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Towards a national research agenda

Achievements thus far and where to from here

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Protecting Australia's Children Research Forum

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Overview

- Why are we developing a national research agenda?
- Steps for developing and maintaining a national research agenda
- Nature and extent of the evidence
- Research priorities - initial consultations
- Developing a conceptual framework



Why a national research agenda?



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A National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020

- A National Framework
 - ◆ developed through consultation with the sector
 - ◆ for the benefit of the sector, and
 - ◆ ultimately, for Australia's children



Strength of a national research agenda

- A national research agenda would provide:
 - ◆ a systemic framework to ensure that there is a quality evidence base to inform policy and practice; and
 - ◆ guidance to researchers and research funders regarding the relative priorities.



Developing and maintaining a national research agenda



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Steps in developing a national research agenda

- What are the research needs for the sector?
- What is the nature and extent of the existing Australian evidence-base?
 - ◆ What research has been done?
 - ◆ What do we know from what's been done?
 - ◆ What is the quality of the research (i.e., is it robust, reliable, generalisable)?
- Is there international literature that is transferable to the Australian context?
- What are the priority research gaps?



Steps in maintaining a national research agenda

- National research agenda to be publicly available
- Act to fill the priority research gaps
 - ◆ Seek funding through all available channels
- Mechanisms to monitor and report on progress
 - ◆ (need to know what new research has been completed)
- Mechanisms to review and revise the agenda over time
- Effectively disseminate what we learn from research



Nature and extent of the evidence



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Audit of child abuse prevention and child protection

- Statutory child protection services
 - ◆ risk assessment, service system structure, workforce issues, mandatory reporting, community attitudes
- Prevention
 - ◆ children services, parenting services, home visiting and family support
- Therapeutic interventions
 - ◆ family preservation, family reunification, family violence, sexual abuse survivors and perpetrator programs
- Risk factors
 - ◆ substance misuse, adult sex offenders, bullying, juvenile offenders, organisational safety
- Incidence and recurrence of child protection involvement
- Methodological issues



Systematic review of OOHC research

- Characteristics of natural families
- Outcomes for children and young people in care
- Foster families
- Reunification
- Participation of children in decisions affecting their lives
- Young people leaving care
- Cultural considerations in out-of-home care
- Residential and specialised models of care
- Kinship care
- Issues for non-child welfare professionals working with children and young people in out-of-home care



Extent of the evidence-base

“The main issues that these audits have highlighted are the overall shortage of research and the low level of research funding for child abuse prevention, child protection and out-of-home care research in Australia, such that it is not possible to claim an adequate evidence-base for sound policy and practice decisions, or to be able to single out particular areas” as requiring further research



Nature of the evidence-base

“... an over-reliance on qualitative techniques, the consequence of which was an evidence base rich in detail, but with limited capacity to be generalised. In addition, the majority of the quantitative studies that were conducted provided only descriptive data”



What you told us had been done

- Audits completed in 2004 and 2005
 - ◆ Now dated
 - ◆ Broader concept of protecting children
- Research areas not identified in the audit:
 - ◆ Children's voices
 - ◆ Family law and child maltreatment
 - ◆ Children's courts
 - ◆ Maltreatment prevalence in the community
 - ◆ Child Protection and clients with CALD backgrounds
 - ◆ Research dissemination & implementation in child & family welfare
- Significant gap = systematic appraisal of what's been done



What are the research priorities?



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Survey of frontline practitioners

- Responses coded in three ways:
 - ◆ Individual research questions
 - ◆ Populations of interest
 - ◆ Research designs
- Knowledge or research needs?
 - ◆ The argument for effective dissemination



Your priorities

- Similar to the survey, responses included:
 - ◆ Individual research questions
 - ◆ Populations of interest
 - ◆ Priority research designs
- Crossed the spectrum of prevention, protection and out-of-home care
- Many similarities in terms of research questions
- Some new areas ...
 - ◆ Broader concept of protecting children
 - ◆ Attention to the way research is used



What should a national research agenda look like?



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Do the audits provide a starting framework for the agenda?

