

Data Systems across the Life Course Submission

The opportunity for an integrated data system for children and families

05.07.2024



The voice for
local government

No one understands the challenges and opportunities facing Victoria in the 21st century better than local councils. From rapidly evolving technology to social changes, shifting economies to environmental pressures, our local communities and the governments that represent them—are at the forefront of multiple transformations happening simultaneously.

As the peak body for the Victorian local government sector, the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) offers councils a one-stop shop of services and support to help them serve their communities.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we live. We recognise their continuing connection to land, waters and culture and pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

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1 Executive Summary

The Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) is pleased to provide a submission to the Communities and Families Transformation Program. Our submission underscores the necessity for an integrated data system for children and families in Victoria. The Department of Families, Fairness & Housing (DFFH) aims to ensure a seamless, accessible, and outcomes-focused child and family system across all levels of government. The Victorian Early Years Compact 2017-2027 establishes a framework for a joined-up, place-based service system, targeting positive outcomes for children and families, irrespective of their circumstances.

Local government is crucial in delivering universal services and supporting secondary and tertiary services for children and families. However, they face challenges managing multiple state government system requirements, affecting efficiency and service delivery.

The MAV advocates for a modern, integrated system to address these inefficiencies, aligning with the State Government's Digital Strategy. Current national and state policies aim to enhance child health and wellbeing, but the lack of an integrated system limits the ability to track and evaluate these outcomes effectively.

There is a significant opportunity to develop an integrated data system with Current investments by the Department of Health (DH), the Department of Education (DE), and the DFFH in various child and family systems. This system should follow a child from conception through universal and targeted services, capturing a holistic view of their needs and outcomes.

2 Introduction

In Victoria, all levels of government are stewards of the child and family system. There needs to be a set of outcomes for children and families in Victoria that guide Governments to ensure:

- The child and family system is joined up and easy to navigate, providing connections between universal and broader child and family systems and programs.
- Governments use funding, regulatory, and policy levers within the market environment in combination with service delivery to shape a system that is sustainable, flexible, aligned to need, and driven by outcomes for children and families.
- Governments take shared responsibility for the system and collaborate with the sector to realise shared goals.
- There is holistic governance and clear roles and responsibilities for the child and family services sector.

Sitting alongside the stewardship role of Governments are a set of principles – accessibility, equity, affordability and quality. The Victorian Early Years Compact 2017 -2027 <https://www.vic.gov.au/early-years-compact> provides an approach for a joined-up, place-based service system across the State Government working in partnership with the MAV representing local government. Through this Compact, the parties seek the following outcomes for Victoria's children and their families:

- All young children are engaged, confident and creative learners.
- All children are safe, cared for and experience optimal health and development.
- Vulnerability, location and disadvantage do not determine outcomes for young children.
- Families feel well supported by high-quality, inclusive services for children and families in the early years.
- Families are connected to culture, actively participate in community life and can access help when and where they need it.

3 Role of Local Government

Role of local government in the children and families service system

In Victoria, local government is the main provider of universal services for children and families. In many cases, they are also involved in planning and delivering secondary and tertiary services. They also support and provide unique enabling services that support the referral, entry, access to and connection of children and families into the broader service system.

Local government has faced the challenge of managing a wide range of State Government system requirements for numerous years. Depending on the range of services councils deliver, the main ones being Maternal and Child Health services and Kindergarten they can be using up to five government systems to record information and data for the same child or family.

Councils share the same aspirations outlined in the DFFH Transformation paper including;

- a system where frontline staff could spend more time working with the children and families.
- a system where the needs of the child at the first point of contact in the service system are captured and responded to.
- a system that supports a better understanding of the interventions required and the efficacy of them and that policy, practice and legislative change was effectively implemented to improve practice and response.

4 Integrated Systems

Importance / Benefits of integrated systems

The Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) has long advocated for the State Government to develop a fit-for-purpose joined-up system that addresses a range of current issues including siloed and inefficient systems and processes, and the need for a client-centric centred model. The appointment of a Minister for Children, and the departments of DFFH, Department of Health (DH) and the Department of Education (DE) all in the process of reviewing and renewing service systems, presents a unique opportunity for the State Government to develop a modern integrated operating model and service system.

