

thriving families^{SA} 2025 – 2045

Response to Issues Paper Royal Commission into Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence

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Who we are

The *BetterStart* Health and Development Research Group comprises inter-disciplinary researchers from epidemiology, public health, criminology, paediatrics, biostatistics, and psychology who are trying to better understand how to ensure infants, children and young people have the best start in life that will enhance their health, development and human capability formation over the life course.

Acknowledgement of Country

BetterStart acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the First Peoples and Nations of the lands and waters we live and work upon.

We acknowledge and pay our respects to the Kurna people, the traditional custodians of the lands we live and work on. We acknowledge the deep feelings of attachment and relationship of the Kurna people to country and we respect and value their past, present and ongoing connection to the land and cultural beliefs.

We extend our respects to all First Nations people, and acknowledge that sovereignty of the land was never ceded, it always was, and always will be, Aboriginal land.

The University acknowledges the historical impact of colonisation and its continuing effects, and is committed to the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation vision: 'A united Australia which respects this land of ours; values the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage; and provides justice and equity for all'.

Other Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the data in this statement represent serious experiences that can have a lifelong impact on children and families.

Using data in this way is only one way to tell important stories, however, we hope that this work contributes to ensuring South Australia is able to make more informed decisions about how best to support children and families.

Contact us

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Executive Summary

Thriving Families 2025-2045 is a generational vision that has grown out of the realisation that we have to “do things differently” to improve outcomes for children, young people and families – but what does “different” look like? Whichever statistic is chosen, South Australian children, young people and families are worse off than in other jurisdictions. About 24% of SA children are developmentally vulnerable at age 5.

Thriving Families has been developed in response to the overwhelming investment and readiness in the non-government sector to take a different approach to improving outcomes for children, young people, families and communities in South Australia.

Over 80 non-government organisations, children’s commissioners, families with lived experience, Aboriginal leaders and Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations, have been involved in the development of Thriving Families 2025-2045. There have been over 1,000 conversations, both formal and informal, that underpin the Thriving Families vision. The engagement and coordination of the coalition supporting Thriving Families is ongoing.

Thriving Families has been developed independent of government, backed by considerable investment from the University of Adelaide and in-kind support from ZED for Social Change.

Thriving Families is now poised to take the next steps and begin putting the generational vision into action, with the Chief Executive of the SA Department of Human Services, acting as a cross-government sponsor of Thriving Families.

It is important to understand that Thriving Families is not a Child Protection strategy. Rather, the goal of Thriving Families is to turn our current crisis focused system into a prevention focused system that delivers early appropriate supports, before crisis ensues.

Thriving Families is a system change initiative that recognises there is no single agency or sector solely responsible for child and family wellbeing. For this reason, Thriving Families spans multiple agencies and sectors inclusive of but not limited to: family support, health, housing and homelessness, domestic and family violence (DFV), drug and alcohol support, child protection, mental health, early childhood, and education.

Thriving Families understands that getting supports and strategies right in the DFV space will ultimately support better outcomes for children, young people and families. DFV services are integral to the generational vision and cohesive ecosystem that Thriving Families is seeking to build.

This submission outlines the Thriving Families 2025-2045 vision and progress to date, as well as how Thriving Families can underpin future initiatives that have a child, young person and family focus, including the reform and reimagining of DFV systems and services.

What is Thriving Families?

Thriving Families 2025 – 2045 is an ambitious generational vision for doing things differently to get better outcomes for South Australian children, young people, families and communities.

Thriving Families' mission is to provide support as early as possible, and to prevent crises by fostering conditions that shift the focus from reactive crisis management to proactive prevention, coordination, and early intervention. Its goal is to ensure that no child, young person or family is disadvantaged by factors such as gender, culture, language, geography or socio-economic background.

The Thriving Families vision builds on the collective insights of over 400 people across non-government and government sectors in South Australia, as well as those with lived experience. They have all contributed to a shared goal of 'doing things differently' to improve the wellbeing of all South Australians. Thriving Families 2025-2045 reflects the best research evidence on the current state of South Australia and the challenges faced by sectors supporting families, alongside national and international strategies for strengthening families and communities.

Since its inception, Thriving Families has garnered significant interest and support across the state as a catalyst for doing things differently to improve outcomes. Already, **more than 50 community organisations have pledged their commitment** to work together in achieving the goals of Thriving Families.

Thriving Families is led by the University of Adelaide's BetterStart team from the School of Public Health, in partnership with ZED, a South Australian consulting firm dedicated to fostering positive social change in the state.

The University of Adelaide has invested in Thriving Families as an expression of its commitment to contributing to achieving major social change underpinned by strong connections to the community. The in-kind contribution from ZED- Building Social Value, has been instrumental in progressing Thriving Families to date.

Figure 1: A generational approach to Thriving Families

Why 2025 – 2045?

Thriving Families establishes a goal of 2045 for holistic transformation of entrenched complex challenges that have evolved over decades. This timeframe provides an aspirational future state that can only be achieved through sustained, long-term investment and commitment to create meaningful and impactful change.

Thriving Families provides an opportunity to take a progressive approach to generational change over the next 20 years and position South Australia to lead the nation in illustrating how we can work together to improve outcomes for our current and future generations.

The genesis of Thriving Families

In late 2022, leaders and researchers from The University of Adelaide identified an opportunity to contribute to the call from SA Premier Peter Malinauskas, to “do things differently” as we seek to address the consistent challenges posed in South Australia by entrenched disadvantage.

Thriving Families was deemed an investment of a different kind – it was an opportunity to support the translation of a decades’ worth of research partnerships led by Professor John Lynch and Dr Rhiannon Pilkington, through an outward facing project that has resulted in the **engagement of over 80 community organisations**, and nearly every government agency across health, education, social services and treasury.

Professor John Lynch, Dr Rhiannon Pilkington and the BetterStart team in the School of Public Health have collaborated with ZED- Building Social Value, to work up a pathway forward for how to ‘do better’ for the many children and families in SA experiencing challenging circumstances.

To understand what “doing things differently to do things better” meant to South Australians, Thriving Families initially engaged through facilitated ‘Imagine If’ journey lab sessions seeking ideas and insights from community organisations. The journey lab posed a single question to the community:

‘If we could build a different, better system by 2045, what would it look like?’

With this question underpinning the engagement process, over 600 consultations have been conducted with non-government and community sector organisations, government stakeholders, Aboriginal leaders, and individuals with lived experience to identify what is needed to design a better system that empowers children, young people, and families to reach their full potential.

From this process, **Thriving Families 2025-2045 emerged** – a generational vision shaped by over 400 community voices from more than 80 community organisations, including the Aboriginal Community-Controlled sector and individuals with lived experience, as well as 60 state government stakeholders.

The insights harnessed from community organisations and lived experience has been underpinned by research evidence through the BetterStart Research group using the BEBOLD platform at The University of Adelaide.

What problem is Thriving Families trying to solve?

Many indicators of child and family wellbeing—such as developmental vulnerability, child maltreatment, and poverty—show South Australia consistently underperforms relative to the rest of the country. These indicators are all symptoms of families not thriving.

The current service system(s) in South Australia has evolved to the state where crisis systems are often seen as the only “front door” to receiving supportive services. Too many families are experiencing cycles of trauma, disadvantage, and adversity. This is most acutely seen in the child protection system, where families are often struggling with multiple, complex social challenges, limiting their ability to make positive changes and access holistic support.

The intersection of domestic and family violence (DFV) and child protection is a critical area of concern. The 2023 Australian Child Maltreatment Study (ACMS) found that a little more than 2 in 5 (43.8%) people aged between 16 and 24-years-old have been exposed to domestic violence-(5). The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) states that 15% (n=108,400) of South Australian women witnessed violence toward a parent by a partner before the age of 15(6). DFV is not only a significant risk factor for families reported to child protection agencies, but it also profoundly impacts the wellbeing and safety of children. Addressing DFV is essential for ensuring child and family wellbeing and supporting South Australian families to thrive.

