

The Hon Ivan Dean MLC
Chair
Parliamentary Standing Committee of Public Accounts
By email: pac@parliament.tas.gov.au

3 July 2020

Dear Chair

Thank you for your letter of 1 July 2020 inviting a submission to the inquiry being conducted by the Public Accounts Committee into the Tasmanian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

I enclose my 5 June 2020 submission to the Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Council and ask that you consider this to be my submission to the Committee's inquiry.

I am about to undergo a surgical procedure which necessitates that I take a period of six weeks medical leave, returning back to work in late August. I will be available at that time should the Committee wish to raise any matters with me.

I thank you for your invitation to participate in this inquiry.

Yours sincerely



Leanne McLean
Commissioner for Children and Young People

Encl: Submission 5 June 2020 to the Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Council

Your Ref:
Our Ref:

5 June 2020

Don Challen AM
Chair
Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council
By email: secretariat.PESRAC@treasury.tas.gov.au

Dear Chair

Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council - Stage One Consultation

I welcome the opportunity to formally contribute to the Stage One Consultation of the Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council (the Council). Whilst I acknowledge my individual membership of the Council, this submission constitutes my formal contribution as Tasmania's independent statutory advocate for children and young people. The aim of this submission is to help inform the Council's advice to the Premier on the strategies and initiatives which will support Tasmania's short to medium, and longer-term recovery from COVID-19.

This first consultation has been described as a 'Listening Phase' to help the Council gain a rapid understanding of the current situation arising from the COVID-19 pandemic at a broad level to inform its interim report to the Premier. It is also intended to assist in developing the Council's approach to its Stage Two Consultation in July/August 2020.

I commend the Council on its flexible approach to consultation. Meaningful consultation, including with children and young people, is vital to understanding the social and economic effects of the pandemic on our community in the short to medium, and longer-term. It is also key to shaping the strategies and other activities that will be necessary to recover from the pandemic, to build on our existing strengths and to shape the future. I strongly encourage the Council to explore options for hearing directly from children and young people around Tasmania during the next consultation phase, a matter I discuss in more detail in this submission.

About the Commissioner for Children and Young People

The Commissioner for Children and Young People is an independent statutory office established under Tasmania's *Commissioner for Children and Young People Act 2016* (the CCYP Act). At its very essence, the role of the Commissioner is to promote the rights and wellbeing of **all** children and young people in Tasmania aged less than 18 years.



The Commissioner's functions, which are set out in section 8(1) of the CCYP Act, include:

- advocating for all children and young people in the State generally;
- acting as an advocate for a detainee under the *Youth Justice Act 1997* (Tas);
- researching, investigating and influencing policy development into matters relating to children and young people generally;
- promoting, monitoring and reviewing the wellbeing of children and young people generally;
- promoting and empowering the participation of children and young people in the making of decisions, or the expressing of opinions on matters, that may affect their lives; and
- assisting in ensuring the State satisfies its national and international obligations in respect of children and young people generally.

In performing these and other functions under the CCYP Act, the Commissioner is required to do so according to the principle that the wellbeing and best interests of children and young people are paramount and must observe any relevant provisions of the UN *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (the CRC).¹

Importantly, the Commissioner must act independently, impartially and in the public interest when performing a function, or exercising a power, under the CCYP Act or any other Act. The Commissioner is also required to give special regard to the needs and interests of children and young people who are vulnerable or disadvantaged for any reason.²

The four general principles of the CRC which I use as a shorthand guide for my work are:

- The child's **right to non-discrimination** (Article 2 CRC).
- The child's **right to have their best interests taken into account** as a primary consideration in all actions and decisions that affect them (Article 3 CRC).
- The child's **right to life, survival and development** (Article 6 CRC).
- The child's **right to have a say** in all matters affecting them and for their views to be taken into account (Article 12 CRC).

¹ CCYP Act, s3(1); UN *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC) 1989, (resolution 44/25), opened for signature 20 November 1989, entered into force 2 September 1990, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

² CCYP Act, s3(2). Section 4 of the CCYP provides that:

Vulnerable, in relation to a child or young person, includes –

(a) a child or young person who is the subject of proceedings under the *Youth Justice Act 1997*; and

(b) a child or young person who is, or was, the subject of a care and protection order under the *Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act 1997*; and

(c) a child or young person who is at risk within the meaning of the *Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act 1997*; and

(d) a child or young person who is receiving, or has received, services under the *Youth Justice Act 1997* or Part 5 of the *Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act 1997*



These and the other rights under the CRC are often referred to as being “interrelated, interdependent and indivisible”.

Consistent with the statutory functions of the Commissioner, my comments focus on matters that are particularly relevant to promoting and protecting the rights, wellbeing and best interests of children and young people in Tasmania.

Current context

It is important to acknowledge that the effects of the pandemic on children and young people in Tasmania, including effects on their health and wellbeing, are likely to be profound and to compound pre-existing challenges. The United Nations recently made the following observations:

Children are not the face of this pandemic. But they risk being among its biggest victims. While they have thankfully been largely spared from the direct health effects of COVID-19 – at least to date – the crisis is having a profound effect on their wellbeing. All children, of all ages, and in all countries, are being affected, in particular by the socio-economic impacts and, in some cases, by mitigation measures that may inadvertently do more harm than good. This is a universal crisis and, for some children, the impact will be lifelong.³

As well as having immediate effects on children and young people’s wellbeing, the COVID-19 pandemic is expected to also have medium to longer-term effects for children and young people. It is anticipated that adverse effects of the pandemic will be even more severe and long-lasting for those children and young people who are vulnerable or disadvantaged for any reason, including but not limited to those children and young people who live in poverty, who have disabilities, who are homeless, and those in the child safety system or detention.⁴

I recently published a [Commissioner for Children and Young People Monitoring and Advocacy During COVID-19](#) framework which provides more information about my approach to monitoring and advocacy during COVID-19. I am closely monitoring the short, medium and long-term effects of the pandemic on the wellbeing of children and young people in Tasmania, with a focus on the needs of those who are vulnerable or disadvantaged for any reason.

To gain a picture of how children and young people are faring in the context of the pandemic, I have embarked on a process of engaging with and listening to any concerns raised by children and young people, service providers, advocacy organisations, family and carers and other community members, about the provision of services and supports to children and young people in Tasmania. I am also interested to hear about things that may be going well at this time and to understand any opportunities that have arisen in the context of COVID-19 which can help to better promote the wellbeing of children and young people.

³ United Nations (2020), *Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on children*, 15 April, p.2, https://unsdq.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-04/160420_Covid_Children_Policy_Brief.pdf

⁴ United Nations (2020), *Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on children*, 15 April, https://unsdq.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-04/160420_Covid_Children_Policy_Brief.pdf



Quantitative data is also vital to completing this picture. While I have encountered some challenges to accessing timely contemporaneous data which can measure trends and the effects of COVID-19 on children and young people, I have been engaging in collaborative discussions with government agencies to identify measures and to seek regular reporting of data to my office. I speak about this in more detail below.

As I said in my February 2020 report, *Investing in the Wellbeing of Tasmania's Children and Young People*,⁵ the future prosperity of our state by any measure, be it social, economic, or environmental, depends on us enabling all Tasmanian children and young people to have a good life, to grow up healthy and safe, to learn and to participate.

