



Establishing the foundations for Aboriginal Child & Family Research

AbSec Aboriginal Sector Forum

Paul Gray

Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research
University of Technology Sydney



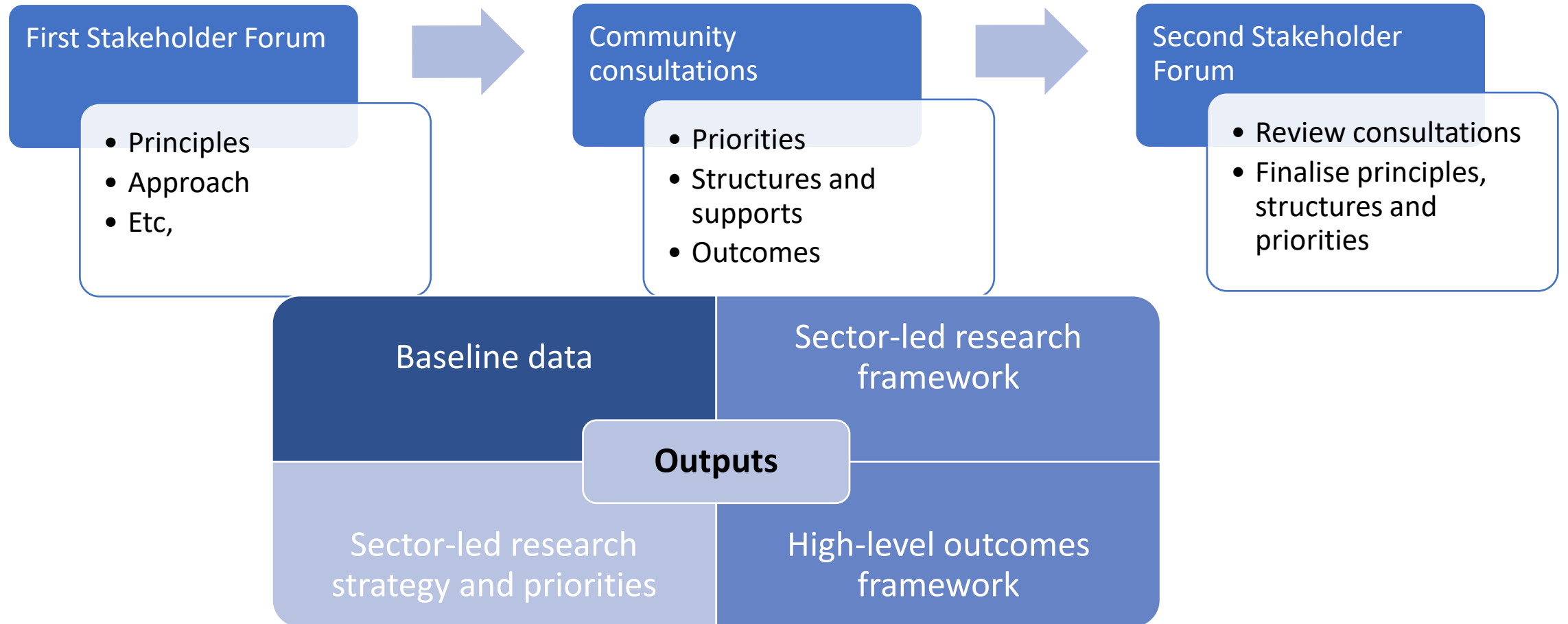
Project Overview

- Aim: to develop the foundations for Aboriginal community-led research about child protection systems and practice,
 - Benchmark current participation
 - Identify desired structures, supports and resources
 - Develop priorities and research strategy
 - Consider what 'outcomes' should guide evaluations and evidence
- Modelled on ACMP approach – multi-stage, community consultations book-ended by stakeholder forums

Project Approach



- Aim: to develop the foundations for Aboriginal community-led research about child protection systems and practice.



Aboriginal research in Aboriginal hands

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- Aboriginal people are usually researched without our permission
 - By non-Aboriginal people, governments, institutions
 - With little or no return

This process is about:

- Our voices & systems
- Our data
- Our priorities

Can't guarantee an outcome, however the aim is to develop a model to focus advocacy





Stage 1 – First Stakeholder Forum

- Forum of community and sector stakeholders, hosted by Aboriginal peak body AbSec
- Presented background information about other similar research and research ethics bodies relevant to Aboriginal communities
- Invited participants to describe the principles and values they believe should guide child and family research in NSW
- Described the proposed project approach, including Stage 2 questions, and invited stakeholder feedback – only continued with their support

Stage 2 – Community Forums



- Series of community forums across various communities – co-hosted with AbSec
- Sought community feedback on the draft principles and values developed in Stage 1
- Asked participants to:
 - Identify child protection/child and family research priorities
 - Describe the processes, structures and resources that would enable them to undertake their own research activities
 - Outline their perspective of the outcomes that are important within the sector
- Aboriginal Child and Family Sector Survey – open to ACCOs, intended to understand current research involvement

