



**Australian Government**

**Australian Institute of Family Studies**

# Exploring issues and barriers at the interface of legal reporting obligations and Child Aware Approaches

Rhys Price-Robertson (Australian Institute of Family Studies)  
& Leah Bromfield (University of South Australia)

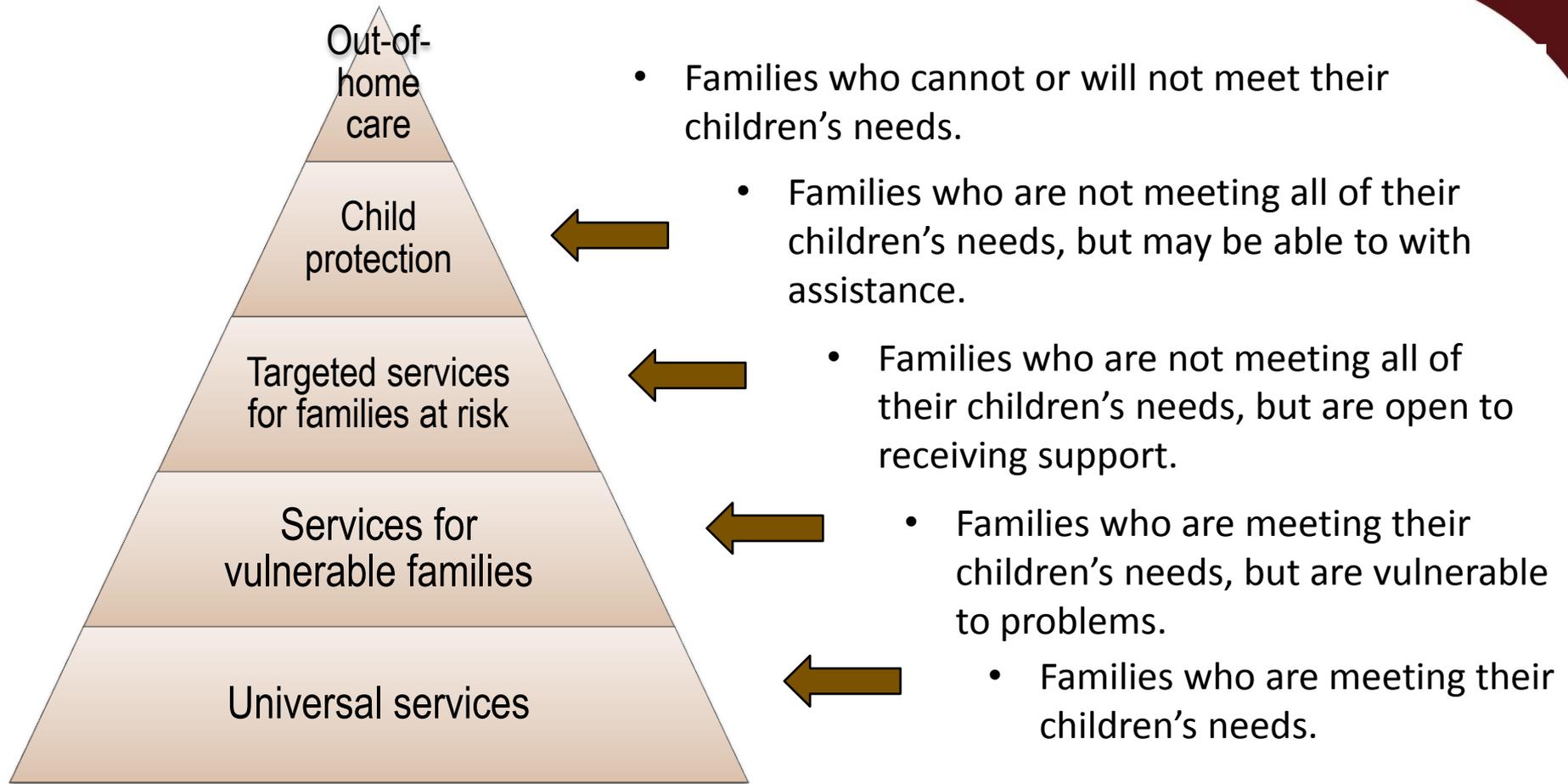
Child Aware Approaches Conference, 11-12 April 2013, Melbourne