Wellbeing has been defined by the Tasmanian Government as:

The state where a child or young person feels loved and safe; has access to material basics; has their physical, mental and emotional health needs met; is learning and participating; and has a positive sense of culture and identity.⁶

The wellbeing of children and young people is influenced by everything around them and the different experiences and needs they have at different developmental stages. This includes their individual circumstances, the supports they receive from their caregivers and their community, and the services that support them.⁷ This view of children and young people as being influenced by their surroundings is consistent with the ecological model of child development, which recognises that families, communities and broader society all contribute to a child's sense of wellbeing.⁸

While I acknowledge the efforts of current and previous governments to improve the wellbeing of Tasmania's children and young people, many wellbeing outcomes of children and young people in Tasmania have remained stagnant or worsened over time, despite our best efforts. Contributing factors have included a lack of coordination between government departments and other organisations supporting children and their families, and investment being focused more on crisis intervention than prevention and early intervention supports. It is important to acknowledge that COVID-19 is likely to exacerbate pre-existing disadvantages and vulnerabilities experienced by children and young people, as well as increase the numbers of children and young people who experience disadvantage.

Children and young people deserve special consideration in our recovery process not just because responding to their wellbeing needs upholds their rights under the CRC, but because their success (which is largely dependent on their wellbeing) also drives our future economic growth. Seen this way, it is important that we develop and implement strategies and initiatives during and after the pandemic which keep the rights and wellbeing of children and young people, and the broader contexts in which they live, at the forefront.

⁵ Commissioner for Children and Young People (Tas) (2020), *Investing in the Wellbeing of Tasmania's Children and Young People*, Hobart. <https://www.childcomm.tas.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/Investing-in-the-Wellbeing-of-Tasmanias-Children-and-Young-People.pdf>

⁶ Tasmanian Government (2018), *Tasmanian Child and Youth Wellbeing Framework*. https://www.strongfamiliesafekids.tas.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0023/5549/1-Tasmanian-Child-and-Youth-Wellbeing-Framework-Web.pdf

⁷ Scottish Government (2018), *Getting it right for every child: Understanding wellbeing*. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/getting-right-childunderstanding-wellbeing-leaflet/pages/1/>

⁸ Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979), *The ecology of human development*, Harvard University Press.



While the recommendations I made in my February 2020 report were made before the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic were felt in Tasmania, they are nevertheless clearly relevant to and should inform Tasmania's social and economic recovery process. For ease of reference I set out those recommendations below:

Wellbeing Strategy

1. Tasmania develops and implements a long-term, cross-partisan, evidence informed strategy for promoting and improving the wellbeing of children and young people in Tasmania that:
 - a. is built on the domains of the *Tasmanian Child and Youth Wellbeing Framework*;
 - b. addresses fragmentation of effort;
 - c. has benchmarks, baselines, outcomes and indicators that are agreed to by government, nongovernment partners, and communities, inclusive of Aboriginal communities, and which can clearly demonstrate that what we are doing is working and inform future action; and
 - d. is the responsibility of the Cabinet of the day.
2. The data required to measure and monitor progress against the strategy and inform future action should be simple, concise, population and place based and made publicly available.
3. While the strategy in Recommendation 1 is under development, the Tasmanian Government should immediately focus on and invest in two critical areas:
 - a. strengthening supports in the first 1,000 days of children's lives; and
 - b. reducing fragmentation of effort in service delivery.

First 1,000 Days

I recommend that:

4. Striving to achieve the very best experience for all children in their first 1,000 days should be a cross-partisan, mainstream undertaking in Tasmania and a key priority for all relevant government agencies.
5. Interventions in the first 1,000 days should take an evidence-based, holistic, integrated and inclusive approach, and be delivered both universally and proportionate to need.

Adoption of a wellbeing framework is in my view the appropriate way to conceptualise how we measure the effects of COVID-19 on children and young people, track our progress in overcoming and mitigating those effects and inform future actions. I am pleased to note that following the release of my February 2020 report, the Premier committed to developing and funding Tasmania's first-ever, comprehensive, long-term whole-of-government Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy with a particular focus on the first 1,000 days. It would therefore be appropriate to position recovery-related strategies to promote the wellbeing of children and young people in the context of the development of the whole-of-government Wellbeing Strategy.



Comments prompted by the Consultation Questions

What impacts are currently being seen by your sector or members (including clients/households/individuals as relevant in your context) and what impacts are anticipated in the coming weeks and months?

I am still in the early stages of developing an evidence-based understanding of the short, medium and longer-term effects of COVID-19 on children and young people in Tasmania. However, this first consultation phase of the Council provides a welcome opportunity to outline, at a high level, some of the known effects of the pandemic on children and young people in Tasmania. Where appropriate, I have structured my comments to align with the six domains of *Tasmania's Child and Youth Wellbeing Framework*. In this context, I also make some comments on mitigation strategies that have been or could be adopted to address these issues and outline some medium- to longer-term strategies and other actions which I believe are necessary for the Council to consider in the context of the recovery process. I look forward to building upon these comments in future consultation phases.

Loved and safe

"The one thing that I could change to improve Tasmania would be to ensure that young people are safe." – *Young person during a consultation with the Commissioner*⁹

Family violence for children and young people living in families

It is well-established that experiences of family violence have significant and long-lasting adverse impacts on children and young people's health and wellbeing, including their mental health, developmental progress and learning.¹⁰ While I understand that reports of family violence to police have been lower during COVID-19 than for the same time last year, I have received anecdotal evidence to the effect that contacts with some family violence services have increased. This would be consistent with international evidence of an increase in family violence in the context of 'lockdowns'. It is anticipated that the incidence of family violence will continue to be influenced as we move through the recovery phase. For example, it has been suggested that family violence may increase further later this year when household incomes reduce as JobKeeper ceases and the Coronavirus Supplement ends. Consideration should be given to a continuation of supports and assistance such as this noting especially the pre-COVID-19 calls for an increase in the rate of Newstart.

While I acknowledge the additional investments made by the Tasmanian Government to support the delivery of family violence services during COVID-19, we need to ensure that specialist family violence services are properly resourced and supported to respond to any spike in demand and that, in particular, capacity exists to respond to the needs of children and young people affected by family violence. This might include provision of ongoing

⁹ Commissioner for Children and Young People (2020), *Listening to Children and Young People Report 2019*, <https://www.childcomm.tas.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/CCYP-Listening-to-Children-and-Young-People-Report-2019-WEB.pdf>

¹⁰ Campo, M. (2015), *Children's exposure to domestic and family violence: Key issues and responses*, CFCA Paper No. 36, Child Family Community Australia, Australian Institute of Family Studies, <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/sites/default/files/publication-documents/cfca-36-children-exposure-fdv.pdf>



resourcing to service providers to enable the development of different ways of engaging with children and young people including through web-based chat facilities.

eSafety

During the pandemic, children and young people have been spending more time at home — and more time online. This has provided children and young people with valuable opportunities to learn and connect from home with families and friends during the pandemic. However, the extra time spent online has also heightened the risks to the safety of children and young people, including: excessive screen time; unsafe content such as misinformation, scams and pornography; cyberbullying; sexting; online gaming; and unwanted contact and grooming.¹¹ I note that in response to these heightened risks, the eSafety Commissioner is delivering innovative information and support programs about eSafety to children, young people, parents and carers, teachers and others who may be working online with children, such as psychologists.¹²

Face-to-face contact for children and young people in out-of-home care

Children and young people living in out-of-home care have experienced reduced or no face-to-face contact with their Child Safety Officers (CSO) and other social workers during the pandemic. The reduction in face-to-face contact between children and their CSO has clear implications for the ability of CSOs to observe children in their home environment and to monitor and provide support for their wellbeing needs according to their individual circumstances. Children and young people in out-of-home care have told me that these restrictions on face-to-face contact have also led to reduced face-to-face contact with their families of origin, including their siblings. I am also aware that the restrictions on face-to-face contact have made family restoration difficult for some children and young people.

