



Family &
Community
Services

FACS ANALYSIS AND RESEARCH

Applying the NSW Human Services Outcomes Framework in FACS: an overview

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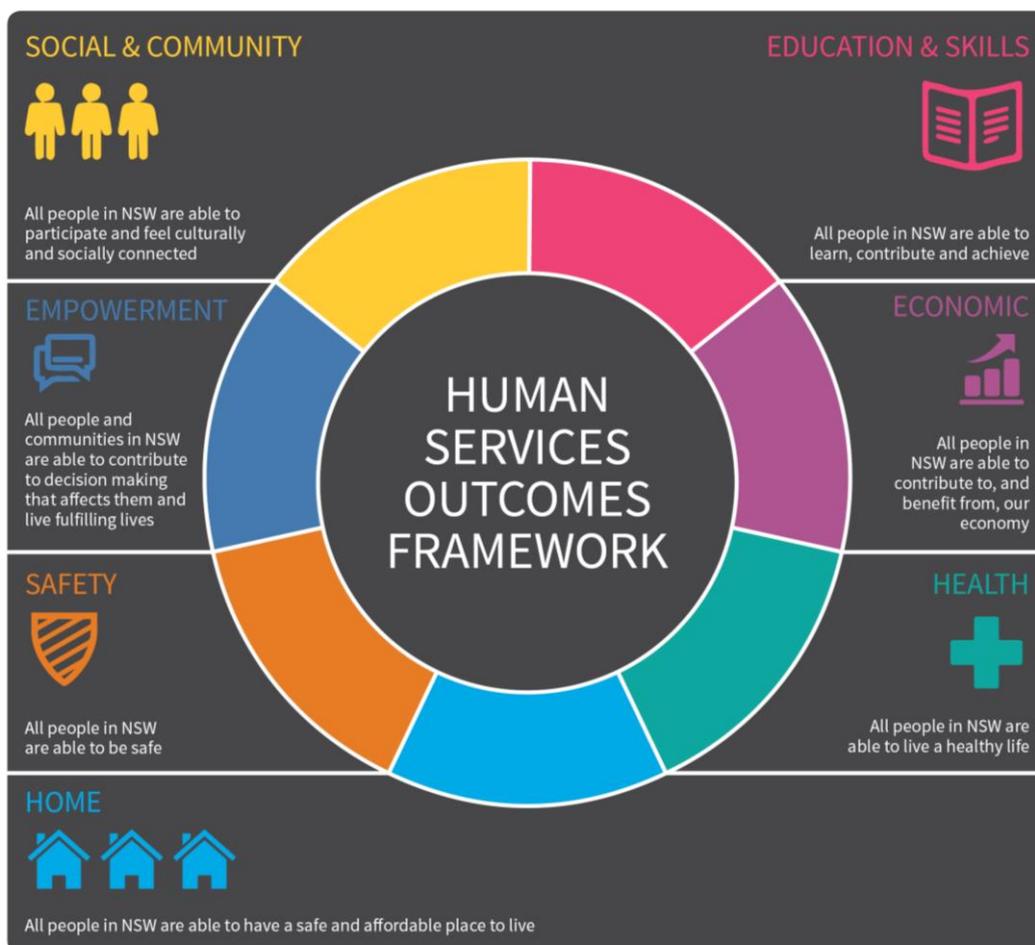
The NSW Human Services Outcomes Framework

The NSW Human Services Outcomes Framework (Outcomes Framework) provides a common set of population-level wellbeing outcomes and indicators for NSW government and non-government agencies. The seven wellbeing domains were designed by agencies and non-governmental organisation (NGOs) and informed by a review of national and international research on what determines a person’s wellbeing. The seven outcome domains are Safety, Home, Health, Education and Skills, Economics, Social and Community and Empowerment (see Figure 1 below).

The Outcomes Framework aims to:

- be a resource for government agencies and NGOs to work together to achieve better results using the best-available evidence of what works
- facilitate collaboration and opportunities for working together
- help identify programs and services that have the greatest impact.

Figure 1: The seven domains of the NSW Human Services Outcomes Framework



FACS development of the Outcomes Framework

Family and Community Services (FACS) is applying the Outcomes Framework to its policies, programs and services. The FACS application of the Outcomes Framework was designed using a capabilities approach proposed by the 1998 Nobel Prize winning economist Professor Amartya Sen (Sen, 2005). This approach views the role of government as an enabler of its people (Alkire, 2005). It does not guarantee the achievement of outcomes but rather the development of capabilities that enable people to realise the outcomes they value (Nussbaum, 2011). Long-term wellbeing outcomes are a function of multiple factors, including families, communities, other services and people themselves (Hobson and Fahlen, 2009).

