

# Assessing and improving **child welfare reform outcomes**

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## **Victoria's Child and Family Services Sector**



Since 2008, the Child and Family Services sector in the Australian state of Victoria has been undertaking a significant program of reform aimed at achieving the best possible outcomes for vulnerable children, young people and their families. The reforms have focused on creating change at a number of different levels: placing the best interests of children at the centre, better integrating services that work with vulnerable families, supporting both professionals and vulnerable children and families to access community-based earlier intervention services and ultimately, improving outcomes for children and families involved with Child Protection, Out of Home Care and Family Services.

In order to assess the value of the reforms and support continuous learning over the reform implementation period, KPMG in Australia was engaged to undertake a three-year evaluation of the reforms.

“KPMG in Australia helped us to understand and demonstrate the value of this wide ranging reform agenda and to identify future opportunities to improve services to vulnerable children and families,” noted **Mick Naughton, Director, Child Protection Workforce Reform, Department of Human Services, Victoria.** “Their mixed method approach provided our government and workforce an independent perspective on what aspects of the reforms were working and what other action we needed to take to support outcomes for vulnerable children, young people and families.”

## Taking a holistic view of change

Founded in the Children, Youth and Families Act of 2005, the government recognized that – to ensure the reforms were achieving the stated policy objectives and be accountable to ongoing funding – they would need to put a rigorous evaluation process in place.

To manage such a wide-scale and long-term evaluation and support the capacity for continuous learning throughout the evaluation period, the department required the support of an independent evaluator that could offer a more holistic view of the reforms. A strong understanding of the Child and Family Services System, a strong evaluation capability and expertise in data analysis would be demanded, as would an ability to qualitatively assess the impact of the reforms on the various stakeholders involved: the departmental workforce, its service providers, related professionals who may report to Child Protection and vulnerable children, young people and families themselves.

## Leveraging experience to drive success

With a long and successful history of collaboration with the Child and Family Services sector, the department selected KPMG in Australia to develop and conduct the evaluation. The firm had been involved in developing key elements of the programs of reforms, as well as the creation of the performance standards that would ultimately define how the new services would operate.

Based on this hands-on experience and the Australian firm’s ability to draw on a strong bench of professionals with both direct service delivery and policy-based experience, KPMG developed a robust evaluation framework aimed at assessing the implementation of the reforms to improve services going forward.

## Painting a clear picture

Central to the evaluation was the Australian firm’s development of a mixed methods approach that

combined quantitative and qualitative analysis to deliver a clear vision of the progress and achievements.

For example, the team conducted a series of case studies to evaluate the impact of introducing community based earlier intervention services within a variety of diverse locations across the State; these locations included a spread of metropolitan and rural areas, those that had higher Aboriginal populations and those that had different levels of community need and risk. The team also developed a workforce survey that was deployed at various points during the reform process to ascertain the change and impact of the reforms on Child Protection, Out of Home Care and Family Services workforce. This was further augmented by focus groups and workshops with individuals such as family service workers who were responsible for embedding the change into their practices.

## Reaping the benefits of success

As a result of their work, the KPMG team delivered a series of in-depth and practical reports that enabled the government to not only track the progress of the reforms, but also to identify opportunities for further reform.

Furthermore, the evaluation has also contributed to other policy decisions for the Department of Human Services Victoria, particularly in designing the Child Protection workforce reform program.

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