Encouragingly, I have also heard evidence of innovative practice using digital technology to maintain contact with children and young people in out-of-home care, including an increase in the frequency of contact, albeit not face-to-face contact. A recent report by Ernst & Young into the impact of the pandemic on out-of-home care notes that:

There are opportunities to support the sector through the rapid development of procedures and technologies to support the implementation and uptake of remote service delivery modes. This includes the use of apps to connect young people and carers to caseworkers, technology to enable ease of communication between children and their parents to support maintaining contact, and the development and implementation of socially distanced home visiting and contact protocols where possible.¹³

It is nevertheless important that face-to-face contact for children and young people in out-of-home care is recommenced as soon as possible, especially for those children and young people whose needs are not adequately met by remote and/or digital communication. One

¹¹e-Safety Commissioner (2020), *COVID-19 Global Safety Advice for Parents and Carers: Australian Edition*, <https://www.esafety.gov.au/key-issues/covid-19/advice-parents-carers>

¹² e-Safety Commissioner (2020), *COVID-19: Tips for staying safe online during the COVID-19 pandemic*, <https://www.esafety.gov.au/key-issues/covid-19>

¹³ Galvin, M. & Kaltner, M. (2020), *Understanding the Impact of COVID-19 on Out-of-Home Care in Australia*, 9 April, https://assets.ey.com/content/dam/ey-sites/ey-com/en_au/topics/covid-19-response/ey-impacts-of-covid-19-on-oohc.pdf



such priority group is babies and pre-schoolers, for whom physical face-to-face contact with their CSOs, carers or families of origin is vitally important to their safety, development and wellbeing. This should of course be done in a way which promotes safety and complies with Public Health advice and guidelines.

Respite for children and young people in out-of-home care

Children and young people in out-of-home care have experienced significantly reduced access to respite during the pandemic. Respite care in the context of out-of-home care is crucial to the wellbeing of children and young people, their carers, and biological children of foster carers. During my pandemic monitoring, young people in out-of-home care have told me that not being able to access respite care during the pandemic has been difficult for them, a situation which has been compounded by them not being communicated with about changes to respite or being given the opportunity to voice their concerns or be involved in collaborative decision making about access to respite.

It is important that all respite services for children and young people in out-of-home care are restored as soon as possible, in accordance with any specific Public Health advice and it is important that system is prepared and able to respond to any potential increase in demand for respite.

Respite for children and young people with disability

Through monitoring activities, I have become aware that children and young people with disability in Tasmania have consistently experienced reduced access to respite care during the pandemic, with only “essential” respite care being provided. This is of concern because respite care is crucial to the wellbeing of children and young people with disability, and important for the functioning of families with a child with disability, as well as for the wellbeing of their siblings.

I strongly encourage the recommencement of respite care for children with disability in accordance with relevant Public Health advice and guidelines.

Learning

“...One thing that definitely could be improved is our school system to provide more flexibility and engagement to those students that don't love learning and school as much as me. It would help those young people finish year 12 and have better opportunities in the future.” – Young person during a consultation with the Commissioner ¹⁴

Vulnerable children and young people engaged in education

Children and young people who are vulnerable or disadvantaged were especially adversely impacted during the period of learning from home in April and May 2020.¹⁵ Young people in

¹⁴ Commissioner for Children and Young People (2020), *Listening to Children and Young People Report 2019*, <https://www.childcomm.tas.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/CCYP-Listening-to-Children-and-Young-People-Report-2019-WEB.pdf>

¹⁵ Brown, N., te Riele, K., Shelley, B. & Woodroffe, J. (2020) *Learning at home during COVID-19*:



out-of-home care from across Tasmania who are members of the Youth Change Makers Group, convened by the Child Advocate for children in care (Department of Communities Tasmania) and the CREATE Foundation (Tas) recently told me that children and young people with mental health conditions and learning difficulties were finding learning during the pandemic particularly challenging. Several young people in out-of-home care told me that while learning from home, they missed the guidance and support of their teachers, specialist learning support staff, teacher aides, and access to additional learning resources and modified learning programs and timetables.

These adverse impacts included: (a) reduced ability of school social workers, principals, teachers and teacher aides to have face-to-face contact with vulnerable children and young people; (b) reduced or no access to the 'psychologically safe' place and social connections that school environments can provide for children and young people whose home environments are unstable or unsafe; and (c) a heightened risk of educational disengagement or 'falling behind' for children and young people facing obstacles to their learning.

The Tasmanian Government is to be commended for establishing, during the pandemic, Vulnerable Students Panels, which allow for greater collaboration by the Department of Education and the Department of Communities Tasmania in their oversight of vulnerable children and young people enrolled in government schools. In my opinion, these panels should be continued as they provide a mechanism for continued enhanced collaborative monitoring of and provision of support to vulnerable students who are enrolled in the government school system. Shared data arrangements should be further strengthened and embedded in policy and if necessary – legislated.

As noted in research undertaken by the Peter Underwood Centre at the University of Tasmania, many Tasmanian children and young people, and especially vulnerable students, will have experienced learning losses during the pandemic. It is vitally important to implement and provide support for initiatives to identify and mitigate these learning losses. These initiatives should be targeted to all age groups, from infants and children engaged in early years learning, to young people participating in vocational training and apprenticeships, as well as those completing year 11 and 12. Noting the evidence for the benefits of quality play-based early learning, such initiatives could include scaling-up early learning programs for those aged 0 to 4 years.

Engagement of young people in full time education, training or employment

The participation rate of young people aged 15 years and above in education, training and employment has been a longstanding issue in Tasmania. Various policy responses over the past two decades have seen incremental improvements in year 12 attainment, however Tasmania's year 12 attainment, and youth employment rates remain some of the lowest in Australia. This in turn impacts on Tasmanian workforce participation, productivity, and most importantly, the wellbeing of Tasmanian young people.

Effects on vulnerable young Australians – Independent Rapid Response Report, April, Peter Underwood Centre for Educational Attainment, University of Tasmania,
https://www.dese.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/learning_at_home_during_covid_30042020.pdf



Data presented by Saul Eslake at a recent Youth Network of Tasmania forum on social and economic recovery for young people indicates that this, already less than satisfactory situation has been amplified during COVID-19. Mr Eslake noted that an above average proportion of young people aged 15-24 were neither working nor in full-time education during April 2020.¹⁶ Participation rates have been influenced during COVID-19 by young people losing their jobs and/or becoming disengaged from education and training.