FACS initiated the development of an Outcomes Framework in 2015 to systematically track and prioritise client outcomes. This process involved extensive consultation with internal stakeholders, government partners, universities, research centres, and service providers. This consultation was important to ensure clarity and transparency about how to meaningfully measure the success of services, and decide what services should be prioritised, when and for whom.

How FACS is applying the Outcomes Framework

The Outcomes Framework provides a way to understand and measure the extent to which FACS makes a long-term positive difference to people's lives and enables us to build evidence of what works in improving wellbeing. The Outcomes Framework contains the following elements:

- desired outcomes for FACS clients and populations are clearly defined
- evidence of what services and supports are needed to achieve the desired outcomes
- data collection and analysis to report the extent to which those outcomes are being achieved.

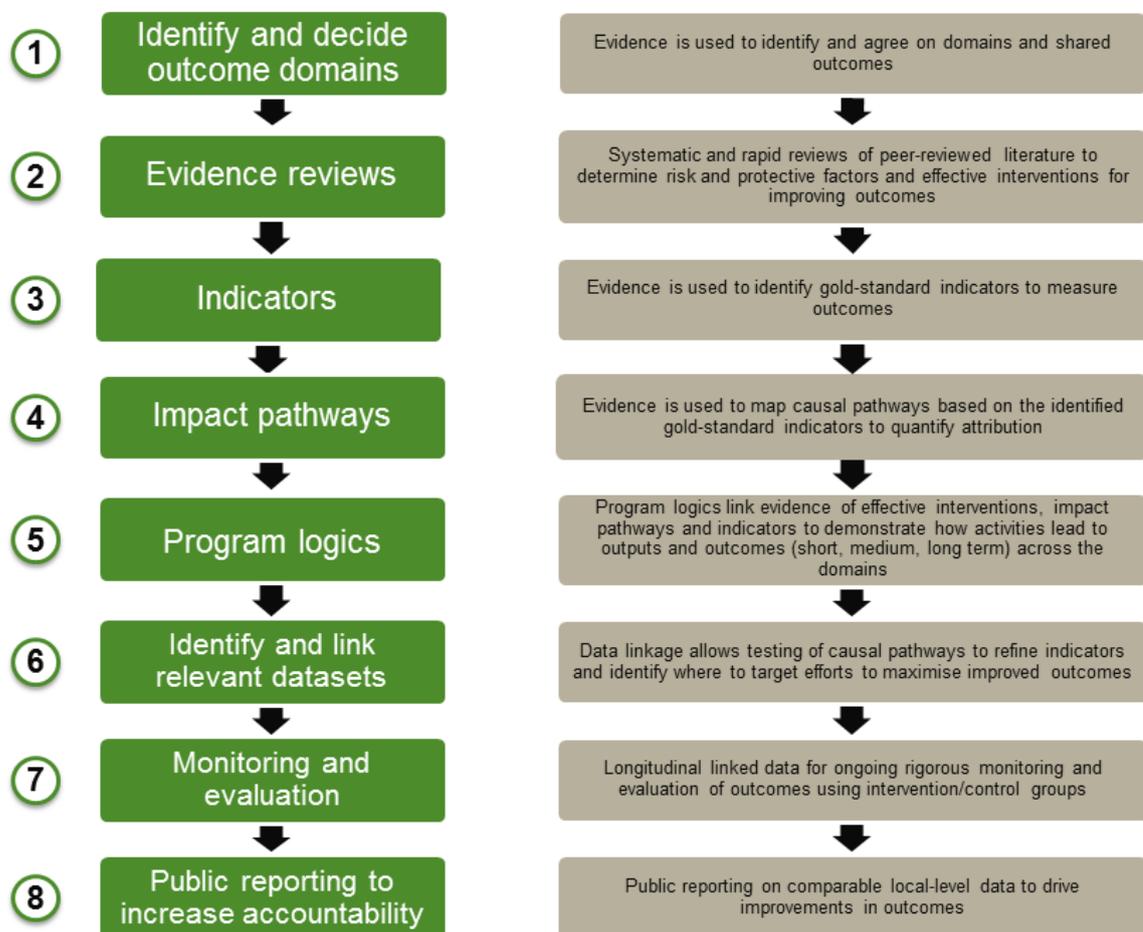
The Outcomes Framework helps FACS meet the needs of clients through developing a common understanding across FACS, other agencies and stakeholders of what outcomes should be achieved. It builds a link between program objectives, research evidence, performance and effectiveness in influencing client outcomes. The Framework incorporates an intergenerational view of programs and services and aims to influence the development of capabilities at multiple levels (e.g. parent and child) and time-points along the life cycle.