Compounding crisis driven responses are fragmented services, and systems and funding models that contribute to families falling through the cracks, leading to more instances of intergenerational poverty, child maltreatment, and statutory intervention. The longer these negative outcomes persist, the more difficult and complex the necessary interventions become.

Thriving Families recognises that the legacy of colonisation, oppression, and racist policies and systems continues to cause disproportionately poor outcomes and intergenerational trauma for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Institutional racism perpetuates poorer outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and results in over representation in statutory responses such as child protection. We are committed to embedding and elevating Aboriginal leadership in Thriving Families to create a system and governance model where power is truly shared between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal leaders.

“Structural racism creates oppressive circumstances for Aboriginal families and the need to challenge systems on individual and community levels(7).”

- Commissioner April Lawrie, Holding Onto Our Future Report.

To “break the cycle”, a large-scale disruption is required. A collective approach is essential, as no single government or service can solve these issues alone. Improving outcomes for children, young people, and families in South Australia is a shared responsibility.

The goal of Thriving Families 2025 – 2045 is to drive transformational change, shifting from a system dominated by last-minute crisis support to one focused on prevention and early intervention. Thriving Families promotes and enables self-sufficiency and empowerment for families through targeted, integrated supports that work seamlessly together, making statutory responses the exception rather than the norm.

Creating transformational change will require both non-government and government sectors to do things differently. A new system will have to be invented for the particular service context of SA – there are no off-the-shelf solutions. Together with government, non-government and community,

University involvement is crucial in driving a rapid cycle design-test-learn strategy to concretely demonstrate what ‘different’ looks like.

Figure 2: Factors driving the need for change in South Australia

Key drivers for change

- > South Australian families are struggling to manage costs of living with **1 in 6 households with children living in poverty**(1)
- > **Too many children are being left behind** with 1 in 4 starting school developmentally vulnerable(2)
- > **The volume of need is too high** with 1 in 10 infants in South Australia known to child protection before they can walk or talk(3)
- > **We don’t respond early enough** with 40,000 children each year notified to child protection – 70% of these are already known to the system(3)
- > **Our rate of children being removed from family and community** has continued to grow at a level well above the national average. We now sit **almost 50% higher than the national rate of children in care**(4)
- > **Our investment is crisis driven** – we spend over 80% of our child protection services budget on out-of-home care(4)
- > **Outcomes for Aboriginal children are disproportionately worse** with Aboriginal children 10 times more likely to be removed from their families than non-Aboriginal children(4)
- > **We are operating an unsustainable system** – our expenditure on care services alone has tripled in the past decade
- > We need to chart a way forward – and it’s not yet another public inquiry, Royal Commission, research project or investigation – we already have a **staggering 811 recommendations put forward from 10 Royal Commissions and Reviews**
- > The call from those in the community sector is clear – the **current system is not working for families**– we need to do things differently to do things better

What we know about the intersection of Domestic and Family Violence and the Child Protection system from South Australian government data

Much of the research basis of Thriving Families comes from the BEBOLD platform which holds de-identified data on over 3 million children and young people born from 1991 onwards, and their parents and carers. State and Commonwealth data sources span the health, human services, welfare, education, justice, housing and social systems. BEBOLD is the most contemporary, comprehensive collection of routinely collected whole-of-population data in Australia. The BEBOLD platform supports research to inform and evaluate approaches to intractable health and social problems such as poor child development, mental health, child maltreatment, and intergenerational disadvantage, while preserving confidentiality and privacy.

The focus of BEBOLD to date has been on children and families, which is reflected in the population BEBOLD currently captures as illustrated above. Through BEBOLD we are limited in our view of DFV, as we do not currently hold Police or Courts data. We are able to use indicators of DFV from Specialist Homelessness Services, Hospital, Emergency Department (ED), Public Housing, and Child Protection data. However, even in these data sets, the view of DFV can be limited. For example, information on causes of injury (such as assault) is not available in emergency department data, and identifying family and domestic violence hospitalisations relies on recording and coding of the alleged perpetrator in hospital data. Therefore, we assume the hospitalisations related to DFV represent a considerable underestimate.

We consistently hear from communities and community organisations that things are getting worse. The challenges across housing, homelessness, child protection, mental health, domestic and family violence, and drug and alcohol issues can seem insurmountable and demoralising. Workforce turnover is increasing. While these challenges may often be considered 'other', the reality is these are common, and these challenges all impact child wellbeing and development. We have little evidence that we are achieving success in one of the core challenges in Australia and internationally - breaking intergenerational cycles of disadvantage in all its forms, inclusive of DFV.

Through BEBOLD we can demonstrate the links between contact with different service systems such as DFV, homelessness, and child protection (CP). BetterStart have quantified the need for child maltreatment prevention services by estimating the size of the SA populations experiencing child protection contact of all types, from notification through to out-of-home care. We have stratified these estimates by key drivers of child protection contact including poverty, mental health, substance abuse, domestic and family violence and intergenerational child protection contact.

The data in BEBOLD tells us the following:

- In South Australia 1 in 10 infants are known to child protection before they can walk and talk. In other words, of around 20,000 births in SA each year, 2000 of those children were notified to child protection by age 1(3).
 - 24% of these children had at least one parent with an indicator of domestic or family violence from emergency, inpatient hospital, homelessness or child protection data vs <1% with no CP contact(3)



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We know the DFV system echoes systems like child protection whereby supports and services are crisis driven and often operate in silos, despite the impact of DFV being reflected across multiple social issues.

Through other publicly available data, we know:

- 38% of homelessness service seekers reported experiencing domestic and family violence (DFV)(9)
- 80% of women in custody are DFV survivors(10)
- DFV survivors experience a 45% income drop post-separation, contributing to poverty(11).
- People with a disability are 2x more likely to experience DFV(12).
- Family violence is one of the key drivers for child protection contact: 70% of Unborn Child Concern reports are linked to DFV(13).

The prevalence of DFV and its links to other drivers of disadvantage are clear indicators of families not thriving. Thriving Families believes that embedding the capacity for early support into a child and family wellbeing system means the responsibility for addressing circumstances that lead to child protection and developmental risk must be shared across all agencies that can contribute to prevention efforts. In South Australia, this implies agencies with the responsibility to deliver support in drug and alcohol, mental health, housing, homelessness, domestic and family violence, along with intensive family support services. All these agencies and services have an important role to play in preventing maltreatment and promoting child wellbeing.

The Case for Change

We are **all responsible** for improving outcomes for children, young people and families in South Australia. We need to come together to do things differently...to do things better. We want to

ensure future generations are supported to thrive and are empowered to find what they need – within themselves, their families, their communities and in the services they access.

A child wellbeing ecosystem must be set up to reach and support populations experiencing underlying drivers of poorer outcomes including poverty, housing stress, unemployment, domestic and family violence, poor mental health, and drug and alcohol issues - connect all the major social institutions that comprise the early years from health to child protection, ECEC, and education - connect the major government run systems to non-government service providers and to communities - be set up to achieve measurable outcomes at individual, carer and community level - be set up to innovate - be set up to test, learn and adapt to drive continuous improvement

Realising meaningful change will take targeted and sustained effort over time – it will take a new approach to designing and delivering a service system that empowers people to exercise choice, control and cultural authority over decisions that affect them and their family.

There is broad agreement that the timing is right for considering the merits of taking on the ambitious generational change agenda:

- The Premier is committed to investing in outcomes beyond a 4-year term and is consistently talking about the need to think and do differently when it comes to issues like the child protection crises that have become a burning platform for change.
- The final report from the SA Royal Commission led by former Prime Minister Julia Gillard into Early Childhood Education and Care has been released with recommendations strongly aligned to the generational vision of Thriving Families and has attracted an initial investment of \$715 million over 5 years to implement 3-year-old preschool and other key recommendations.
- The Federal Government has committed \$200 million in a Targeting Entrenched Disadvantage package, with a focus on improving social outcomes.
- The national Investment Dialogue is bringing together philanthropic organisations with government in an attempt to coordinate investment in improving outcomes for children and families.

