



youth  
coalition  
of the ACT

# Submission to the ACT Budget 2022-23

Providing supports for children  
and young people aged 10-13

The Youth Coalition of the ACT acknowledge the traditional owners and continuing custodians of the lands of the ACT and pay our respects to the Elders, families and ancestors.

We acknowledge that the effect of forced removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people from their families as well as past racist policies and actions continues today. We acknowledge that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples hold distinctive rights as the original people of modern-day Australia including the right to a distinct status and culture, self-determination and land. We celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and the invaluable contribution they make to our community.

### **About the Youth Coalition of the ACT**

The Youth Coalition of the ACT is the peak youth affairs body in the Australian Capital Territory. The Youth Coalition's vision is for an ACT community that values and provides opportunity, participation, justice and equity for all young people. The Youth Coalition undertakes policy development, sector development, research and evaluation, advocacy and representation activities to improve outcomes for young people and their families.

A key role of the Youth Coalition is the development and analysis of ACT social policy and program decisions that affect young people and youth services. The Youth Coalition facilitates the development of strong linkages and promotes collaboration between the community, government and private sectors to achieve better outcomes for young people in the ACT.

Prepared by team members Erin Barry and Dr Justin Barker.

## ACT Budget 2022-23: Providing supports for children and young people aged 10-13, and their families

The Parliamentary and Governing Agreement for the 10<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly included a welcome and long-awaited commitment to raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility.

Alongside experts and advocates across the human rights, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, medical and legal sectors, the Youth Coalition supports raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 14 years. We congratulate the ACT Government for being the first Australian jurisdiction to recognise and act to prevent the damaging and potentially life-long effects of incarceration on children and young people.

In 2021, the ACT Budget delivered \$795,000 over two years to progress this important reform. Additional work was also commissioned through the Justice and Community Safety Directorate to review the ACT service system to assess the changes required to improve outcomes for children and young people. The review was carried out by Professor Morag McArthur, Dr Aino Suomi and Curijo Pty Ltd. Their report<sup>1</sup> identified a **range of gaps within the current service system that require attention** in order to meet the needs of children and young people aged 10-13.

Current service system gaps identified in the report relate to:

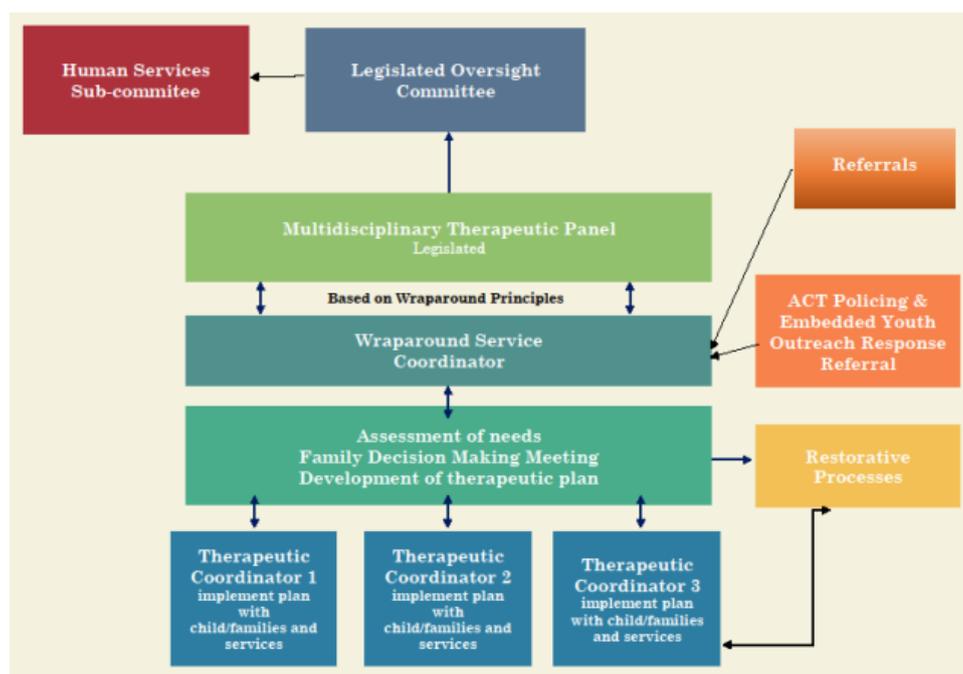
- A lack of coordination and integration across the service system, including: limited information sharing, lack of capacity to work with children with multiple needs, limited specialised and generalist programs, inflexible service delivery modes, barriers navigating the system, limited understanding of familial and cultural needs, and long waiting lists;
- Children aged 10-13, and especially those under the age of 12, are often ineligible for a range of services in the ACT, due to their age, comorbidities, or level of complexity;
- Workforce capability issues;
- The need for a trauma-informed workforce;
- The need for safe accommodation for children, including crisis accommodation for this age group and a secure therapeutic facility. (p 8)