FACS is applying the Framework to better focus activities towards achieving client outcomes for specific client cohorts and programs. This means that investment focused on changing the trajectory of people’s lives can have long-term impacts on client outcomes and FACS service delivery.

An outcomes-focused approach will also promote consistency in applying evidence, the measurement and evaluation of outcomes and activities, foster innovation and learning and encourage collaboration in service design.

The Outcomes Framework can be adapted across any area of FACS and can be tailored to individual programs and services. In the following section we outline the key elements in applying the Outcomes Framework to FACS (illustrated in Figure 2).

Figure 2: An evidence based approach to implementing the Outcomes Framework in FACS



1. Identifying and deciding on outcome domains

The seven domains of the Outcomes Framework are relevant to the wellbeing of all people in NSW. There may be, however, instances where FACS will specify outcomes within these domains for specific cohorts. For example, within the education domain, school readiness may be chosen when considering important outcomes for vulnerable children aged 0-5 years.

In other instances, FACS may prioritise some outcomes over others because they are more pressing for the cohort. For example, economic, health and education domains may be more important initially for improving outcomes among a cohort of people who are unemployed than other domains. Prioritising outcome domains is undertaken with stakeholders including representatives of the cohort selected.

2. Undertaking evidence reviews to identify protective factors and interventions

Research evidence helps guide decision making at all stages of the commissioning, policy and program design and service delivery process. Evidence helps us to identify what works and to pinpoint gaps where the evidence of program or intervention effectiveness is lacking. Systematic reviews of the best available peer-reviewed published literature answer specific policy or program questions, and assist us to identify protective factors and interventions that improve client wellbeing. Increasing the production and use of evidence reviews should be a future focus for FACS policy and reform. Several evidence reviews have been commissioned or are in the process of being commissioned (see Figure 3). These include:

- An evidence review of high-quality wellbeing indicators across the life cycle (Miranti et al., 2016)
- An evidence review of risk factors and interventions for preventing homelessness after transition from government services including out of home care (Conroy and Williams, 2017)
- An evidence gap map of interventions for children in out of home care (Albers et al., 2017)
- An evidence review applying social housing to the Outcomes Framework (Brackertz et al., 2017).

Figure 3: Evidence reviews to support implementation of the Outcomes Framework



3. Developing evidence-based pathways

Evidence pathways are links between the seven domains that were developed from a desktop review of the best available evidence on what improves wellbeing for FACS clients.

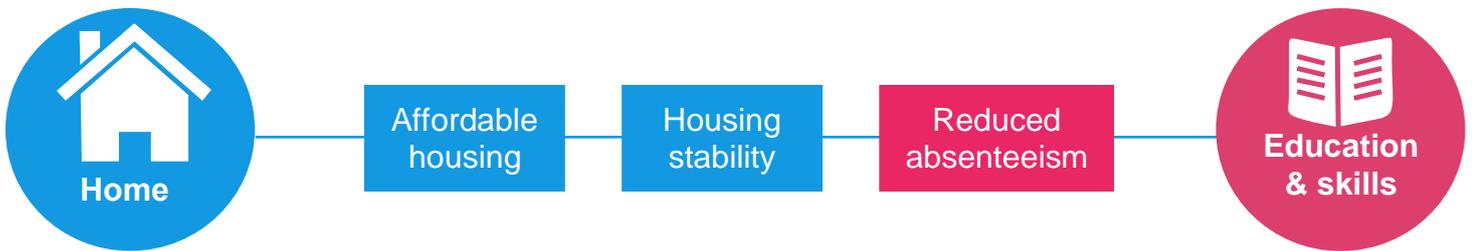
There are marked differences in the pathways between people who are disadvantaged and people who are advantaged in society. For FACS to support breaking cycles of disadvantage, strategies should primarily focus on impacting capabilities at certain intervention points to best assist people to change their life trajectory.

The pathways can be applied to supporting FACS clients in a number of ways. They can be used to understand trajectories across the life-course and in terms of people’s use of government services. Importantly they can be used to identify the outcomes that matter most to clients and focus FACS on providing services that support achieving these outcomes. To demonstrate this concept, a pathway is shown below.