- Only looked at what had been done
- Did not identify the broader areas of what needed to be done
- Did not assess what international literature was transferable to the Australian context
- Could not identify single areas that stood out as gaps
- No conceptual framework - just a thematic analysis of what's been done - already it is getting unwieldy
- Broad research areas (e.g. outcomes) do not provide sufficient detail



National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children

1. Children live in safe & supportive families
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



New Zealand

- Developed research framework to inform statutory services for children in care:
 - ◆ context of care;
 - ◆ chronology of care;
 - ◆ the resources for care; and
 - ◆ the development of care



United States and Canada

- Using a public health framework
 - ◆ population-based research measuring the prevalence and incidence of child abuse and neglect;
 - ◆ identifying risk and protective factors, causal mechanisms and the outcomes of child abuse and neglect;
 - ◆ intervention and evaluation; and
 - ◆ implementation and dissemination

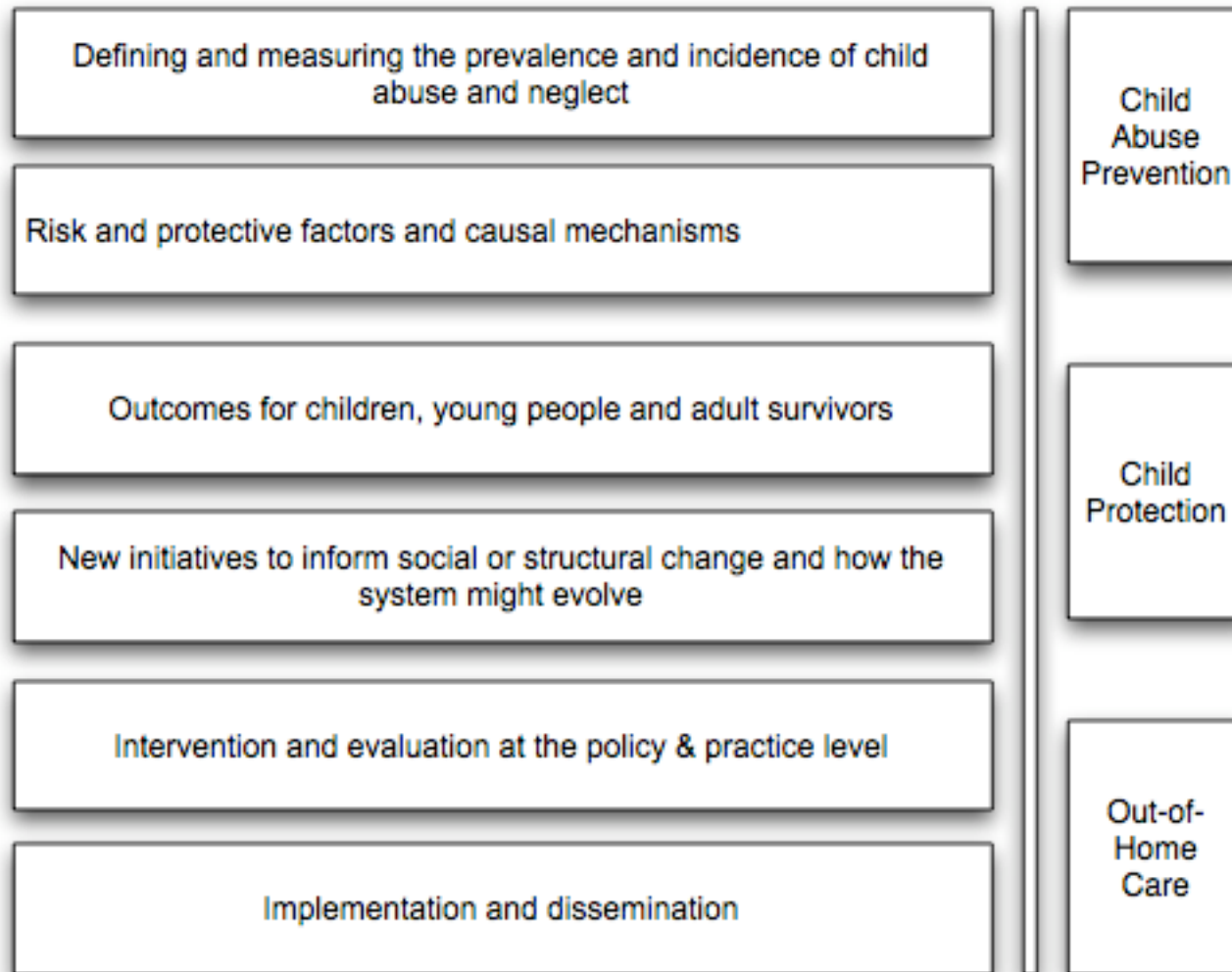


A public health-informed conceptual framework

1. Defining and measuring the prevalence and incidence of child abuse and neglect
2. Risk and protective factors and causal mechanisms
3. Outcomes for children, young people and adult survivors
4. New initiatives to inform structural and social change and how the system might evolve
5. Intervention and evaluation at the policy and practice level (i.e., what works)
6. Implementation and dissemination