For the Tasmanian community to recover well from the pandemic and lay the foundations for the state's future prosperity, it is vital that Tasmanian young people can engage in an educational/vocational pathway that is linked to real workforce opportunities here in Tasmania, and which fosters entrepreneurship and a resourceful and adaptable mindset towards both education and work. As outlined in my report, *Listening to Children and Young People in Tasmania 2019*, education and opportunities were key themes raised with me during 2019 by CCYP Ambassadors; they were very clear about the need to ensure that their education is relevant to their future opportunities. They told me that their education should position them to be able to take up employment opportunities in an ever-changing world. They expressed the wish to be taught the skills they need to be adaptable and flexible in an 21st century employment market. CCYP Ambassadors also expressed a desire to learn about things that would enable them to be active and contributing citizens e.g. how to vote, understanding how decisions are made within our political system. As one CCYP Ambassador said, "We need to know how to be part of our community and contribute to our society".¹⁷

Significant work is underway across the education sector aimed at addressing this challenge over a five year plus timeframe. The Years 9 to 12 Project is a collaborative, cross-sectoral project which includes all Tasmanian school sectors, TasTAFE, the University of Tasmania, Skills Tasmania and the Office of Tasmanian Assessment, Standards and Certification. Its simple aim is to make education more meaningful for young people through a simpler, clearer curriculum, better explanation of pathways to jobs, including a significantly bigger and broader focus on vocational learning with clear links to Tasmanian Industries. It is important that this project is prioritised and supported, including bringing Tasmanian industries and employers further on board as key partners in our education and training system. If a project such as this were brought forward and appropriately resourced, and linked to growing industry sectors, it could make a significant and lasting impact for participation, engagement of Tasmanian young people.

Equally important to tackling this challenge is an increased focus on locally based early intervention programs targeting children and young people aged from 12 years, which focus on a combination of wellbeing and employment opportunities (such as those programs delivered in Tasmania by Project O and the Beacon Foundation).

¹⁶ Eslake, S. (2020), *COVID-19, the economic downturn and some of its consequences for young people in Tasmania*, Presentation to an online forum, hosted by the Youth Network of Tasmania, Corrina Economic Advisory, 25 May.

¹⁷ Commissioner for Children and Young People (2020), *Listening to Children and Young People Report 2019*, <https://www.childcomm.tas.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/CCYP-Listening-to-Children-and-Young-People-Report-2019-WEB.pdf>



Early Childhood Education and Care

Supports for families and their children from birth through to 4 years, including early learning, are crucial to lifelong health and development. During the pandemic, these supports have been reduced, or limited, due to physical distancing and other restrictions, however the role of these supports as we respond to and recover from the pandemic is more important than ever. A recent paper prepared for the Australian Government details the impacts of learning losses for Australia's children as a result of the current pandemic. The authors of that paper emphasise the critical role that quality early learning plays for all children, but especially for those children in families experiencing vulnerabilities. The authors also note that the impacts of early learning losses extend beyond learning outcomes and can lead to deficits in growth and child development which are increasingly difficult to remedy beyond the early childhood years.¹⁸ I would encourage the Tasmanian Government to support all families to continue to engage with early years education through the recovery period.

The “digital divide” for children and young people engaged in education

The *Australian Digital Inclusion Index 2019* found that the digital inclusion gap widened between Tasmanians living in the lowest income households and the Tasmanian population average, from 13.0 points in 2014 to 16.7 points in 2019.¹⁹ The shift to home learning for children and young people in education and training in Tasmania has exposed and compounded the pre-existing ‘digital divide’ in this state. This divide was apparent in the stories I heard from children and young people who did not have adequate access to digital devices or internet connectivity in their home environments. I also heard that many children and young people were required to primarily engage in paper-based learning activities or share devices with other family members while learning from home. The resultant impact on learning for children and young people who have experienced these obstacles will have been particularly amplified for children and young people who are vulnerable or from disadvantaged families. The ‘digital divide’ also has broader implications across other domains of child wellbeing (for example, access to telehealth, participating and connection to culture) and a clear link with the material basics domain.

The Tasmanian Government is to be commended for taking steps to ameliorate this inequity including by providing free loans of devices to vulnerable students in government schools, the ICT Fund for students in out-of-home care and the Flexible Active Family Fund. In my opinion, initiatives such as these should be continued, and if possible expanded, as we move through the response and recovery phases, to ensure every child and young person in Tasmania has home-based access to the internet and computers/devices for learning, and they or their carers receive comprehensive computer skills training, to facilitate digital learning and participation, and prepare them for future work opportunities in the ‘digital age’.

¹⁸ Brown, N., te Riele, K., Shelley, B. & Woodroffe, J. (2020), *Learning at home during COVID-19: Effects on vulnerable young Australians – Independent Rapid Response Report*, April, Peter Underwood Centre for Educational Attainment, University of Tasmania, https://www.dese.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/learning_at_home_during_covid_30042020.pdf

¹⁹ Thomas, J., Barraket, J., Wilson, C.K., Rennie, E., Ewing, S., MacDonald, T. (2019), *Measuring Australia's Digital Divide: The Australian Digital Inclusion Index 2019*, RMIT University and Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne, for Telstra, https://www.csi.edu.au/media/2019_ADII_Report.pdf



Children and young people with disability who are engaged in education

I have become aware that some families with children with disabilities have encountered obstacles in ensuring a continuity of learning and appropriate supports for their child during the pandemic. These experiences no doubt arose in the context of responses aimed at protecting children and young people with disability from infection by the COVID-19 virus. Children and young people with disability and their families should now be encouraged and supported to enable a return to school-based learning, taking account of Public Health and medical advice. Efforts should be made to identify any associated learning losses for children with disability and provide the support required to mitigate them. I understand work is underway within the Department of Education to identify and respond to any losses of learning for students in government schools.

Being healthy

“I am extremely passionate about mental health for young people. I believe that we need to find better systems for supporting young people and their families to feel connected to each other and to their communities.” – Young person during a consultation with the Commissioner²⁰

Mental health and wellbeing for children and young people

Australia’s Deputy Medical Officer for Mental Health, along with other psychiatrists, has identified significant mental health risks for children and young people during the pandemic, including increased rates of anxiety, depression, self-harm and suicide. In addition, it is anticipated that children and young people have experienced significant worry and loneliness, arising from a highly uncertain socio-economic environment and social isolation. This increase in distress is reflected in the Tasmanian figures from the Kids Helpline; in 2019 Kids Helpline received an estimated 11,201 contacts from Tasmania, and in the first four months of 2020, has received an estimated 4,383 contacts from Tasmania, a 12 per cent increase over the same period in 2019.²¹ Additionally, evidence from previous disasters shows that while mental health may not worsen during the pandemic, ongoing stressors and social and economic disruption after the pandemic, in home environments, schools and the community, can lead to poorer mental health for children and young people.²²

The Tasmanian system for supporting the mental health of children and young people is already under significant strain. As Commissioner, I am concerned that the current system in Tasmania is not well placed to respond to an increased demand for mental health care, especially for children and young people. For example, I have been told by children and young people in out-of-home care that they have felt anxious about potentially losing access to clinical support amid uncertainty about whether and how they can access their psychologist or psychiatrist during the pandemic, whether via face-to-face or through telehealth appointments.

