

# Media Release

**The Hon Luke Donnellan MP**  
Minister for Child Protection  
Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers



Tuesday, 5 October 2021

## STRENGTHENING PROTECTION FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Victoria's landmark reform to support all care-leavers up to the age of 21 will be enshrined in law as part of significant amendments to the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* introduced into Parliament today.

The Bill will reshape the children and families system to focus on earlier intervention and prevention, strengthen the rights of the child and legislate Victoria's *Home Stretch* program.

Home Stretch provides continued support until the age of 21 to every Victorian leaving care – around 700 young people a year – to assist their transition to adulthood. Victoria became the first Australian state to make the program universal this year, and the Bill will require in law that these supports are provided.

The amendments will strengthen requirements for children to be supported to participate in decision-making about their futures – as well as to convene family group conferences, which bring families together with an independent facilitator to make a plan for a child's wellbeing prior to the need for court intervention.

In an Australian first, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations will be enabled to lead the response to child protection reports about Aboriginal children.

This will contribute to efforts to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal children in care by 45 per cent by 2031 under the Closing the Gap Agreement, and support *Wungurilwil Gapgapduir*, the landmark partnership between Government, the Aboriginal community and the child and family sector based on self-determination.

As part of this, all five aspects of the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle will also be legislated to recognise the importance of prevention, participation, partnership, placement and maintaining connection to culture.

The reforms enable new child protection reports on at-risk 17-year-olds, closing a long-standing service gap. Currently a 17-year-old fleeing violence or abuse at home cannot receive child protection services or in many cases adult services, placing them at high risk of homelessness and contact with the justice system.

The changes provide new protections for individuals who make reports in good faith about child sexual abuse in institutional contexts. This responds to a key recommendation made by the *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse*, which found the fear of reprisal can prevent reporting of child abuse.

The Government is providing more support than ever before for at-risk children, their families and carers, through a massive \$1.2 billion boost for the children and families system in the *Victorian Budget 2021/22* – on top of the unprecedented \$1 billion in last year's Budget.

### Quotes attributable to Minister for Child Protection Luke Donnellan

*"By legislating Home Stretch, we're making sure no young person misses out on the critical support they need to thrive as they transition into adult life."*

*"Every child has the right to reach their full potential – these reforms will keep children safe and families strong."*

*"We are transforming the child protection system from focusing on crisis response to earlier intervention and prevention through an unprecedented investment and reform agenda."*

**Media contact:** David Donaldson 0400 881 562 | david.donaldson@minstaff.vic.gov.au