This aligns with the State Government's [Digital Strategy](#) to 'deliver experiences that are centred on the needs of individuals and businesses and empower diverse Victorian communities; Build services that are easy to navigate and include support options that are available when needed; design inclusive and accessible services that are connected across government'.

Current national and state policy aims to improve child health and wellbeing outcomes; however, the service system cannot cross-reference parameters that could measure these outcomes. Consequently, it is not possible to track the individual child, family and/or service changes over time, understand subpopulation and whole of population data, or effectively evaluate and improve current services.

The Australia's Children Report (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2020) synthesises and reports on child health data sets across Australia. The Report identifies several national data gaps, including the current inability to track children's outcomes as they move through the different services and systems. Also identifying that without this data it is difficult to evaluate services effectively (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2020).

As previously stated, there is now an opportunity for the State Government to have an integrated data system in relation to children with:

- DH investing in a new system for the Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Service inclusive of MCH services provided by the local government, health services on behalf of the local government, Aboriginal MCH services and the MCH Line.
- DE is redeveloping the KIMS system to include participation data of children attending kindergarten, not just enrolment data.
- DFFH is in progress with the Communities and Families Transformation Program concerning new technology supporting the communities and families service system.

In addition, DE is leading the State Government's Child Information Sharing Scheme and is the steward for ChildLink which can link limited data sets across Government funded services. For optimal progress, all further systems development should be founded on the principles of ChildLink and should actively enhance system integration.

5 Conceptual Model

A conceptual model of a system following the child

Any conceptual model developed should be underpinned by an overall intention of the State Government to deliver a joined-up technology system that supports the child and families service system, not just select programs within parts of that service system.

For example, the MCH system – CDIS held by councils and DH, is usually the first system that records details of the child and family and yet the DFFH Transformation proposal makes no reference to CDIS in the conceptual approach. Nor does it reference any of the existing systems in DE that also capture a range of information regarding children and families including ChildLink.

The MAV suggests that a conceptual model should be developed from a child and family perspective, rather than a program perspective. It should follow a child from conception through the universal service system and targeted service system responding to children's and families' needs.

The MAV's vision is for an integrated data system that incorporates:

- Universal services of MCH, Kindergarten (including enrolment/attendance), Childcare, Family Day Care, Supported Playgroup and immunisation data.
- Targeted services systems and case management – Child Protection, Family Services, Community Health, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations.
- Ability to data link to/with current data systems e.g. Hospital systems e.g. antenatal and birthing information, RCH and Monash Children's for medical information.
- Ability to datalink to current state and federal registers. For example, Victorian Perinatal Data Collection and the Australian Immunisation Register.
- Enabling systems such as Central Registration and Enrolment are sequenced to be brought into an integrated data system.
- That system development is guided by an outcome focus on children and families including child health and development, child safety and determinants of health.
- Measures for change and impact of interactions/interventions/health promotion.
- Impact of prevention on individuals/subpopulation and/or population.

That system development and future aspirations are underpinned by consideration of the workforce using these systems including building in:

- Ability for the workforce to easily access snapshots and customisable information required for their role.
- Search functionality including client view and service engagement is easy to access.
- Focus on enabling collaborative practice in line with the Child Information Sharing legislation where consent and access are based on the role in the system.
- Improvement to data sets for outcomes and research to support service improvement.

6 Moving Forward

As stated in the State Government Digital Strategy, information technology is central to a modern government that delivers better services, makes better decisions and offers better value to Victorians. People do not want to have to repeat basic information and are often willing to share their data in exchange for easier-to-use, quicker, more seamless services. They also expect their information to follow them across service channels within a single interaction particularly where they may be interacting in their most vulnerable moments.

Any transformation strategy needs to include consultation and co-design with local government as they are arguably the biggest single user of State government systems. Leveraging and building on common connected platforms will require a clear mandate from the State Government to invest more efficiently and undertake some big and bold thinking.

The MAV supports the future opportunities outlined in the consultation document provided at the Town Hall webinar to develop an accessible, integrated and responsive system that supports children and families (and workers) in their journey.

MAV would be pleased to provide clarification on any information in this submission. For further information, please contact, Kim Howland, Manager Community Wellbeing, at khowland@mav.asn.au

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