²⁰ Commissioner for Children and Young People (2020), *Listening to Children and Young People Report 2019*, <https://www.childcomm.tas.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/CCYP-Listening-to-Children-and-Young-People-Report-2019-WEB.pdf>

²¹ Yourtown (2020), *Contacts from Tasmania to Kids Helpline: 2019 & Early 2020*

²² Australian Government (2020), *National Mental Health and Pandemic Response Plan*, National Mental Health Commission, May, <https://www.mentalhealthcommission.gov.au/getmedia/1b7405ce-5d1a-44fc-b1e9-c00204614cb5/National-Mental-Health-and-Wellbeing-Pandemic-Response-Plan>



It is important to ensure that the review of the model of care for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) is finalised as a matter of priority, with a view to expanding and better integrating mental health service provision and supports to children and young people in Tasmania. Implementation of the reforms proposed in the review of CAMHS will require an injection of additional funding by the Tasmanian Government in their 2020-21 Budget.

There is also a need for the Government to fund local, comprehensive, primary prevention programs for children, young people, their families and the wider community, to support psychosocial recovery from the pandemic. These programs should aim to encourage the restoration of social connections, assist and support adjustment to ongoing uncertainty and new “COVIDSafe” rules and routines, and foster a renewed sense of optimism and confidence as Tasmania recovers from the pandemic.

Drug and alcohol misuse

It is well established that substance misuse during childhood and adolescence poses significant risk of harms to health and wellbeing, including mental health. My monitoring activities suggest there has been an increased incidence of drug and alcohol misuse across the community generally. It should be noted that Tasmania’s current alcohol and other drug (AOD) system does not currently include residential detoxification or rehabilitation facilities young people. I understand that some children are referred to interstate residential facilities, arrangements that would be impacted in circumstances where there are restrictions on interstate movements.

I understand the reform of the AOD treatment service system in Tasmania is ongoing. In my opinion, the development and implementation of a specific Youth Framework for the AOD sector in Tasmania would play a vital role in promoting the health and wellbeing of young people in Tasmania.

Health services to parents, newborns and infants

There is considerable evidence that investing in a child’s first 1,000 days, including through the provision of child health services, strengthens the long-term health and development outcomes for babies and infants.²³ I am aware that the Child Health and Parenting Service (CHaPS) in Tasmania has transitioned its service delivery during the pandemic to prioritise telehealth service delivery, with face-to-face visits available where essential. My understanding is that the regular practice of home-visits and the facilitation of face-to-face mother’s groups have been disrupted. As we move toward recovery it is important that face-to-face delivery of health services and parenting supports to parents, newborns and infants are restored as soon as possible, consistent with current Public Health Directions and guidance. Consistent with the recommendations I made in my February 2020 report, *Investing in the Wellbeing of Tasmania’s Children and Young People*, I encourage the Government to strengthen supports for children in the first 1,000 days of their lives.

²³ Commissioner for Children and Young People Tasmania (2020), *Investing in the Wellbeing of Children and Young People*, <https://www.childcomm.tas.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/Investing-in-the-Wellbeing-of-Tasmanias-Children-and-Young-People.pdf>



Service delivery to children and young people generally

I think it is important to acknowledge that COVID-19 has seen a rapid rise in innovative approaches to the delivery of services to children and young people and that there have been distinct advantages arising from this experience for many. For example, I have heard from sexual health and counselling services that some of their young clients prefer to engage through videocalls rather than face-to-face sessions. Another service has advised that, with the introduction of telehealth appointments, they are now attracting clients from remote areas of Tasmania who wouldn't usually access their clinics.

It is in my opinion important to support expanded and flexible opportunities for services to continue to provide opportunities for digital communication to augment face-to-face service provision or contacts, especially for remote or hard-to-reach children and young people. This support should extend beyond digital technology, to providing information, training and support to services to ensure they have the necessary skills and knowledge to promote the privacy and safety of children and young people in an online environment.

Having material basics

"I think kids not having much and not having the proper essentials going to school with, it's just unfair because kids didn't sign up for that life; they need to be treated with care because you can't give back a childhood." – Young person during a consultation with the Commissioner²⁴

Loss of income and employment for young people and their families

The economic repercussions of the pandemic pose one of the most significant risks to the wellbeing of children and young people in Tasmania, arising from lost employment or income for young people themselves, or loss of income or employment for their parents or carers. This may result in larger numbers of children and young people living in poverty and experiencing housing instability, food insecurity, and educational disadvantage including an even larger digital divide, as well as reduced opportunities to engage in valued recreational and social activities. The adverse effects of poverty in childhood can be significant and lifelong, affecting developmental trajectories during childhood, as well as academic success, life chances, and mental and physical health outcomes into adulthood.²⁵

The Federal Government is to be commended for introducing JobKeeper, Economic Support payments and the Coronavirus Supplement, making childcare free for families through the Early Childhood Education and Care Relief Package, and for allowing eligible people to access some of their superannuation early, although it is noted that all these initiatives are currently time limited and are expected to expire later this year. I also acknowledge the important contribution of the Tasmanian Government to meeting the needs of families who are doing it tough by providing for example, the COVID-19 Rent Relief Fund and additional support for emergency relief and assistance.

²⁴ Commissioner for Children and Young People (2020), *Listening to Children and Young People Report 2019*, <https://www.childcomm.tas.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/CCYP-Listening-to-Children-and-Young-People-Report-2019-WEB.pdf>

²⁵ Monks, H. (2017), *CoLab Evidence Report: The impact of poverty on the developing child*, Telethon Kids Institute and Minderoo, <https://colab.telethonkids.org.au/resources/impact-of-poverty/>



These federal and state government initiatives have ‘bought valuable time’ for families during the anticipated height of the pandemic, but there remains considerable uncertainty about whether the Tasmanian economy will have recovered sufficiently by the time most of these initiatives come to an end, for families to be able to earn an income that is sufficient to sustain an adequate standard of living for themselves and their children and young people.

Homelessness for children and young people

The social and economic uncertainty arising from the pandemic, coupled with the Public Health Directions which have restricted people’s movements, have served to highlight the ongoing needs of homeless children and young people in Tasmania, who are frequently moving between homelessness shelters and homes of friends and family (‘couch surfing’) over extended periods. These unstable housing arrangements pose significant health, education and safety risks to children and young people, including high rates of emotional distress and self-harm, exposure to unsafe adults, reduced access to health and support services, and disengagement from education and training.²⁶

It is anticipated that youth homelessness will increase in Tasmania during and after the pandemic, as unemployment and underemployment increases, particularly among young people, and when Federal payments including JobKeeper and Jobseeker either cease or return to pre-pandemic levels.

I am particularly concerned about homeless children in Tasmania aged under 16 years who do not have an active parent or guardian – ‘unaccompanied homeless children’. Our response to these children, who are “currently surviving without the stable care, protection or shelter needed for adequate physical, social and emotional development”²⁷ requires more than simply providing accommodation.

The Tasmanian Government is to be commended for recently committing to implementing all of the recommendations of the Under 16 Homelessness Taskforce and for taking steps to establish the Youth Homelessness Working Group to oversee this implementation.²⁸ It is important that this work is supported and prioritised.