Figure 4 illustrates an evidence-based pathway that shows how stable, affordable housing can influence the attainment of education and skills:

- Housing tenure impacts housing stability as people tend to move around, for example, in the pursuit of affordable housing
- A stable environment in turn influences absenteeism in that if multiple movements are avoided, less school days are missed, parents experience less stress and
- These two factors can lead to a positive impact on child development and allow children to improve their education outcomes.

Figure 4: The impact pathway between the Home domain and Education & Skills domain



4. Identifying and developing indicators

After developing pathways, indicators are identified to measure outcomes along these pathways to wellbeing. Indicators bring the Outcomes Framework to life and enable FACS to assess whether a person’s wellbeing has improved over time as a result of services or intervention. Indicators are derived from evidence and assessed according to criteria such as: relevance, reliability, validity, comparability and efficiency.

Validated measures can be used to track how FACS is progressing with regard to achieving improved client outcomes. Population outcomes measures, FACS client outcome measures and measures of risk and protective factors are being identified to assist users to align activity level measures to outcome domains. These measures can be used to monitor progress towards achieving agreed outcomes at a contract, program or population level. An indicator library is currently being developed to support the use of consistent scientifically validated measures across FACS. An example of measures for vulnerable children and young people is shown in Figure 5.

5. Developing program logics to link activities and outcomes

A program logic outlines the theory of change a program uses to predict impacts on client outcomes. Developing this theory of change before a program or activity is implemented is essential to test whether the program impacts on the identified outcomes, and whether the impacts can be attributed to the program, rather than other factors.

FACS is currently using an outcomes-based program logic to guide Future Directions¹ in the design of specific service improvement initiatives, such as Personal Support Plans. This approach allows the designers to use high-quality research evidence of what works and enables agencies to prioritise activities most likely to work best for clients, and modify or stop activities that do not support the

¹ Future Directions for Social Housing in NSW sets out the NSW Government’s vision for social housing over the next 10 years. This strategy will drive better outcomes for tenants including helping those who are able to transition out of social housing.

intended outcomes. Appendix 2 illustrates a program logic template used in evaluation in FACS.

The program logic model also assists in identifying a set of indicators that will provide data about progress towards the outcome. Using gold-standard, validated and practical measures will improve FACS' ability to attribute program performance to the achievement of client outcomes.

Figure 5: Example indicators for vulnerable children and young people for each of the seven domains of the NSW Human Services Outcomes Framework

Sample of draft measures: Vulnerable children and young people			
DOMAINS	0-4 YEARS EARLY CHILDHOOD	5-17 YEARS SCHOOLING	18-24 YEARS TRANSITION TO EMPLOYMENT
Economic	Proportion of children aged 0-12 years living in households experiencing housing disadvantage (homelessness, overcrowding, housing stress, forced residential mobility)		
	Proportion of households with children aged 0-14 years where at least 50% of gross household incomes is from government allowances		
Education & Skills	Proportion of children who are developmentally vulnerable on one or more domains (AEDC)		
	Proportion of children achieving at or above the national minimum standard (NAPLAN)		
Home	Proportion of children aged 0-17 year exiting out-of-home-care during the year who had 1 or 2 placements		
	Rate of children aged 0-17 years who are in out-of-home-care		
Health	Proportion of parents with children aged 0-14 years who used any illicit drugs in the last 12 months		
	Proportion of children scoring 'of concern' on the strengths and difficulties questionnaire		
Safety	Proportion of adults who experience current partner violence and their children saw or heard the violence in the previous 12 months		
	% of children and young people re-reported at ROSH within 12 months after a case plan for a previous ROSH report was completed and closed		
Social & Community	Proportion of households with children 0-14 years where their neighbourhood is perceived as safe		
	Proportion of Indigenous children aged 0-17 years in care who have a cultural support plan		
Empowerment	Proportion of children aged 0-12 years whose parent or guardian was usually able to get help when needed		

6. Identifying and linking relevant data to measure outcomes

Improving outcomes for the most vulnerable members in the community requires a client-centric approach that is a joint responsibility across government agencies, Non-Government Organisations (NGOs), private enterprise and the community. Data linkage with state and commonwealth agencies is therefore required to measure pathways/trajectories of service usage, identify intervention points that can be addressed in order to improve educational, health, justice and other life outcomes for FACS clients.