Thriving Families has laid the ground work to start to mobilise its vision through our ongoing engagement and consultation with the South Australian community including people with lived experience, government and non-government organisations. The time is right to put the wheels of change in motion for South Australia.

Prevention and Early Intervention

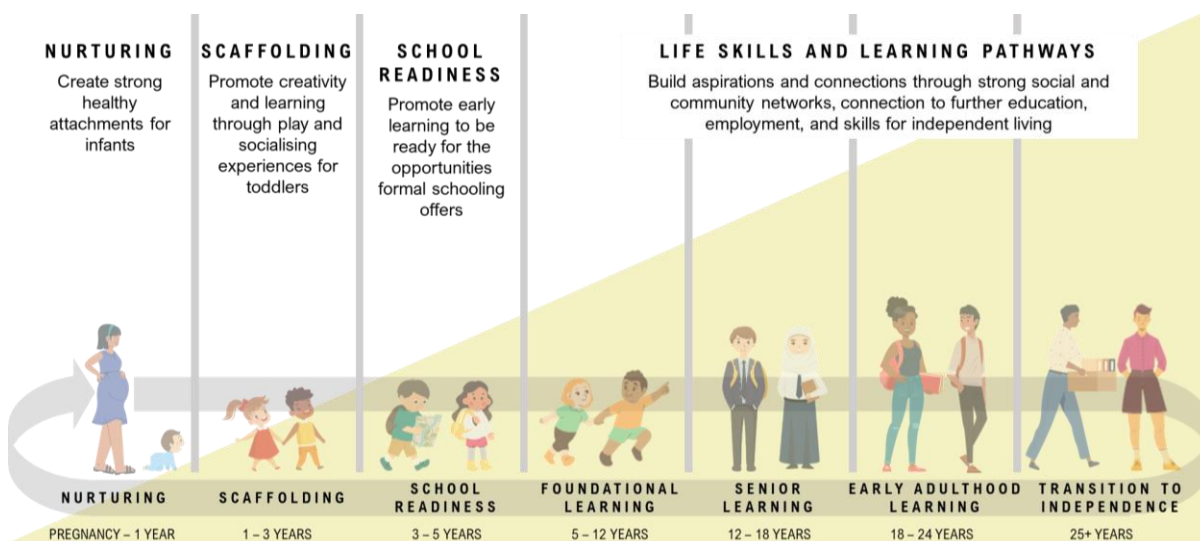
One of the missions of Thriving Families is to flip the current system on its head so that we invest the most money into prevention and early supports, and have our crisis and statutory responses as the leanest part of our systems. This means scaffolding supports throughout the life stages to enable children and families to access assistance and services which can support their wellbeing before they experience crisis, diverting them from current statutory responses wherever possible. To do this, we must support all individuals during all life stages (from children, young people and adults) regardless of gender, cultural and linguistic background and sexuality (see Figure 3).

Thriving Families 2025 – 2045 takes a holistic approach to framing the systemic change required to benefit all South Australian children, young people and families. Consideration for the social and economic systems in which people grow and the bio-psycho-social developmental needs of individuals, is essential in the co-creation of an ecosystem that will lead generational change.

Each life stage holds expected developmental competencies, and the building blocks of life-skills. We need an ecosystem that provides tailored support to ensure these competencies, and positive outcomes across the life-trajectory are met. With more than half the adult population having experienced trauma, we need an ecosystem scaffolded in trauma-informed approaches to supporting people. This will involve educating our community and upskilling our workforce.

Prioritising healthy development across all life stages means we are safeguarding the next generation.

Figure 3: Supporting healthy development across the lifespan



What we have now

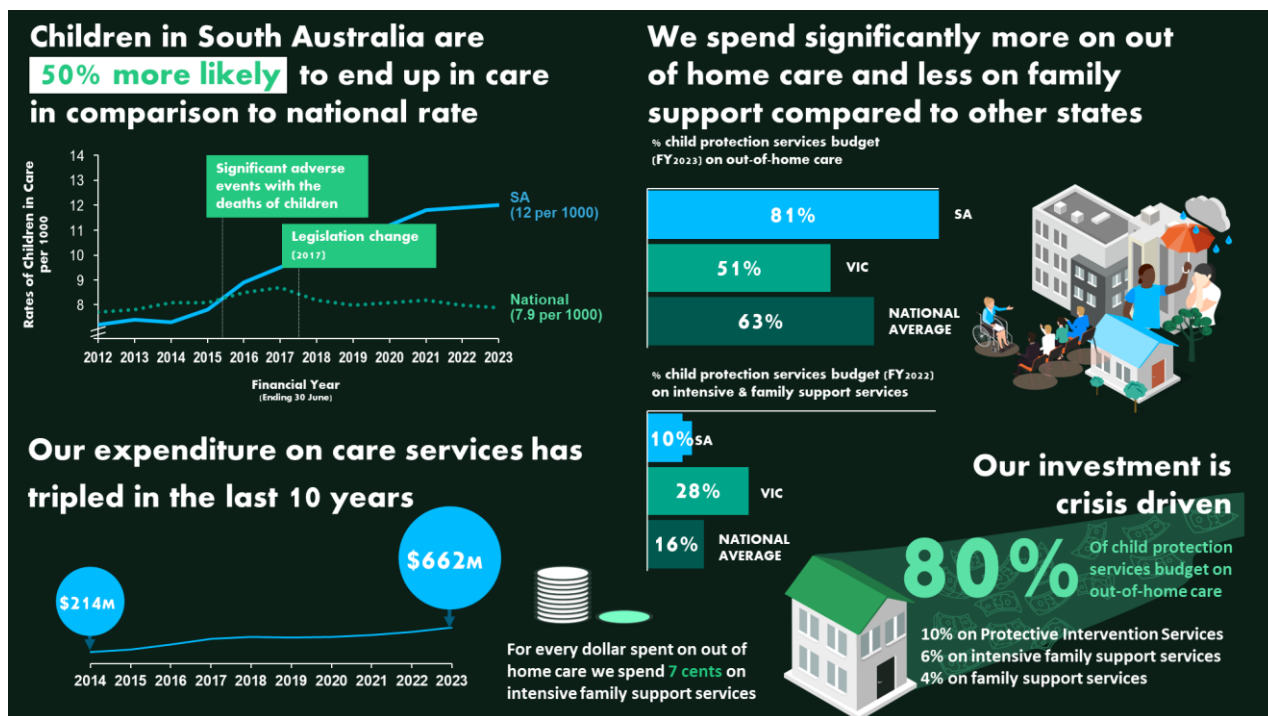
Failure of families to thrive is a multifaceted, cross-sector issue that can reflect what are often multiple failure points in systems. Statutory interventions are the focal point of our current system infrastructure, which means that our resources are pushed towards intervening in crises. Our service system is fragmented and our current commissioning arrangements and competing objectives create deep holes for people to fall between targeted services.

Community is not supported to connect or enabled to take an active role. The current culture is described as one of “report not support”. We lack truly universally accessible and equitable services, and our existing universal services are not equipped to support all families. Poor experiences and

intergenerational trauma mean that those experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage are often fearful and avoidant of accessing services before they reach crisis point. Rural children and families are isolated from help as our rural and remote communities have far less access to basic, universal, targeted or crisis supports.

We know Aboriginal people suffer disproportionately worse outcomes due to a history of dispossession of land, colonisation, stolen generations and racism. Aboriginal people are over-represented in all aspects of crisis intervention.

Figure 4: Expenditure in our currently crisis driven system



The over-representation of particular sub populations in systems such as child protection and DFV is reflective of systemic environments which are not providing equitable support and intervention, exacerbated by crisis-focused responses being overwhelmingly funded over prevention and early intervention supports. A myriad of social factors impacts the capacity and capability of families. These include domestic and family violence, housing insecurity, substance and alcohol abuse, mental health challenges, disability and poverty.