# Overview

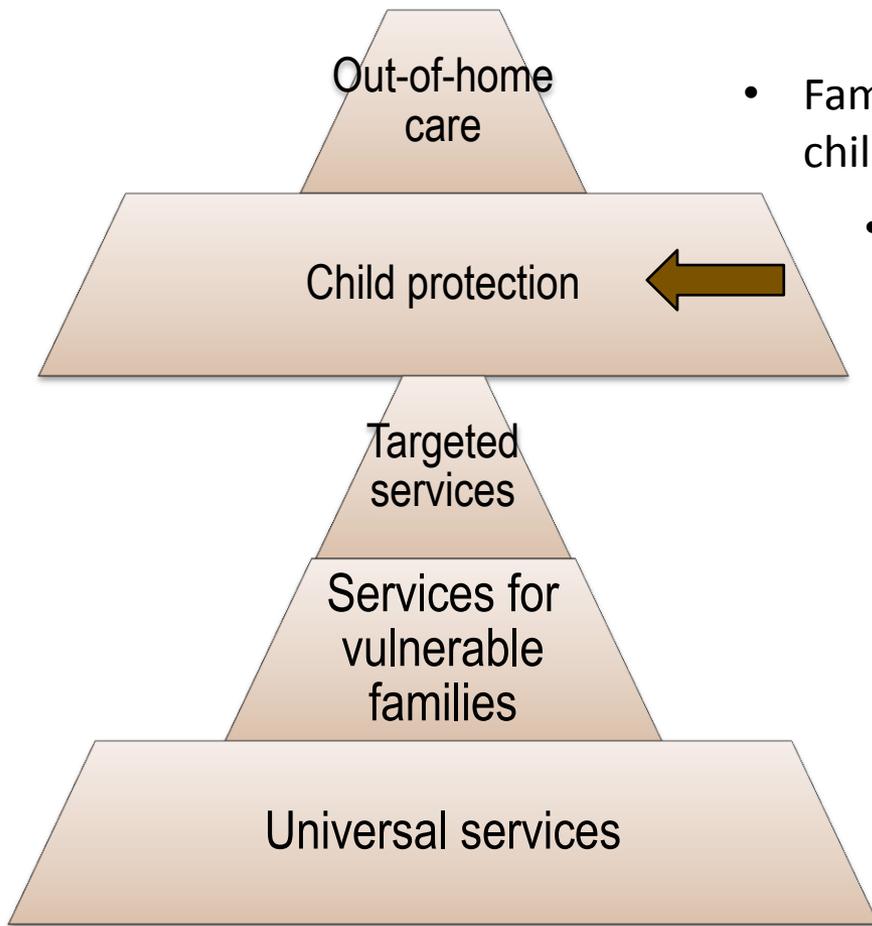
- Problem
  - ◆ Overburdened child protection systems
- Solutions
  - ◆ State and territory reform agendas
  - ◆ National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children
  - ◆ Child Aware Approaches
- Unintended consequences
  - ◆ ...of increased child awareness intersecting with current mandatory reporting requirements



# A balanced child welfare system



# Child welfare in the 1980s and '90s



- Families who cannot or will not meet their children's needs.
- Families who are not meeting all of their children's needs, but may be able to with assistance.
- Families who are not meeting all of their children's needs, but are open to receiving support.
- Families who are meeting their children's needs, but are vulnerable to problems.
- Families who are meeting their children's needs.



# Child welfare in the 1980s and '90s

- Introduction of mandatory reporting
- Increased scope of child protection
- Managerialism and specialisation
- Increased sense of risk—'risk society'

... all led to overburdened child protection systems



# Child Aware Approaches

- Extending awareness of child welfare into other human service sectors “to promote better understanding of the relationship between child abuse and neglect and:
  - ◆ Domestic/family violence
  - ◆ Mental illness; and
  - ◆ Sexual abuse,
  - ◆ Recognising that substance abuse issues may intersect with these risks” (FaHCSIA, 2012)



# The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020

- A substantial and sustained reduction in child abuse and neglect in Australia over time
  1. Children live in safe and supportive families and communities
  2. Children and families access adequate support to promote safety and intervene early
  3. Risk factors for child abuse and neglect are addressed
  4. Children who have been abused or neglected receive the support and care they need for their safety and wellbeing
  5. Indigenous children are supported and safe in their families and communities
  6. Child sexual abuse and exploitation is prevented and survivors receive adequate support (COAG, 2009)



# National Framework: Supporting Outcome 1

Children live in safe and supportive families and communities

‘Protecting children from abuse and neglect begins with developing a shared responsibility for tackling the problem’

Unintended consequences of increased awareness:

- ◆ Lack of responsibility
- ◆ Reluctance to report



# National Framework: Supporting Outcome 3

## Risk factors for child abuse and neglect are addressed

‘Many of the main factors that research has shown to be associated with abuse and neglect are the behaviours and characteristics of parents. ...those risk factors usually include domestic violence, parental alcohol and drug abuse, parental mental health problems and homelessness’

## Unintended consequence of increased awareness:

- ◆ Mandatory reporting conflicts with other service goals



# Issues at the interface of mandatory reporting and Child Aware Approaches

- Lack of responsibility
- Reluctance to report
- Mandatory reporting conflicts with other service goals



# Unintended consequence: Lack of responsibility

- Need to be clear about what ‘awareness’ and ‘responsibility’ mean
- Focus on child abuse *prevention*
- Messages we could share:
  - ◆ All parents need help at times;
  - ◆ Involve men in saying ‘no’ to domestic violence;
  - ◆ Encourage family-friendly work policies;
  - ◆ Reflect on how parental problems affect children.
- Tailor messages to different groups



# Unintended consequence: Reluctance to report

- Need welfare systems that can appropriately refer incoming families
- E.g., Gateway services, Tasmania
  - ◆ Single access point, with referral to different services
  - ◆ Linkages between different service providers
  - ◆ Can direct children to child protection system
  - ◆ Fulfills mandatory reporting requirements



# Unintended consequence: Mandatory reporting conflicts with other service goals

- Again, need welfare systems that can appropriately refer incoming families
- Think about reporting thresholds
- Could consider other ways of reporting
  - ◆ E.g., Cooperative needs assessment in Finland



# Summary

- It's time to start thinking carefully about these unintended consequences
- We need to ensure our legislative environments support our efforts to raise child awareness



# Thank you!

Contact: [rhys.price-robertson @aifs.gov.au](mailto:rhys.price-robertson@aifs.gov.au)



**Australian Government**

**Australian Institute of Family Studies**