Measuring improved client outcomes will mean linking administrative data with other NSW and commonwealth agencies. There are a range of projects currently underway or in development that involve the linkage of FACS data with data from other government agencies (both state and commonwealth) and universities. This work will demonstrate how FACS programs improve clients' outcomes such as improved health or educational outcomes. Linked data will transform the evidence base and enable us to better target services and interventions for FACS clients.

7. Rigorous evaluation and monitoring

FACS is undertaking a range of outcome evaluations of its major reforms and initiatives that are aligned to the Outcomes Framework, such as Future Directions, Their Futures Matters² and the Premier's Youth Initiative³ focused on homelessness, the latter of which is being evaluated using a randomised controlled trial. This will ensure FACS programs and initiatives are working toward the same client outcomes and applying rigorous methodology. The Outcomes Framework is used to ensure outcome evaluations:

- clearly align the aims, outputs, process measures and outcome measures across each of the domains, to demonstrate which programs and initiatives are meeting which client needs
- rigorous baseline data collection and ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the impacts and cost benefits of interventions from the client perspective, and estimates of the attribution of benefits to specific programs and initiatives
- improved consistency in data collection across providers, programs and initiatives, and increased capability for reporting local data back to providers to inform service improvement.

Rigorous outcome evaluation using robust comparison groups will be an essential step in the commissioning cycle to assess what clients need, how those needs are best met, and the most appropriate mode of delivery.

² Their Futures Matter sets out a future vision and long-term strategy for out of home care, and for improving outcomes for vulnerable children and families in NSW.

³ The Premier's Youth Initiative aims to reduce youth homelessness by reviewing the support services available to vulnerable young people leaving out-of-home care.

8. Increasing accountability through public reporting

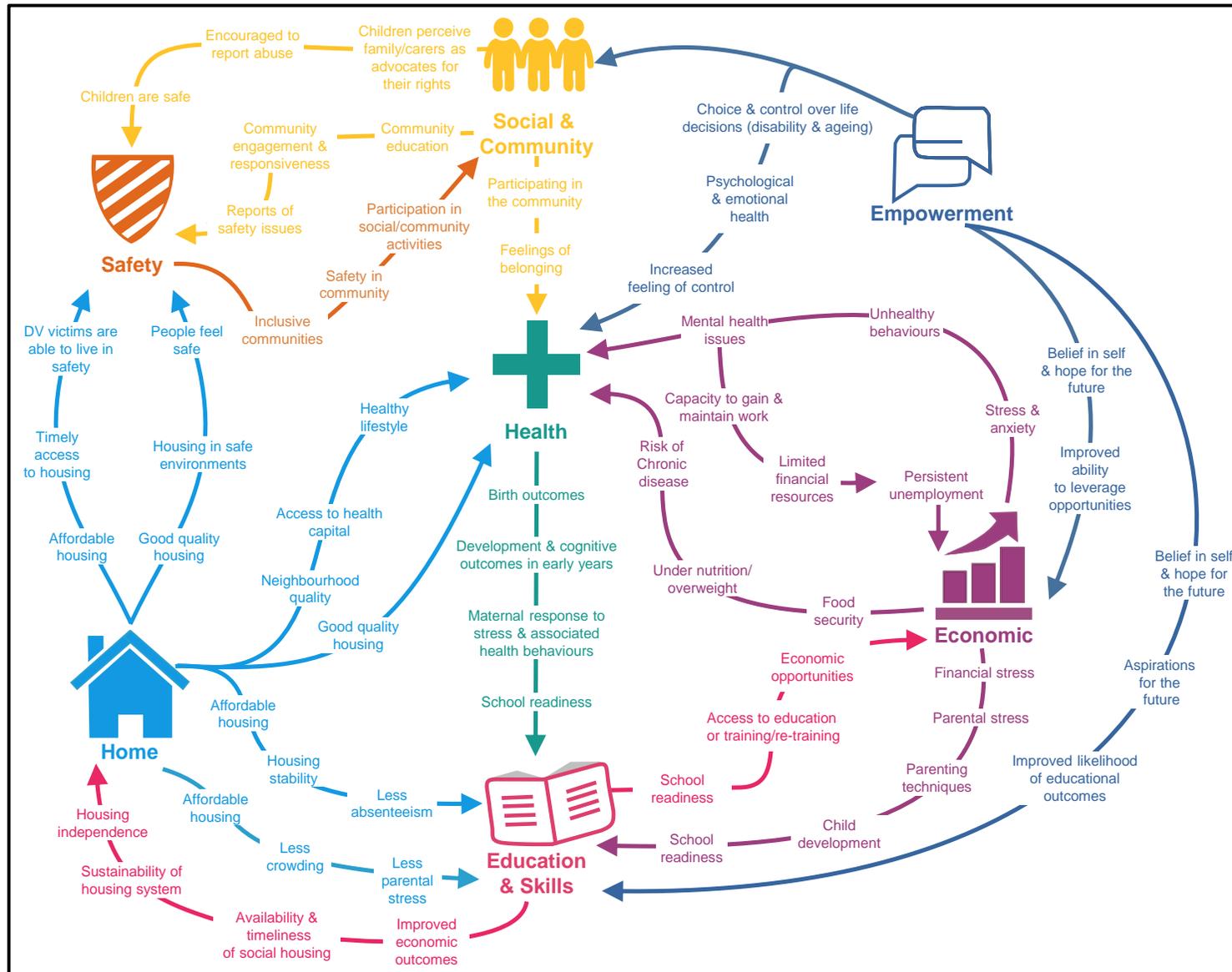
FACS has an obligation to collect information for the purposes of public reporting. It is our intention to use the Outcomes Framework to report against each domain at a population cohort and district or local geographic level so that areas with similar characteristics can assess their outcomes together. Focusing on outcome domains will help build a common understanding across agencies and NGOs of how working together can contribute to a common achievement of outcomes.