We know that individuals who have contact with crisis systems like child protection are more likely to have poorer wellbeing outcomes and indicators, and be dealing with challenging social and health issues. For example, of those reported as unborn child concerns, 80% of non-Aboriginal and 93% of Aboriginal families had an indicator related to experiencing poverty(14).

Our systems are not integrated so when families experience complexity, necessitating their involvement with multiples sectors or services, they are not triaged as being the most “in need”, nor do services routinely coordinate to make the experience easier for the family. For example, facing 3 or more social challenges, and a child protection intervention, does not necessarily mean a family/parent/child will be assisted quickly. It means they will have to meet the threshold of eligibility for at least 3 different agencies. These families experience:

- the need to engage with multiple services and agencies
- requirement to participate in each service’s intake, assessment, and engagement processes and expectations
- multiple support workers and calendars of appointments
- limitations through siloed supports and information as worker effectiveness is limited by lack of access to each client’s holistic picture of need
- full-time hours of service hopping to get help
- a lack of shared objectives between disciplines of service because a whole of family approach is rarely expressed in practice

There are structural and system behaviour challenges in the current system identified by people with lived experience. These challenges effect the operation and the outcomes for people living through the experience of crisis intervention.

Due to the current culture of crisis systems being the “front door” to receiving supportive services, families find themselves trapped in cycles of trauma, disadvantage, and adversity. Through lived experience engagement, Thriving Families know that the effect of intergenerational social and economic burdens cannot be underestimated.

- Many parents have reported that they did not know there was anything “wrong” or unsafe about their parenting, until they were confronted by Statutory services.
- The experiences of attachment and parenting they had as children formed their understanding of how to parent themselves.
- The missed opportunity to support, educate and develop capacity results in children being separated from family; further traumatising children and families that the system has already identified as experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage.
- The challenges arising from vulnerability and disadvantage are considered as “risk” which is then used to substantiate concerns and risk factors, and ultimately to remove children from the care of their families. This is in opposition to an approach that would seek to add protective factors (e.g. financial resources, housing, food relief, social support) in support of families experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage.

The current system penalises those who need more help. This cycle is presently inescapable. Children born into experiences of multiple social challenges, including poverty, domestic and family violence, alcohol and drug issues, and poor mental health, require support from the start of their lives. Supporting children born into these care environments means supporting the families and communities who provide these care environments.

What we need

To support Thriving Families we need to create an ecosystem with targeted and universal supports which uplifts and builds the capacity of communities to support its citizens. We envision a new child and family wellbeing system working in harmony for the benefit of all South Australian families..

Thriving Families is a generational vision that acknowledges that the current service system landscape is built upon entrenched ideologies and ways of doing things. Although the broader vision of Thriving Families is generational from 2025 to 2045, Thriving Families believe that the quantum shift that is needed to achieve the vision can begin to be mobilised as outlined below.

The following statements depict the paradigm shift required to move from current to future state:

Key drivers for change

- > **FROM** a system of operating through *discrete* organisations **TO** an *ecosystem*
- > **FROM** 'protection of the child' **TO** 'thriving children and families'
- > **FROM** a system that is *reactive to immediate risk*, **TO** a system that is *purpose driven and responsive* in the best interest of the child's life trajectory

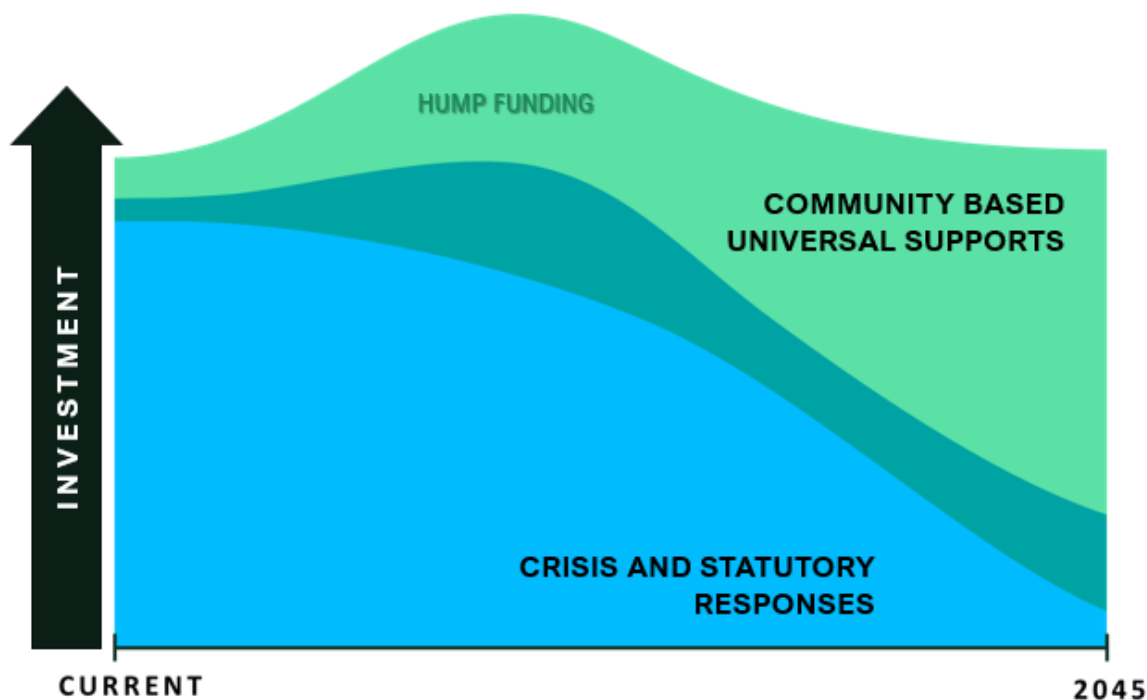
Thriving Families has six principles underpinning its vision for the future:

1. **Families empowered and thriving:** We see families empowered and capable as children's first teachers across all stages of a child and young person's development
2. **Participatory Communities:** We see communities flourishing with relationships and networks that are actively engaged in supporting each other
3. **Wellbeing and protection in balance:** We see an ecosystem that is focused on early support to prevent crisis and need for statutory intervention
4. **A smart and collaborative service system:** We see an innovative, connected and well-resourced system that responds in a fair, equitable, culturally-sensitive and trauma-informed manner
5. **Adaptive investment driven by cycles of innovation, learning and outcomes:** We see an innovation, learning and outcomes-focused mindset that drives investment in what is working, and shares learning from what is not to grow together
6. **Aligned political and policy environment:** We see alignment of vision across the political and policy landscape for children and families in South Australia

We must balance the investment required to continue supporting children, young people and families in the current system with the future investment needed to move to the Thriving Families 2045 vision.

We need to put effort and focus into preparing the community to take an active role as the first line of support; and services to work together for common objectives. It will take time to create methods of collaboration, and activation of social structures that engage our whole population where all children and families flourish, however, we cannot ignore our families currently in crisis. This will take a generational approach to investment as we shift our focus over time from crisis into community led and owned universal supports

Figure 5: Investment changes across the generational timespan of 2025-2045



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Response, Recovery and Healing

The structural and systemic drivers of poor outcomes for children, young people, families and communities including poverty and systemic racism must be addressed to support meaningful positive change for the next generation. In order to respond to the needs of children, young people and families, we need to consider the service system as not just a series of discrete systems and responses, but as an ecosystem that is multi-layered and must work as a whole. Thriving Families has illustrated what this transition to an ecosystem will look like in Figure 6, with a shift from crisis intervention being the largest part of the system, to universal and targeted supports being integrated into communities, with crisis and statutory responses being a small part of the service response for children, young people and families (see

Figure 7

Figure 7 for definitions).