Participating

“It’s our lives and we should know what is happening for us.” – Young person in out-of-home care during a consultation with the Commissioner and the Child Advocate in the Department of Communities

²⁶ Flatau, P. et al (n.d.), *The cost of youth homelessness in Australia: Study Snapshot Report 1 – The Australian youth homeless experience*, Swinburne University, Centre for Social Impact and others, https://www.csi.edu.au/media/uploads/UWA_Cost_of_Youth_Homelessness_2_KuddSko.pdf

²⁷ Under 16 Homelessness Taskforce (2019), *Under 16 Homelessness Taskforce Ministerial Advice*, December, p.5, https://www.communities.tas.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0032/89591/Attachment-1_Ministerial-Advic--Background-Document-Final.PDF

²⁸ The Hon Roger Jaensch MP, Minister for Human Services, *Media Release: Youth Homelessness Working Group to Impalement Taskforce Recommendations*, 16 May 2020.



Information for children and young people

Access to accurate and timely information is foundational to children and young people's ability to exercise their right to participate in decisions that affect them. This is no less the case, and arguably even more necessary, during the pandemic. A recent survey conducted by UNICEF found that one in two (51%) Australian young people aged 13 to 17 years believe that there hasn't been enough effort put into communicating effectively with children and young people.²⁹

In particular, I have heard that for some children and young people in out-of-home care, communication of information about the pandemic and associated responses has been inadequate or absent. These children and young people have said that while information is provided by the Government and service provider to carers and service providers, this information is not necessarily passed on to the children and young people. These young people said that they would like decision makers to let them know what is going on, especially during the pandemic and the recovery phase. Providing open forums for children and young people to ask questions and have them answered directly by decision makers is a good way to ensure their understanding of changing situations, participation in decision making, and, if necessary, compliance with evolving community restrictions. Examples of such successful forums in which I was involved included a CREATE Foundation (Tasmania) Zoom Q&A Forum held in April 2020, where CREATE Young Consultants asked a range of questions about COVID-19 and what it means for children and young people in care. During March and April 2020, I also participated in ABC Hobart Radio hosted Q&A sessions for children and young people.

For children and young people to feel confident to make choices for themselves or to contribute to decision making processes during a time of significant uncertainty and change, they need to be kept informed about what is going on and what the Government is doing, not just at the highest level but also at the service-delivery level, such as in schools, health services and out-of-home care. Importantly, information needs to be provided to children and young people via channels which actually reach them and appeal to them – including via visual and social media.

I encourage the Council to consider not only how it consults with children and young people, but also how it communicates its advice to them, including in accessible formats.

Voices of children and young people

As noted above, the right for children and young people to have a say in decisions which affect them is one of the four guiding principles of the UN CRC.³⁰ It is foundational to their ability to participate effectively in decision-making processes in all aspects of their lives, including within child safety and educational systems. Children and young people, as experts on their own lives, have the capacity to form and express insightful perspectives on their experience of the pandemic and they often have clear views about what needs to be done to recover. Listening to the voices of children and young people and taking account of their views in decision making is important to ensuring that responses are relevant to

²⁹ UNICEF Australia (2020), *“Living in Limbo”: The views and experiences of young people in Australia at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and national response*, Fact Sheet, UNICEF Australia, p.10.

³⁰ *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/crc.pdf>



children and young people, and address their needs; young people in out-of-home care have told me that they would like decision makers to really understand their perspectives and their experiences of living in out-of-home care, especially during the pandemic.

In designing and implementing the Recovery Plan for Tasmania, in collaboration with the private and not-for profit sector, the Government needs to actively seek and consider the views of children and young people throughout this process. Children and young people will likely shoulder the burden of the recovery for longer than any other group and so we need to ensure they can see opportunities for their futures, here in Tasmania. This includes ensuring they can see that their ideas are being included in processes like these.

There are a range of ways that the Council could hear the views of children and young people and consider those views in the development of the Recovery Plan, including by:

- Specifically requesting the views of children and young people, a process I could facilitate, including through the CCYP Ambassador Program.
- Ongoing consultation with other organisations which consult with and advocate for the views of children and young people, including but not limited to the CREATE Foundation (for children and young people in out-of-home care), the Youth Network of Tasmania (for youth aged 12 -24), local Councils, the Youth Change Makers group, and the Multicultural Youth Advisory Network.
- Engaging with members of the Premier's Youth Advisory Council.
- Once available, considering the results of the University of Tasmania's *The Tasmania Project – Children's and Young People's Views*. I have collaborated with members of *The Tasmania Project* research team to develop survey questions designed to elicit the views of children and young people currently participating in the CCYP Ambassador Program about their experiences during COVID-19 and their aspirations for the future of Tasmania. This project will complement *The Tasmania Project* surveys and interviews already being conducted with adults.³¹
- Sourcing data from the Department of Education's Student Wellbeing Surveys which will be recommenced in coming months.

Having a positive sense of culture and identity

"We need to reach out and make all people – of all genders, races, backgrounds and ability level – feel as though they belong to something which is our wonderful and diverse community." – Young person during a consultation with the Commissioner³²

Aboriginal children and young people

I am aware of and concerned by the disproportionate impact of responses during COVID-19 on Aboriginal children and young people and their communities in Tasmania. Restrictions on movement have inadvertently caused obstacles for the ability of Aboriginal children and

³¹ University of Tasmania (2020), *The Tasmania Project*, <https://www.utas.edu.au/tasmania-project>

³² Commissioner for Children and Young People (2020), *Listening to Children and Young People Report 2019*, <https://www.childcomm.tas.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/CCYP-Listening-to-Children-and-Young-People-Report-2019-WEB.pdf>



young people to maintain their connection with their families and communities, a connection which is foundational to the maintenance of their Aboriginal culture, identity and wellbeing generally. In Tasmania, Aboriginal children and young people are disproportionately represented in both the youth justice and child safety systems. I am aware that children and young people in these systems have been particularly affected restrictions on face-to-face service delivery and family contact during the pandemic.³³

Children and young people who are part of culturally and linguistically diverse families, including refugees

I am aware that adults residing in Australia on a range of visas, including temporary protection visas or student visas, are not eligible for Job Keeper payments. This poses a significant economic risk to children and young people whose parents or carers have lost income or employment during the pandemic but are not eligible for this income support during the pandemic. I commend the Tasmanian Government for providing up to \$3 million in support for temporary visa holders experiencing difficulties, including Pandemic Isolation Assistance Grants, emergency relief and assistance, support to return to their country of origin and the Temporary Visa Holder Skilled Employee Assistance Program. However, it is not yet clear whether that support will be sufficient to meet the needs of these families.

Cultural engagement for all Tasmanian children and young people

I have heard from children and young people that restrictions on movement have necessitated the temporary cessation of key social and cultural activities enjoyed by many children and young people, including: (a) celebrating milestones and socialising with family and friends via shared meals; (b) participating in religious or cultural activities; (c) participating in or watching performances of music, dancing, drama and art; (d) spending time in nature, such as through camping, going to the beach or walking in National Parks; and (e) participating in sports and other recreational activities.

For younger children, experiences of play have been adversely affected during the pandemic, with restrictions placed on access to outdoor play equipment, parks, play centres and playgroups, as well as the chance to participate in 'play dates' with friends.