Next steps

The next stage for the Outcomes Framework is to routinely embed the framework in FACS' strategic, service and operational commissioning to improve outcomes for clients in NSW. In 2017-18, we will focus on:

- Supporting the Better Outcomes for Aboriginal people policy reforms
- Developing a FACS indicator bank of high quality, consistent program level and client outcome indicators for use by FACS staff that aligns to the outcome domains of the Human Services Outcomes Framework. This will be supported by a guide to assist staff in using indicators to measure client outcomes
- Continuing the completion of evidence reviews to inform the selection of best evidence interventions and programs to improve client outcomes
- Establishing a network of expert researchers for peer review and time-limited advisory panels to increase the rigour of evidence used in application of the Outcomes Framework
- Developing software to support FACS staff use and interpretation of research evidence and application of the Outcomes Framework
- Developing guidelines to enable the Outcomes Framework to inform the way we measure and pay for performance in our contracts with providers
- Continuing application of the Outcomes Framework to Social Housing, Homelessness, Targeted Early Intervention, Child Protection and Out of Home Care.
- Continuing major data linkage projects and outcome evaluations in Social Housing, Homelessness, Child Protection and Out of Home Care.

Appendix 1: Pathways across all the domains and the impact on life outcomes



Appendix 2: An example of an evidence-based program logic that aligns with the NSW Human Services Outcomes Framework

1. PROBLEM	2. EVIDENCE	3. PROGRAM: core components and flexible activities (if applicable)	4. MECHANISMS OF CHANGE	5. OUTPUTS & CLIENT OUTCOMES Describe the specific client outcomes likely to result from this program component as they relate to the NSW Human Services Outcome Framework Domains				6. GOAL			
				Immediate outputs and implementation outcomes	Immediate outcomes (outcome measure) Primarily attributed to the program	Intermediate outcomes (outcome measure) Partly attributed to program, beginning of shared attribution	Long-term outcomes (outcome measure) Shared attribution across agencies/NGOs				
<p>Identify the problem areas this program seeks to change. Be as specific as possible</p> <p><i>I.e. Describe the population group or cohort, delivery setting, client needs or risk factors experienced by this population group</i></p>	<p>Summarise the research evidence on the most effective programs, and/or program components, available to change the identified problems. Please start with evidence from published systematic reviews and high quality randomised controlled trials that demonstrate effectiveness. Please also include relevant evaluation reports.</p> <p><i>Note: FACS Library can assist in providing relevant research evidence including literature searches Library@facs.nsw.gov.au</i></p>	<p>Based on the identified problems, and what the evidence suggests is the most effective way to intervene to change these problems, describe what your program will look like in terms of core standardised components and the flexible activities attached to each of these components (there is no limit to how many core components or activities you can include)</p>	<p>Describe how the program will specifically achieve the desired outcomes via the program activities</p>		ECONOMIC						
					EDUCATION & SKILLS						
					SAFETY						
					HOME						
					HEALTH						
					SOCIAL & COMMUNITY						
					EMPOWERMENT						

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