Figure 6: Thriving Families generational shift to a cohesive ecosystem of support

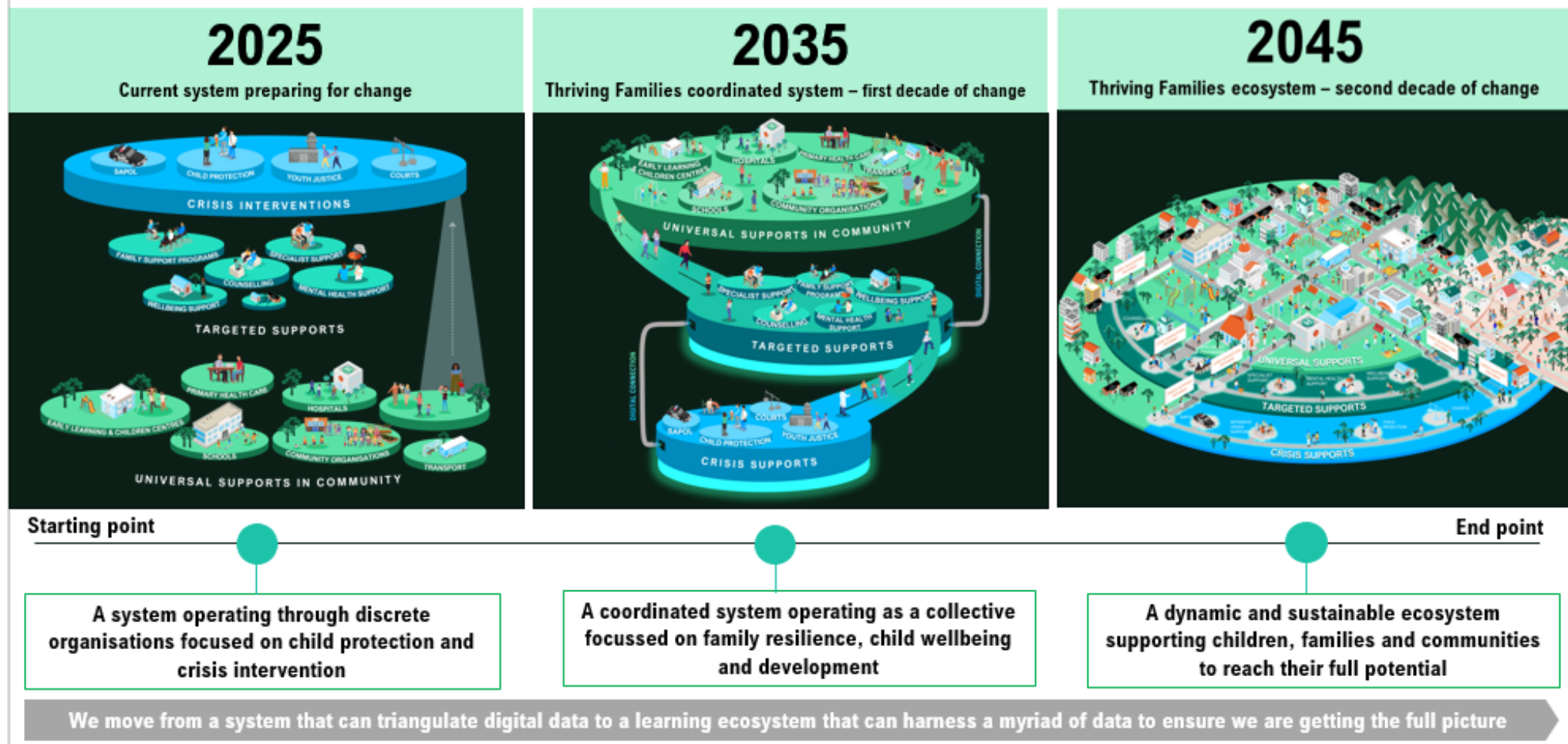
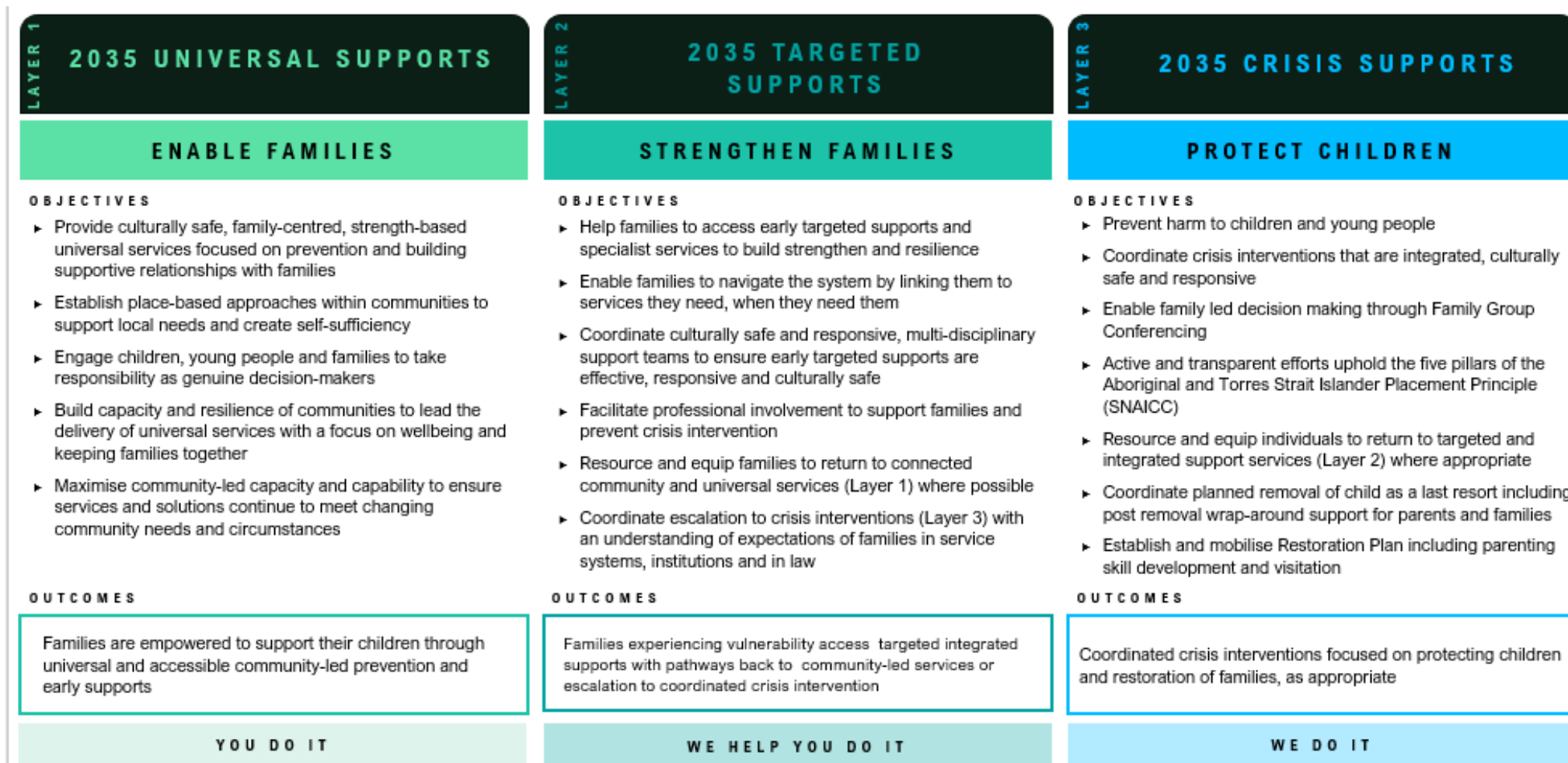


Figure 7: Definitions of Universal, Targeted and Crisis Supports



How do we get there?

Eight interconnected levers for change have been defined based on research evidence and insights gained through extensive engagement with community organisations.

Each of the eight levers frame the work needed to move towards the vision of Thriving Families 2025 – 2045. The levers represent categories of system level improvements that are expected, over time, to collectively contribute to transforming current state into an ecosystem that supports children, young people, families and communities to thrive.