Participating in these activities is in my opinion crucial to the wellbeing and developmental progress of all children and young people. Encouraging children and young people to resume participation in these types of cultural activities as restrictions lift, is one way of promoting their psychosocial recovery from the effects of the pandemic.

What data or other information can currently be provided to the Council on the nature and magnitude of impacts for your sector/members?

As noted above, I am engaging in ongoing discussions with relevant data custodians within Tasmanian Government so that I can better understand the types of data they collect with a view to receiving regular reports of data to inform my COVID-19 related monitoring activities. I have prepared a list of quantitative measures and sources of data which I believe can assist us to better understand the effects of the pandemic on the wellbeing of children and

³³ Change the Record (2020), *Condition critical: The impact of covid-19 policies, prisons and policing on First Nations communities*, <https://changetherecord.org.au/blog/news/critical-condition>



young people in Tasmania and in turn, inform the action we need to take to promote the wellbeing of our children and young people as we recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. The measures included are by no means exhaustive and are subject to change depending on the evolving circumstances related to responding to and recovering from the pandemic. This list of measures is largely comprised of government administrative data and complements the longer-term wellbeing measures included on pages 16 and 17 of my February 2020 report, *Investing in the Wellbeing of Tasmania's Children and Young People*.

I am also engaged in ongoing discussions with non-government organisations about the types of data they can contribute, and I am available to discuss this further with Council members. Clearly there are publicly available sources of up-to-date data which can also be referenced.

In my respectful opinion, a coordinated whole-of-government approach is required to identify, collect, collate, and analyse relevant data. It may be that this provides an opportunity to access independent expert assistance and/or analysis to inform the recovery process. This in turn may be a first step towards a comprehensive approach to measuring the wellbeing of children and young people, as further described in my response to question 3.

Of course, as I have already discussed above, we also need to ensure that we actively seek and consider the views of children and young people as we move through the response and recovery phase of the pandemic. I have outlined above, ways in which this could be done and will not repeat them here.

I have also recently undertaken a survey of children and young people involved in the 2020 CCYP Ambassador Program seeking to ascertain their experiences of learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. I will be releasing the results of that survey in the coming weeks and I would welcome the opportunity to share those results with the Council.

What responses both within the sector and more broadly are front of mind and over what timeframes – what should be stopped, what should continue and what should be started?

Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy including the first 1,000 days

As I have already mentioned, in response to my February 2020 report *Investing in the Wellbeing of Tasmania's Children and Young People*, the Tasmanian Government responded with a commitment to implementing a Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy; that commitment needs to be prioritised across Government agencies. My report included a recommendation that the Government develop a place-based data set, aligned to the domains in the *Tasmanian Child and Youth Wellbeing Framework*, and also conduct a consultation process to understand what should be measured and how. The Government has not, to date, committed to this specific component of a wellbeing strategy however in my opinion, the development of this data set would be highly beneficial and could inform our efforts to promote and measure social and economic recovery.



Further, prioritisation of the development of this strategy will help with tackling some of our long-standing social problems including youth unemployment, homeless children and young people, rising numbers of children and young people in the child safety system including in out-of-home care, children and young people living in poverty or circumstances of disadvantage and the disproportionate representation of Aboriginal children and young people in our child safety and youth justice systems.

Child Safe reforms

In the Tasmanian Government's response to the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, the Government accepted in principle recommendations made to all Australian states and territories to implement numerous child safe reforms. These include: ensuring that all organisations and businesses providing services to children implement the Child Safe Standards recommended by the Royal Commission, implementing a reportable conduct scheme, and introducing a carers' register for people providing care to children and young people, including foster carers, kinship carers and residential care staff.³⁴

Whilst resources of government have been appropriately directed toward responding to the pandemic crisis, we must now prioritise the development of a child safe organisational framework in Tasmania. Effective and timely implementation of these reforms will require focused effort and adequate resourcing by the Government, as well as the provision of consistent communication and support to organisations, agencies and businesses which deliver services to children and young people. Any child safe organisation framework developed by the Tasmanian Government must take account of risks to the safety of children and young people arising as a result of the adoption of innovative models of service delivery especially noting the risks inherent in engaging with service providers via remote and online mediums. Serious consideration needs to be given to how we can provide the necessary support and assistance for service providers.

What would help create or build business/consumer/community confidence?

Finally, children and young people in Tasmania need to have confidence that decisions are being made which promote their wellbeing— they want opportunities for their voices to be heard but they also require clear and accessible communication from political leaders and other decision makers and genuine opportunities to be and to feel part of the recovery process. It is also extremely important that young Tasmanians can see a clear path forward for their life in Tasmania – from their education during their school years, right through to further education, training and employment.

I strongly encourage the provision of additional support and assistance for innovative approaches to meaningfully engaging with children and young people in Tasmania, including in remote and regional areas, for example through extra-curricular arts-based and other cultural activities.

³⁴ Government of Tasmania (2019), *Tasmanian Response: Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse*, Department of Justice, https://www.justice.tas.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/418186/Tasmanian-Response-Child-Abuse-Royal-Commission.pdf



Psychosocial recovery is also important to building confidence and could be facilitated through projects which also stimulate Tasmania's arts and sporting sectors.

Conclusion

I wish to emphasise the importance of the Tasmanian Government prioritising the development of a Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy and progressing work to develop a child safe organisation framework in Tasmania noting the need to take account of the changed circumstances within which we find ourselves as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Thank you again for the opportunity to contribute to the first phase of the Council's consultation process. I am available to discuss my submission in more detail and I look forward to contributing to further consultation processes as they arise.

Yours sincerely

Leanne McLean

Commissioner for Children and Young People

Attachment A: Provisional Measures of Wellbeing of Children and Young People in Tasmania during the COVID-19 Response and Recovery

cc *The Hon Peter Gutwein MP, Premier of Tasmania*
The Hon Rebecca White MP, Tasmanian Labor Leader
Cassy O'Connor MP, Leader of the Tasmanian Greens

Attachment A
Provisional Measures of Wellbeing of Children and Young People in Tasmania during the COVID-19 Response and Recovery
5 June 2020

The following list includes quantitative measures and sources of data relevant to the wellbeing of children and young people in Tasmania during the COVID-19 response and recovery. The measures listed here relate predominantly to government administrative data, and complement the longer-term wellbeing measures included on pages 16 and 17 of my February 2020 report, [Investing in the Wellbeing of Tasmania's Children and Young People](#), but are by no means exhaustive. These measures are relevant to the work of the Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Council and will assist in monitoring the economic and social impacts of COVID-19 on the health and wellbeing of Tasmanian children and their caregivers.

It is important to acknowledge that Tasmanian Aboriginal communities must have a say in how the wellbeing of Tasmanian Aboriginal children and young people is measured.

Leanne McLean, Commissioner for Children and Young People

Thematic Area	Measure	Source	Explanation
Child Safety and Out-of-Home Care	Contacts made to, and incidents recorded by, the Strong Families Safe Kids Advice and Referral Line including type of referrer, matters resolved, referrals made to family support, and incidents referred to the Child Safety Service (CSS) for further investigation. Indicators: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of contacts to Advice and Referral Line • Number of contacts resolved • Number of notifications referred for further investigation 	Department of Communities	This measure will track whether there has been any change in the number of contacts to, and incidents recorded by, the Advice and Referral Line regarding the safety and wellbeing of children and young people.