McArthur et al.'s review proposes a **Multidisciplinary Therapeutic Panel (MTP) and Wraparound Service**, including a crisis response, to better meet the needs of these children and young people, and their families. Implementation of the MTP and Wraparound Service is a necessary step to ensure that critical and coordinated supports are in place for children aged 10-13 years.

Importantly, while the service model addresses the needs of children and young people at risk of coming into contact with the justice system, it will also provide coordinated support to a larger population of children aged in the 'middle years' and their families, who have complex needs.

<sup>1</sup> McArthur, M., Suomi, A., Kendall, B. (2021). *Review of the service system and implementation requirements for raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility in the ACT - Final Report*. Canberra: Curijo and Australian National University.

The review by McArthur et al. describes a range of risk factors within childhood that can lead to justice system involvement. These include but are not limited to complexity, disability, complex family dynamics, adverse childhood experiences, trauma, intergenerational crime, and involvement with the child protection system. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are also overrepresented in the justice system. The review noted that many children and families who experience risk factors do not become involved with the youth justice system but may still be in need of support services. It is a **well-known problem in the ACT that children aged 8-14 and their families experience barriers accessing early and appropriate support**, which can lead to a range of negative outcomes.



McArthur et al. 2021. Figure 5. Multidisciplinary Therapeutic Panel and Wraparound Service (p 63)

The core components of the proposed service model include:

- a **crisis response**, in which police respond to the safety and other needs of children, including after hours. This includes a non-justice youth work response and safe accommodation options;
- a **Multidisciplinary Therapeutic Panel (MTP)**, a legislated, collaborative forum that would meet regularly to discuss service delivery options for children with complex needs and oversee the wraparound service;
- a **Wraparound Service**, providing a highly-skilled and supported team of therapeutic coordinators who work directly with the children and their families to engage in assessment, access appropriate support services and facilitate restorative processes;
- a **legislated Oversight Committee** comprised of community-based and government members, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives, and the Commissioner for Children and Young People.

Important considerations for the implementation of the MTP and Wraparound Service model, and broader reform of the service system noted throughout the review include:

- **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Self-determination:** It is essential that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and services play a key role in determining and designing appropriate responses to meet the needs of Aboriginal children and families;
- **Legislating the MTP and Wraparound Service response:** Consultations in the review identified the need for an MTP to be legislated to ensure it has the authority to provide timely and coordinated supports to children and families;
- **Mandatory service engagement:** The review noted that mandated measures are often not effective nor aligned with therapeutic approaches, and efforts should be placed on supporting voluntary engagement with services. Legislative mechanisms already exist which could be amended, and there may be a need to modify existing facilities to provide secure therapeutic support.
- **Enhancing the capacity of services and systems:** The review identifies a range of evidence-informed sector enhancements, such as the expansion of Functional Family Therapy, introduction of Multisystemic Therapy and other parenting programs. It describes the need to strengthen early and coordinated support across sectors, strengthen universal services, and build workforce capacity.

Existing services may be optimised and expanded to develop and deliver the MTP and Wraparound Service Model, building on current evidence-based programs that have demonstrated effective engagement with children, young people and their families.

Addressing the support needs of children aged 10-13 and their families, and raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility, aligns with the **ACT Government's Wellbeing Framework**, through its focus on improving safety, health, human rights and commitment to developing restorative practices.

Furthermore, improving outcomes for these children and young people links directly to the **ACT Government's commitment towards justice reinvestment initiatives** to provide early support, prevent children from becoming involved with the youth justice system and reduce longer-term recidivism. Progressing this work will have wide-reaching benefits to children, young people and families in the ACT community.

## Contact details

For more information about the Youth Coalition's position and advocacy in relation to supporting children aged 10-13 and their families, and raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility, contact:

Dr Justin Barker  
Executive Director  
Youth Coalition of the ACT  
Phone: (02) 6247 3540  
Email: [justin@youthcoalition.net](mailto:justin@youthcoalition.net)