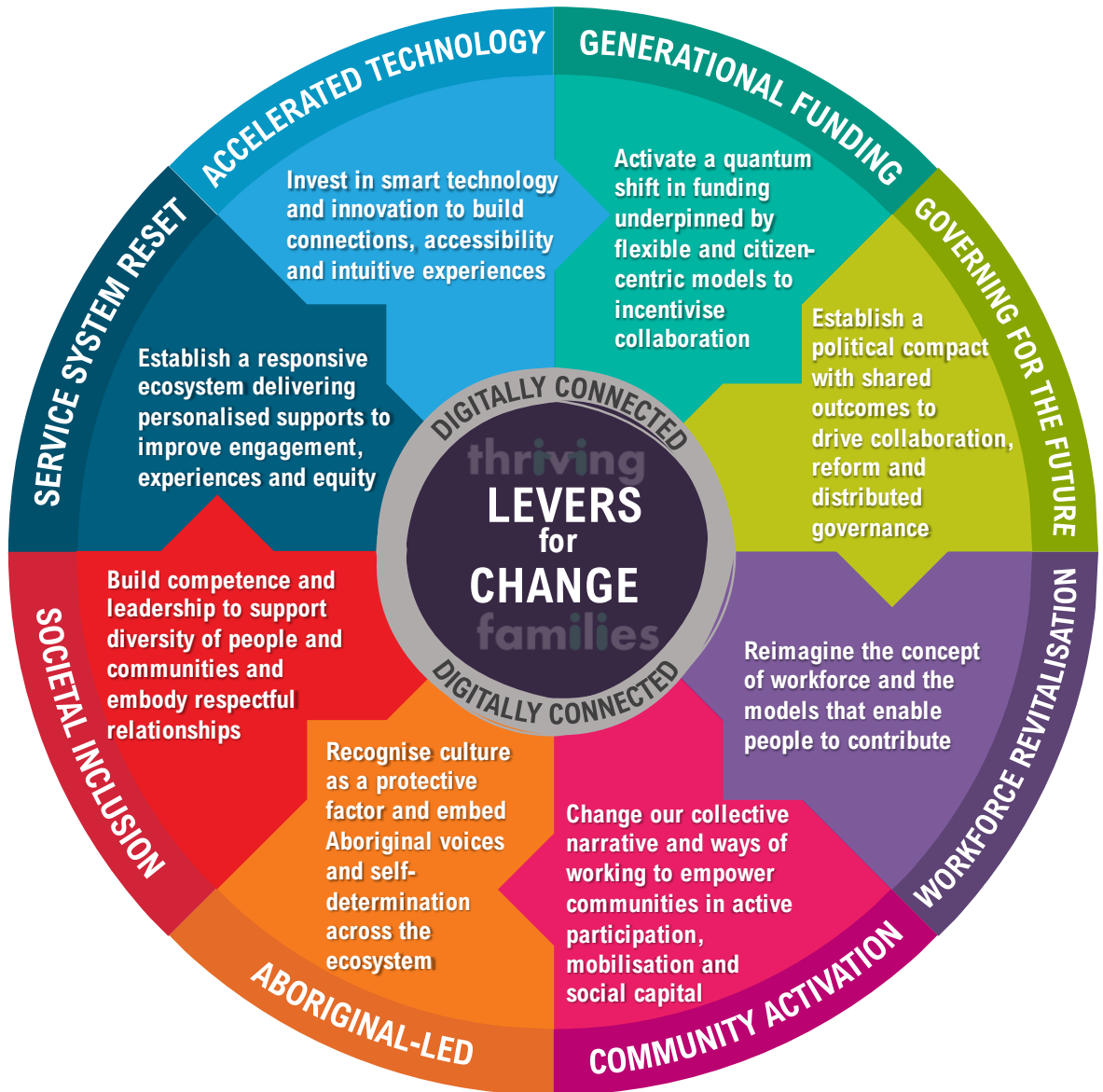
A collective approach across government and community organisations is required to support the implementation of these change initiatives over time. In some circumstances, government may be best to lead the initiatives whilst in other circumstances, community organisations may be best placed to lead the initiatives, supported by government.

The eight levers are outlined in brief below and can be seen in more detail in attachment 1.

- 1. Aboriginal led:** Recognise culture as a protective factor and embed Aboriginal voices and self-determination across the ecosystem. This can occur through removing bias from systems so that they recognise Aboriginal values, traditions, and culture, and ensuring that service systems are culturally informed and safe. Aboriginal-led means creating a system and service governance model where power is shared between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal leaders, redirecting funding to Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs and ACCHOs) for the provision of support to Aboriginal people and communities, and committing to engaging a diversity of Aboriginal voices in the co-design and co-production of the ecosystem.
- 2. Generational Funding:** Activate a quantum shift in funding underpinned by flexible and models to incentivise collaboration. This means injection of higher value funding across the 20-year time horizon with a focus on driving outcomes and innovation, co-designing outcome centric approaches across the service system, streamlining commissioning approaches to avoid duplication and encourage performance, and incentivising collaboration through contribution modelling with shared objectives.
- 3. Governing for the Future:** Establish a political compact with shared outcomes to drive collaboration, reform and distributed governance. This encompasses developing child and family focussed legislation and policies, underpinned by streamlined governance structures, shared outcomes frameworks that clarify roles and responsibilities, a shift towards community governance models that can empower local communities, and the creation of new and highly responsive, culturally appropriate and accessible services for children, young people and families.
- 4. Workforce Revitalisation:** Reimagine the concept of workforce and the models that enable people to contribute to a culture that respects cultural beliefs and considers the thoughts, feelings and experiences of others. Modernise current workforce models and approaches to enhance skills and capabilities underpinned by robust learning systems delivered at scale, and grow a modern hybrid workforce that includes people with lived experience and carers to extend and expand on the professional workforce.

5. **Community Activation:** Change our collective narrative and ways of working to empower communities in active participation, mobilisation and social capital. This mean leading and supporting public discourse with communities about child and family wellbeing and shifting narratives from a focus on risk and harm to celebration of positive change and outcomes. Additionally, we need investment in the development and growth of social capital in communities across the state, with place based and trust-based connections, to equip local community leaders and members to take an active role in early support for families, and leverage the media to engage in storytelling that creates a constructive narrative aligned to Thriving Families.
6. **Societal inclusion:** Build competence and leadership across the sector and in communities that supports diversity of cultures and communities, and embodies respectful relationships. This can be achieved through creating an accountability framework and embedding the Rights of the Child in policy and legislative frameworks, building the capability of service systems to be inclusive, holistic and accessible for all, and building the service system to safely support and learn with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities. It also includes actively seeking diverse voices and representation in leadership, co-design and co-production of the ecosystem.
7. **Service system reset:** Establish a responsive ecosystem delivering personalised supports to improve engagement, experiences and equity. To achieve this, we need to establish a rights-based and experience rated approach to the delivery of all services whether they be universal, targeted, or crisis supports. Included in this lever is also reforming targeted and crisis supports to focus on the safeguarding of children and their best interests for long-term wellbeing outcomes, developing a learning and continuous improvement framework to ensure the ecosystem is responsive and values the expertise of children, young people and families, and integrating state-wide information systems to drive connection and coordination of services that contribute to shared outcomes.
8. **Accelerated technology:** Invest in smart technology and innovation to build connections, accessibility and intuitive experiences. Accelerated technology includes the investment in smart technology that can enhance experiences and performance, reimagining ways of working in a new digital world supported by fit for purpose service systems, safely harnessing the collection and use of a myriad of data to fuel the ecosystem. Embedding human centred design principles in the co-production of the system so we can utilise technology as an enabler for better outcomes and experiences for communities.

Figure 8: Thriving Families Levers for Change



What's next?

In the last year, Thriving Families has moved from being 'notional' to becoming a coherent framework for change in South Australia that is known across the government and non-government sectors. It has become a 'rallying-cry' that will bring South Australia to the fore as world leading in social innovation.

