

MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release

Monday 1 September 2025

From Talk to Transformation: Marist180 hosts National Conversation on Investing Early to Protect Children

Leading child protection experts and advocates will gather in North Sydney next week to call for urgent reform to Australia's child protection system, with a focus on early intervention and family support.

The panel event, **From Talk to Transformation: Investing in Early Support for Families**, will be held on Monday 8 September 2025 at the Peter Cosgrove Centre, Australian Catholic University, as part of **National Child Protection Week**.

Hosted in partnership with the **ACU Institute of Child Protection Studies**, the event will explore how early support can reduce the incidence of child neglect and maltreatment, strengthen families, and improve long-term outcomes for children.

Peter Monaghan, Chief Executive Officer of Marist180, said the current system often fails to reach families until they are already in crisis.

"We see firsthand how timely, culturally responsive support can change a family's trajectory, but too often, services only reach families once they're in crisis. To truly protect children, we need to embed early help into everyday service delivery—accessible, trusted, and tailored to community needs." Mr Monaghan said.

Multiple inquiries and national studies on child abuse prevalence and service effectiveness highlight that our current approach is outdated and reactive.

Professor Daryl Higgins, Director of the Australian Catholic University's Institute of Child Protection Studies and one of Australia's leading child protection researchers highlights the need for systemic reform. *"The 'risk assessment and removal' model of child protection is no longer fit for purpose. With 62% of Australians reporting experiences of child maltreatment, it's clear we need a system that prioritises prevention and early support,"*

"To truly protect children, we need communities and other sectors to step up, so statutory services can focus on the highest-risk cases. That means investing in collaboration and new models of early support that reach families before harm occurs." Professor Higgins said.

Speakers will highlight that effective prevention must be inclusive, culturally safe, and community-led—particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, who remain significantly overrepresented in the system

“Transformation happens when we invest early - in families, in communities, and in connection,” said Kylie Captain, Gamilaroi woman and Board Director of NAPCAN.

“Every conversation matters, but it’s our actions that build the strong foundations children need to thrive.”

With only 10% of funding directed towards early intervention and prevention, greater investment is required in order for families to get the right support at the right time.

“Early intervention and prevention are powerful investments,” Susan Watson, CEO of Fams said.

“When we listen to families, back frontline services, and work together, we create possibilities where children are safe, strong, and supported.”

Zahra Al Hilaly, Manager of Social Policy and Campaigns at NAPCAN, brings a strong youth and cultural lens to the conversation, reminding us that real change begins by listening to children, young people, families and communities—especially those whose voices are often overlooked.

“Early intervention only works if every family feels seen and included,” Ms Al Hilaly said.

“Cultural connection isn’t an add-on, it’s at the heart of prevention.”

The panel will be joined by Australia’s National Children’s Commissioner, Anne Hollonds, whose recent report *Help Way Earlier!* outlines a national roadmap for transforming child protection through early support.

NSW has the opportunity to lead the nation in building a fairer, more inclusive future,” said Peter Monaghan, CEO of Marist180. “Every conversation matters—but action is what protects children. Investing in early support is how we turn words into change. A budget that backs children, young people, and families is a budget that builds a stronger future for all of us.”

<p>Event Summary Date: Monday 08 September 2025 Time: 2:30 PM arrival for a 3.00pm start Duration: 90 mins Venue: The Peter Cosgrove Centre - Australian Catholic University, North Sydney Address: Level 18, Tenison Woods House, 8–20 Napier Street, North Sydney NSW 2060</p>	<p>Media contact: Jane Powles Partnerships and Advocacy Coordinator ☎ 0424350748 ✉ jane.powles@M180.org.au</p>
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