Stage 3 – Second Stakeholder Forum



- Second stakeholder forum hosted by AbSec (in person)
- Described the key findings from previous stages
- Presented the proposed research structures, priorities, and outcomes that had been developed based on the principles, values, and findings from previous stages
- Sought feedback on those outputs to further refine them
- Discussed next steps, including how these outputs might inform strategic advocacy



Outputs – Principles and values

Consistent with related research ethics frameworks, Aboriginal child and family research must be guided by the following principles:

- Self-determination and community-control of research are central
- Research must be grounded in and reflect Aboriginal community values and perspectives, and respect and contribute to Indigenous knowledge systems
- Research must be impactful, contributing to achieving the goals and aspirations of our communities. It must contribute to community governance, and build knowledge and evidence of systems and practice to improve outcomes for Aboriginal children, families and communities



Outputs – Principles and values

In light of these principles, Aboriginal child and family research must:

- be community-led, reflecting principles of self-determination, sovereignty, and respect communities as experts in their own lives. This includes determining priorities, approaches, measures, and research team, respecting and building the capacity of Aboriginal communities in research. Data, knowledge and insights developed through the research belong to those communities, and are transparently reported to the community in an appropriate way.
- value and centre culture, and be aligned to the knowledges, culture and protocols, priorities and aspirations of Aboriginal communities
- not be unduly narrow in focus, reflecting holistic notions of wellbeing and the interconnections between individual and community wellbeing, and include individual, family and community strengths, rather than being limited by non-Indigenous assumptions and approaches related to ‘child protection’
- Prioritise delivering positive impact for Aboriginal children, families and communities, and challenge existing systems and injustice



What we heard: Process and Structure

- There must be community control of all research focused on Aboriginal children and families, respecting the authority of local communities, and supporting collective impact.
- All research focused on the child protection system must involve Aboriginal communities, and must consider the impact for Aboriginal children and families, particularly guarding against harm
- Use of Aboriginal ethics processes that uphold our collective interests in research
- Recognise that Aboriginal communities are already doing this work. Build on what exists.
- Communities must be properly resourced to undertake research aligned to their priorities, with opportunities for collaboration (regional/state). This includes building local research infrastructure.

Survey – intended to identify baseline, but inadequate engagement to do so. As such, insights were integrated into Stage 2 findings. It is anticipated that development of improved community-based research infrastructure would assist in establishing baseline

Proposed structure for Aboriginal child & family research



Community research governance

- Local research infrastructure supported by centralised hub
- Resources for local projects
- Provide local governance according to community authorising environment – leverage ACCMs?
- Resourced Secretariat (including established research/policy role within ACCOs) and reimbursement for community governance

Research forum

- Facilitate access to resources, including advocacy for baseline government funding, engagement in grant processes (including philanthropic etc)
- Opportunity for coordination across local research bodies, oversight of statewide projects (incl. DCJ projects)
- Support local processes with technical expertise (e.g. ethics, methods), links to researchers, provide training etc.
- Facilitate sharing of research – clearinghouse, resource roadshows, etc.
- Potential role in data infrastructure (linked to IDS/IDG processes)



What we heard: Research priorities

- Broad range of research priorities, focused on asserting Aboriginal ways of being, doing and knowing, reshaping systems, structures and practice, and building the evidence for Aboriginal models of care across the continuum.
- Emphasised the need for a holistic perspective, centring the stories and experiences of children and families
- Focus on prevention, family preservation/restoration, and healing, but also acknowledging obligation to improve OOHC outcomes



Proposed child and family research priorities

- Priorities can assist in focusing effort and investment – but wary not to have it constrain local governance of research
- Broad range of research priorities, focused on asserting Aboriginal ways of being, doing and knowing, reshaping systems, structures and practice, and building the evidence for Aboriginal models of care across the continuum.
- Emphasised the need for a holistic perspective, centring the stories and experiences of children and families