There is an expectation from the non-government sector and from government agencies that we will move Thriving Families to the next stage. Thriving Families offers an opportunity to try a new and different way to tackle the crises that keep hitting South Australia.

Ongoing Stewardship of Thriving Families

The University of Adelaide commissioned the work to date and over the last year, The University has proven to be uniquely positioned as a "good faith, interim steward" to help drive generational social transformation for children, young people, and families in South Australia. Thriving Families exists because The University is an independent steward driven by outcomes, that collaborates across NGO's, government and community.

The independence of this project from government afforded by the University funding has been pivotal to creating a powerful foundation from which to gain government support. Nearly every NGO and lived experience participant has commented that the university sponsoring this project has created a dynamic that has been essential to having transparent and honest conversations about where the NGO service sector also needs to reform. This is distinct from the normal 'funder to service' conversations that are hampered by a power imbalance when government attempts to work with the NGO service sector. Government agencies including Treasury have lauded the "think-tank" type approach as creating a powerful voice to government which requires consideration by Chief Executives and Ministers across all agencies concerned with children and families. Additionally, Thriving Families has and will continue to contribute to the Universities investment in the future of South Australia beyond the delivery of tertiary education.

The University seeks State Government support to fund the core infrastructure for Thriving Families over five years to drive the foundational work required for generational change. In partnership with government, the University will establish and host Thriving Families to deliver strategically selected launch projects that will demonstrate what a new system looks like, in different contexts, life stages, and population groups. We will use a design-prototype-launch approach underpinned by learning infrastructure to enable evidence-based scale in collaboration with the sector.

Embedding Thriving Families SA into the University will soon mean it will be part of the new Adelaide University to be established in 2026. In this setting, Thriving Families will contribute to illustrating the value of the new University to building human capital in South Australia.

Establishing Thriving Families SA

Thriving Families is seeking to set up headquarters within the University from which we can begin to launch the operational aspects of Thriving Families.

Thriving Families is currently in the process of meeting with government to secure investment that will ensure we can continue to drive the mission and vision of Thriving Families. Government support will underpin the core infrastructure over five years to drive the foundational work required for generational change. Additional funding for launch projects via operational agencies will also be required. We want to work with government to establish a whole-of-government Thriving Families partnership because this is bigger than any single government department.

We are proposing Thriving Families SA will have shared accountability across the Thriving Families Council which will be comprise, government, non-government, Aboriginal-controlled organisations, and community representatives. Thriving Families proposed inter-relationships are illustrated in Figure 9.

Figure 9: The proposed interrelationships of Thriving Families SA



- Thriving Families Centre for Excellence** Provides portfolio management and stewardship across the ecosystem to drive the transformational changes needed to shift from a crisis-driven system to one focused on prevention and early support
- Sectors** Offer insights, input, and guidance to facilitate transformational change.
- Organisations** Actively participate in the co-design and implementation of transformational initiatives to achieve the Thriving Families generational vision.
- Community Impact Council** Advises and validates the impact of transformational initiatives from the perspective of South Australian families who will benefit from these changes.
- Specialist Community Groups** Provide expert advice and guidance to the Community Impact Council on the impact of transformational initiatives.
- Thriving Families Governing Council** Oversees and supports the effective delivery of the Thriving Families transformational initiatives.
- Specialist Work Groups** Execute tasks and actions as directed by the Thriving Families Governing Council to achieve the outputs and outcomes associated with transformational initiatives

As the Thriving Families steward, the University will house Thriving Families SA including the core delivery team who will lead the 5-year workplan.

Thriving Families is currently creating the Thriving Families Implementation Blueprint which will guide the mobilisation of this initiative. It will establish the authorising framework required for delivery, define priorities for the first five years, and align with the eight critical levers for change identified in the Thriving Families Vision. Additionally, the Blueprint will provide a detailed roadmap for achieving these objectives.

This roadmap, shaped by the valuable input from community organisations through a series of collaborative workshops, outlines the starting points for driving the transformation needed to shift from a crisis-response approach to one prioritising proactive prevention and early support for children, young people, families, and communities.

To initiate this transformation, eight foundational change initiatives have been identified, as outlined in Error! Reference source not found.. These initiatives have been designed with consideration of key interdependencies and sequencing. Each initiative is strategically linked to one or more of the eight levers for change and the broader priorities of the Thriving Families Vision, focusing on the areas critical to creating lasting, meaningful impact.

8 Foundational Change Initiatives:

- 1. Establish Aboriginal leadership and inclusion:** Aboriginal leadership is critical to Thriving Families supporting Aboriginal self-determination and tackling outcomes such as the high removal rates of Aboriginal children from families.
- 2. Create a state-wide approach for coordinating sector investments:** Future investments must help shift from a 'crisis focused' to a 'prevention focused' system. This work will create a transparent system-wide understanding of investment, and support evidence-based decision making within a coherent investment framework to improve outcomes.
- 3. Build new funding models and commissioning practices:** We will partner to build new models of tendering, contract compliance and monitoring that are more efficient and outcomes focused. New funding models, commissioning and contracting practices will reduce red tape and compliance activities for both NGOs and government, thereby increasing service capacity to spend time on activity designed to improve outcomes for children and families.
- 4. Design and implement a shared outcomes approach:** Committing to shared responsibility for delivering target outcomes such as poor school engagement, will create coherent effort across currently siloed health, social and education sectors.
- 5. Design the future Thriving Families governance model:** While Thriving Families partners will need to agree on what future governance will look like, this signals the transition from University as a steward to the University as a long-term partner in building and maintaining the learning system.
- 6. Create a public facing Thriving Families narrative:** A public-facing Thriving Families narrative is required for transformational change underpinned by truth-telling, lived-experience, and research evidence.
- 7. Drive collaborative behaviour and long-term relationships:** We will establish new systems to structurally support coming together and collaborating to solve shared challenges. This will

ultimately support a client-centred approach whereby the collaborative partners collectively offer what the family needs.

8. **Build a learning system to create knowledge assets:** The learning system will build the evidence base that supports delivering integrated programs and services that are responsive to community needs, and community voice.

Launch projects

As part of our commitment to “doing things differently”, Thriving Families is seeking to create launch projects that target key priorities as seen in **Error! Reference source not found.** These launch projects will be co-designed, co-produced and implemented with Thriving Families SA stakeholders. They will be underpinned by data and continuous evaluation to demonstrate what “different” can look like and how we can improve outcomes for South Australian children, families and communities.

The Thriving Families launch projects are centred on the 8 change initiatives and link with the levers for change and strategic priorities consultation (see

Figure 11) as identified through extensive engagement. The launch projects will support rapid “build, test, learn” cycles within the Thriving Families lifespan with the acknowledgement that systemic change takes time. The launch projects and their outcomes will be used to drive innovation and better ways of working within the current system.

To illustrate what launch projects may look like and how they could be utilised, we have provided an example in Figure 10 using change initiative 8: Build a Learning System.

Figure 10: Change initiative 8, launch project example

Launch Project: Build a learning system

What issue is this initiative launch project trying to solve?

