for’ in systems, but nurtured through cultural connection, kinship and community-led healing?
- What role does intergenerational trauma play in placement breakdowns, and how is this being acknowledged or addressed systemically?
- How is the system supporting culturally appropriate, wrap-around responses when kinship care placements show early signs of stress or potential breakdown?

#### **Building Block 4: Governments and services are accountable to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people**

- The Carmody Inquiry provided clear direction for reform of the system, yet many issues remain unresolved. There is frustration that this Inquiry risks repeating known problems without enacting real change.
- There needs to be cultural and practice change, not just policy reform.
- There is a need for clear KPIs, transparent decision-making, and independent oversight, including culturally informed practice panels.

#### **Key questions the Inquiry should explore in partnership with us include:**

What accountability is being placed on services that fail to connect children to culture, mob and Country?

How is the inquiry embedding cultural accountability in its process – are Elders, community-controlled organisations and families directly guiding recommendations?

#### **Overarching Messages**

- In our consultations with members the following overarching messages to the Inquiry have been identified:
- The Inquiry was called without community input—now communities must shape its direction. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices must be central in shaping the system.
- Success must be measured using qualitative and community-led data, not just mandated program metrics.
- Regions where community-led approaches are working must be highlighted, while calling out what needs urgent reform.
- There is a need for performance frameworks that embed accountability into practice, governance and investment decisions.
- Independent review is only meaningful if it reflects cultural values, respects lived experience and leads to real action – not more reports.

QATSICPP trusts you will find the above information useful in your work investigating the key issues and solutions facing Queensland's child safety system. We look forward to discussing these issue and other issues with you further and participating the Commission's various engagement and policy development activities.

Yours sincerely,



**Lizzie Adams**

Executive Chairperson