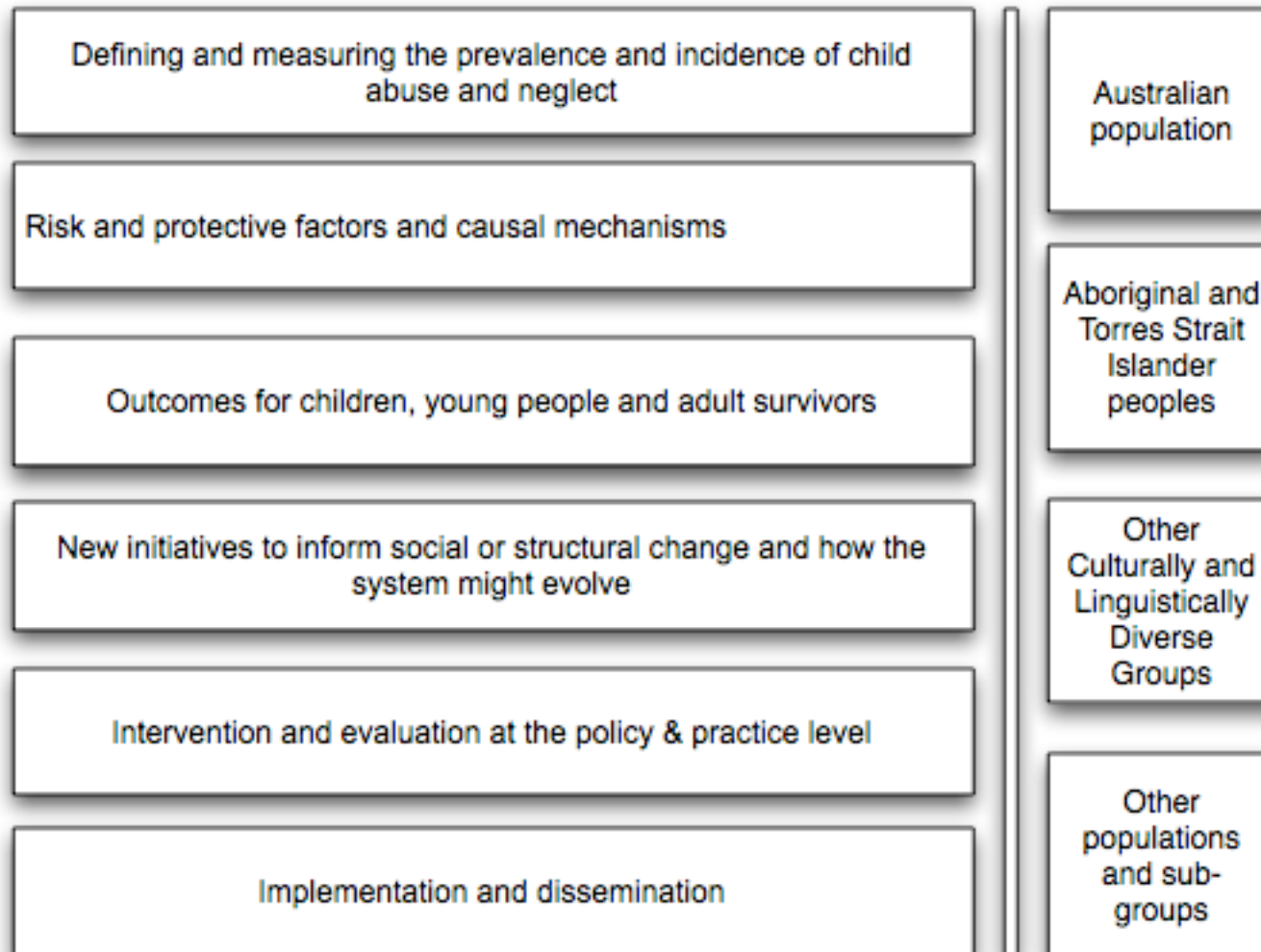
Across the public health continuum



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Different populations and sub-groups



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Group Activity 1: Identifying the priority research areas

- Child abuse prevention
 - ◆ facilitated by Professor Dorothy Scott
- Child protection
 - ◆ facilitated by Ass. Professor Morag McArthur
- Out-of-home care
 - ◆ facilitated by Ass. Professor Judy Cashmore



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