Thematic Area	Measure	Source	Explanation
Child Safety and Out-of-Home Care <i>continued....</i>	Children and young people referred for a child safety assessment who had not been allocated a worker within priority timeframes (daily average).	Department of Communities	This measure will track the performance of CSS to respond to incidents of risk to a child or young person within priority timeframes.
	Children and young people in out-of-home care including numbers entering and exiting care. Indicators: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children and Young People in out-of-home care (daily average) • Children and Young People entering out-of-home care • Children and Young People exiting out-of-home care 	Department of Communities	This measure will track any overall changes in the numbers of children and young people in out-of-home care.
	Children and young people subject to a care concern while in out-of-home care.	Department of Communities	This measure would show any changes in the number of care concerns for children and young people living in out-of-home care.
	Unborn baby alerts.	Department of Communities	This measure would show any increases in unborn baby alerts.
	Applications to the Active Family Fund.	Department of Communities	This would measure the uptake, processing, and any unmet demand for the Active Family Fund (for families receiving family preservation, restoration or Intensive Family Engagement Services for support with hygiene and ICT).
	Applications to the ICT Fund.	Department of Communities	This measures unmet demand for access to internet and mobile technology for home learning and communication by children in care.



Thematic Area	Measure	Source	Explanation
Child Safety and Out-of-Home Care <i>continued....</i>	Face-to-face and non-face-to-face visits to children and young people in contact with and in the CSS. Indicators: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visits to children and young people in contact with CSS including face-to-face and non-face-to-face visits (percentage of children) • Face-to face visits to children and young people in contact with CSS (percentage of children) • Children and young people in contact with CSS who had non face-to-face visits only (percentage of children) 	Department of Communities; non-government service providers	This measure will examine any changes in the delivery of face-to-face services by the CSS and service providers to children and young people.
	Calls to the Carer Support Hotline.	Department of Communities	This measure will help track any increase in calls for assistance and support by carers, and should include calls by informal carers.
Education	Government schools: Proportions of students recording present (at school), participating (at home), and absent are being recorded daily. Attendance rate for a defined period.	Department of Education; Catholic Education; Independent Schools; Australian Government for childcare data	Government schools: This measure will track changes in the proportion of students of Government schools who are: present (at school), participating in learning (at home), and absent. This measure will track attendance rates over time for students of Government schools.
	Government schools: Proportion of students learning at home disaggregated into 'participating' and 'not participating'.	Department of Education; Catholic Education; Independent Schools	Government schools: This measure will track the participation of students of Government schools who are learning at home.



Thematic Area	Measure	Source	Explanation
Education <i>continued...</i>	For those students recording present (at school), information on those who are currently engaged with the Child Safety Service; Aboriginal children and young people; children and young people with a disability; children who are homeless; and children and young people living in rural and remote areas.	Department of Education; Catholic Education; Independent Schools	This measure will further investigate the demographics of children and young people who are attending school physically.
	Children and young people physically attending the DoE Support Schools.	Department of Education	This measure will track changes in physical attendance of children and young people with disabilities at the DoE Support Schools.
	Number of children and young people considered by the Vulnerable Student Panels, disaggregated by category of vulnerability, including any change over time.	Department of Education	This measure will monitor the number and vulnerabilities of students considered by the Vulnerable Student Panels.
Health	Parents attending Child Health Assessments, including home visits by Child and Family Health Nurses (disaggregated by type e.g. telehealth, phone, face to face).	Department of Health	This measure will track any changes in attendance at Child Health Assessments and home visits.
	Women attending antenatal visits, particularly in the first 14 weeks, including home visits.	Department of Health	This measure will track any changes in attendance at antenatal appointments and home visits.
	Referrals to perinatal and infant mental health services, including presentations to mother and baby units.	Department of Health	This measure will indicate whether referrals for mental health support for expectant or new mothers have increased.
	Contacts made to the Parenting Line, presentations to Child Health Centres and Parenting Centres, and referrals to cu@home	Department of Health	This measure will track any increases in calls to parenting helplines as well as physical visits to Child Health Centres and Parenting Centres. In addition, whether referrals have increased for support services for young first-time parents aged 15 to 19 years.



Thematic Area	Measure	Source	Explanation
Health <i>continued....</i>	Contacts made by children and young people to mental health support lines including Lifeline, Kids HelpLine, Tasmanian Support Line, Headspace, Mental Health Services Helpline.	Department of Health; Department of Communities; non-government service providers	This measure will track any increases in calls to mental health support lines by children and young people.
	Contacts made by children and young people to the Tasmanian Public Health Hotline	Department of Health	This measure will track any increases in calls to the public health hotline by children and young people.
	Hospital admissions and emergency presentations for mental health conditions for children and young people.	Department of Health	This measure will track any changes to presentations to hospitals for mental health conditions for children and young people.
	Referrals made, and children and young people currently on the waiting list for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services	Department of Health	This measure will track any increase in service demand for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services.
Housing and Homelessness	Children and young people presenting alone to homelessness services, Housing Connect and the Safe Night Space.	Department of Communities	This measure will track whether there has been an increase in children and young people presenting to homelessness services alone.
	Adults with children presenting to homelessness services, Housing Connect and Safe Night Space	Department of Communities	This measure will track whether there has been an increase in children and young people presenting to homelessness services with adults.
	Applications for social housing by young people aged 16 -17 years or by families with children.	Department of Communities	This measure will track whether there has been an increase in families with children or young people accessing housing services.
Family Violence	<p>Family violence incidents, including children and young people present at family violence incidents and/or children and young people assaulted during family violence.</p> <p>Indicators (Tasmania Police):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family violence incidents with child witnesses • Child assaulted in family violence incident 	Tasmania Police; Department of Justice (Safe at Home)	This measure will show any changes in family violence incidents which directly affected a child or young person.



Thematic Area	Measure	Source	Explanation
Family Violence <i>continued....</i>	Numbers of notifications provided to schools regarding students affected by family violence.	Tasmania Police; Department of Justice (Safe at Home)	This measure will show any changes in numbers of notifications to schools regarding children affected by family violence
	Adults (with children) and children and young people presenting to family violence services (including physically to shelters and counselling services) as well as calls to national family violence support and counselling services such as 1800 RESPECT and Men'sLine. Indicators (Department of Communities): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Referral to the Family Violence Counselling and Support Service – Children Referral to the Family Violence Counselling and Support Service – Adult 	Department of Communities; non-government service providers; Department of Justice (Safe at Home)	This measure will show any changes in families and children accessing counselling and support services for family violence.
Youth at Risk and Youth Justice	Children dealt with by police for non-compliance with public health directions during COVID-19 including outcomes.	Tasmania Police	This measure will show whether children and young people are more readily coming into contact with the law during this period.
	Children and young people in the youth justice system, including those detained at Ashley Youth Detention Centre (AYDC). Indicators: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Daily average young people in Community Youth Justice Daily average young people in Custodial Youth Justice Number of admissions to youth detention 	Department of Communities	This measure will monitor the number of young people in the youth justice system and at AYDC while COVID-19 related measures are in place.
Material Basics	Families accessing emergency relief support.	Department of Communities, non-government service providers, Neighbourhood Houses	This measure will track whether there has been an increase in families with children accessing emergency relief.