- > Government and non-government data sources often fall short in effectively measuring outcomes and providing real-time insights.
- > Non-government organisations do not have the capacity in most cases to continuously analyse their own data or make connections with other data sources, to understand what works and how their service might have a lasting impact beyond their involvement
- > Many publicly available datasets are updated at irregular intervals, which can limit their use to service planning
- > The lack of integration between different data systems further complicates our ability to track individual journeys through service systems, ultimately hindering informed decision-making

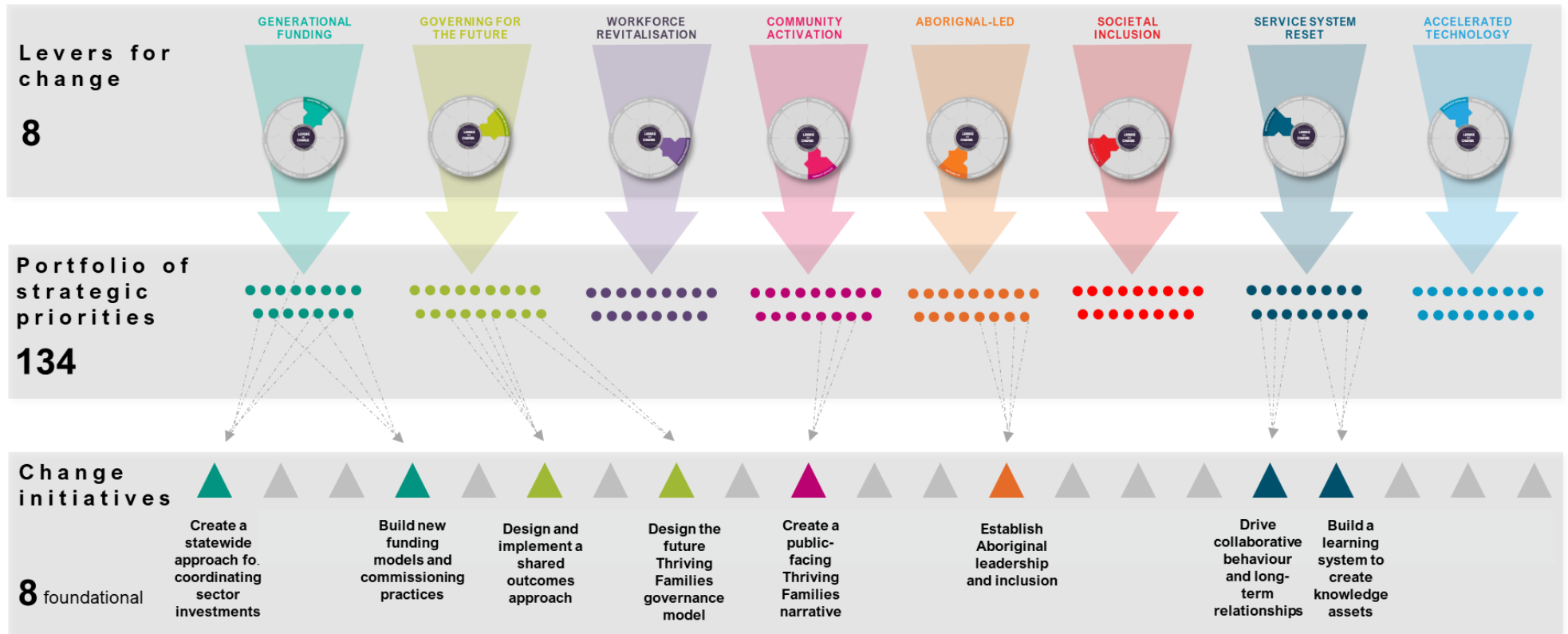
Example using DFV:

- > Our understanding of critical issues like domestic and family violence (DFV) is currently limited by the publicly available data
- > We primarily rely on the Personal Safety Survey for DFV statistics, which is undertaken and published periodically—most recently in 2021/22, 2016, and 2012.
- > This data does not allow for a deep dive into the nuanced local contexts
- > These data and information gaps hinder our ability to fully grasp the DFV landscape within specific communities and to inform targeted responses

How will the launch project address this?

- > **Establish** a knowledge asset within Thriving Families that will foster a learning and continuous improvement system grounded in local, national, and global practices, research and evidence.
- > **Enable** access to real-time, data-driven insights that guide our investments in services that truly make a difference.
- > **Utilise** data in the BEBOLD platform to better understand how individuals navigate and experience various service systems.
- > **Integrate** de-identified service data from non-government organisations and services to truly understand linkages between systems and the ongoing impact of policies and programs.
- > **Create** a learning system that will cultivate a culture of rapid cycles of ‘design-test-learn’ and generate valuable data that enhances our understanding of effective practices.
- > **Produce** high-quality evidence to meet client needs, achieve shared outcomes, and develop scalable methods for routine practice.
- > **Strengthen** the evidence base necessary for delivering integrated programs and services that are responsive to community needs and amplify community voices.

Figure 11: Interconnection of the Thriving Families levers, priorities and change initiatives



▲ Potential change initiatives

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Appendix 1: Thriving Families Team

Together Pam Zervas from ZED, Dr Rhiannon Pilkington, Professor John Lynch and Nadia Di Girolamo form the core Thriving Families team.

Better Start

Professor John Lynch is the Director, and Dr. Rhiannon Pilkington is the Co-Director of the BetterStart Health and Development research group in the School of Public Health, the University of Adelaide. Nadia Di Girolamo is an occupational therapist with almost a decade of community sector experience including clinical care, service design and delivery, and project management.

BetterStart's research is both empirical and interventional. Over the last decade, this has included epidemiological analysis of child protection, poverty, housing, homelessness, youth justice, developmental vulnerability, child health inequalities, and childcare. Our goal is to understand how early life conditions impact life chances, and what we can do to improve early life conditions.

Much of the data presented in this statement is sourced from South Australia's social and health data asset – the **Better Evidence Better Outcomes Linked Data (BEBOLD)** Platform.

The BEBOLD Platform

- The BEBOLD platform includes de-identified data on over 3 million children and young people born from 1991 onwards, and their parents and carers. State and Commonwealth data sources span the health, human services, welfare, education, justice, housing and social systems. Children not born in SA are included in the data platform if they use SA services. BEBOLD is the most contemporary, comprehensive collection of routinely collected whole-of-population data in Australia. Professor John Lynch and Dr Rhiannon Pilkington are Co-Directors of the BEBOLD platform.
- The BetterStart research group has delivered over 100 briefs and reports to the SA government over the past 7 years. We have used the BEBOLD platform in partnership with nearly every government agency in SA across health, human services, treasury, education, and justice to inform 1) defining policy relevant populations (e.g. size, characteristics); 2) understanding patterns of service use and service overlap across different agencies (e.g. transitions from child protection to youth justice); and 3) evaluating policy relevant outcomes of service provision.
- The decade-long build and millions of dollars of investment into the BEBOLD platform supports research to inform and evaluate approaches to intractable health and social problems such as poor child development, mental health, child maltreatment, and intergenerational disadvantage, while preserving confidentiality and privacy.

ZED Consulting

Celebrating 20 years of impactful service, ZED is a proudly South Australian boutique management consulting firm (founded by Company Director, Pam Zervas) dedicated to working with our clients and partners to drive change across the social services landscape. We engage with both government and non-government sectors in vital areas like human services, child protection, health, and education.

Our mission is to empower our clients at any stage of their transformational journey—from the spark of an innovative idea to the tangible execution of their vision. No matter where you are on your path—whether you're resetting your strategy, reimagining your approach, or implementing targeted changes – we are here to support you.

Collaboration is at the core of our philosophy. We cultivate genuine partnerships across a diverse array of organisations, harnessing our collective expertise and resources to tackle complex social and system issues. Some examples of our work include:

- Creation of Thriving Families 2025 – 2045 generational change vision for South Australian children, young people, families and communities, in partnership with the University of Adelaide, NGO sector and state government.
- Delivery of TYSON (Tell Your Story Once Now) Proof of Concept to demonstrate a solution where citizens connect with services and supports more easily through a virtual 'system navigator'. This was commissioned through the state government Research and Innovation Fund.
- Development of the State's COVID-19 system-wide strategy, plans and patient flow pathways that formed the state government's response to the management and care of COVID-19 cases in South Australia.
- Co-design a state-wide approach to the transfer of patients across SA Health facilities and services, in partnership with SA Health clinicians, Local Health Networks (metropolitan and regional), MedStar, SAAS and Royal Flying Doctor Service.

At ZED, creating social value is not just something we do -- it's the essence of who we are. Our mission is to amplify the positive impact of our clients and foster better outcomes for the broader community.

This commitment drives us to invest deeply through **ZED. building social value brand** where we invest our time, skills, and resources into significant social initiatives aimed at creating lasting, systemic change – a great example is Thriving Families.