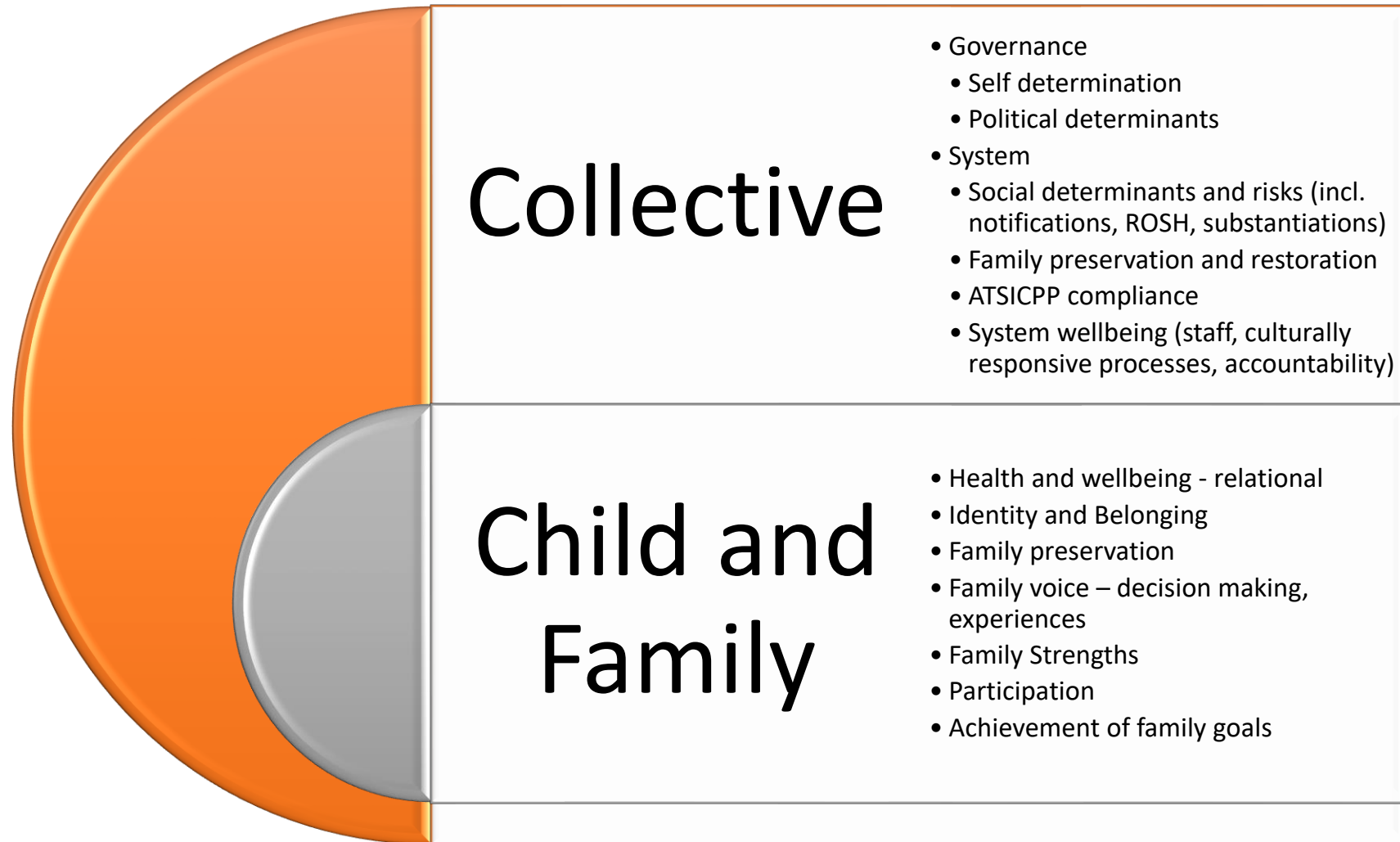
Accountability of current systems	Conceptual Foundations	Transforming current systems	Building the evidence – what works	Hearing the voices of children and families
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Trajectories through the system• Intergenerational impacts• Data accuracy• Challenge racism and structural harm• Implementation of policy – ATSICPP, ACMP etc	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Decolonise child protection• Re-asserting self-determination• Conceptual basis of risk, safety, permanency, best interests etc.• Rethinking legal frameworks• Reclaiming Blak motherhood and fatherhood	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Critique of current systems• Design of new models and approaches• Development of funding models – Aboriginal-led commissioning• Holistic approaches• Transforming decision making (Courts etc)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Evaluation of approaches and responses• Responding effectively to cycles of risk• Outcomes for children and families• Achieving permanency – as we mean it• Culturally valid tools and assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Narratives• Experiences• Outcomes



What we heard: Outcomes framework

- Outcomes were understood broadly, with individual and collective considerations
- Emphasised that local communities need to drive local outcomes – but could be supported by a consistent, high-level framework
- Understanding outcomes requires a range of measures and a clear theory of change
- Broad support for Social and Emotional Wellbeing models which span individual, collective and contextual factors, and consider them relationally.
- Existing ‘outcomes’ were considered to be limited, poorly focused, and do not adequately value what matters from an Aboriginal perspective. They have a role, but need to be expanded.
- Need to shift to strengths framing

Proposed Outcomes framework



Next Steps



- Research outcomes provided to project partner AbSec as relevant Aboriginal peak body in NSW
- Will be progressed through existing AbSec governance processes
- May form ongoing strategic advocacy for systemic change, including calls for the development of Aboriginal community-led research infrastructure – noting that issues around investment and development are challenging
- Opportunities to link to sector strategies, including the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*, and *Safe and Supported: the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children*