

Challenges and outlook



Whilst continuing uncertainty about the long-term future of the FRC contributed to challenges experienced over the past year, Commissioners and staff looked forward with hope and enthusiasm to develop a new Strategic Plan.

FRC Future Directions Review

The FRC understands the final report on the 'Family Responsibilities Commission Future Directions Review 2022', commissioned by the then Department of Seniors, Disability Services and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships to inform the Queensland Government's decision-making on the future of the FRC, has been provided to the Queensland Government. In line with the FR Board's functions under the FRC Act, the Board was invited to provide advice to the Minister on the future operations of the FRC, guided by the findings and recommendations of the final report. To date, the FRC is yet to receive information about the outcome of the review.

Memorandum of Understanding

At the conclusion of the 2022-23 financial year the FRC remained without an MoU for future funding past 30 June 2023. However, given the appointment of the Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner and Local Commissioners for a period of three years from 1 July 2023, staff and Commissioners felt positive about the progression of negotiations towards an MoU.¹

Strategic planning process

Since late 2022, the FRC has undertaken a holistic review of the strategic priorities of the organisation for the next four years and beyond. The development of a new Strategic Plan has set the Commission's strategic direction and key performance indicators and forms the foundation for the development of individual performance plans for the next four years.

Through a series of workshops FRC staff, Local Commissioners and the EMT have, for the first time, collaboratively determined the FRC's strategic priorities. The Strategic Plan document reflects input from the whole FRC team, and the FRC will continue to apply this co-design approach in all operations to give not only staff and Commissioners, but FRC clients, more agency in how the organisation supports them.

The Strategic Plan outlines the FRC's strong commitment to contributing to Closing the Gap on life outcomes for FRC clients. It signals the FRC's continuing focus on exploring avenues of supporting families outside the traditional conferencing model. The FRC intends to capitalise on the increasing voluntary engagement of clients with the FRC to support them to move beyond stabilising their circumstances and take up opportunities to learn, work and flourish.

The new Strategic Plan takes effect from 1 July 2023 so it has not been published in this report of the 2022-23 financial year. However, the challenges and opportunities outlined in the Strategic Plan and set out below, reflect many of the challenges experienced over the past reporting year, and the FRC's outlook for the coming year.

1. On 9 August 2023 an MoU was entered into between the Australian and Queensland Governments to ensure the Commission continued to service its operations at full operational capacity for a fixed period of three years from 1 July 2023 to 30 June 2026.



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Our Challenges
Maintaining legitimacy and improving levels of engagement and personal responsibility without a clear authorising environment
Sustaining, renewing and broadening the pool of Local Commissioners
Supporting a stronger commitment from service provider partners for suitable, available and accountable services for clients
Strengthening resilience and wellbeing in staff and Local Commissioners to meet evolving challenges
Protecting our information assets

Our Opportunities
Embedding the FRC as a partner in the co-design and decision-making of Government
Expanding our impact to new communities and with new triggers targeting areas of need
Increasing voluntary engagement, particularly through increasing options for VIM
Harnessing the evolution of the Local Commissioners' role to increasingly support clients and communities outside of conference
Increasing recognition of the FRC's model of self-determination, through the FRC's local Indigenous-led decision-making, and the cultural capability of the registry

Transition to enhanced Income Management

Clients who had a CDC in FRC communities transitioned to eIM (the SmartCard) on 6 March 2023. Prior to March the Commission worked with DSS and Services Australia in preparing for the transition and assisted in hosting community engagement and information sessions conducted by Services Australia. The transition was implemented seamlessly across the communities. The Commission continues to monitor the use of the new SmartCard by FRC clients and reports any operational issues to DSS, Services Australia and NIAA during meetings conducted on a monthly basis.

The SmartCard has the same technical functionality as the CDC. Clients can use the card at any outlet where there is an eftpos terminal and for shopping online. However, the policy settings attached to the SmartCard do not allow the purchase of tobacco, in contrast to the previous CDC. Local Registry Coordinators have reported that the inability to purchase tobacco products using the SmartCard has resulted in clients on VIM not wishing to renew their VIM agreements. Whilst the Commission encourages and supports clients to pursue healthy habits, it is noted that this may explain a decline in the number of VIM agreements in the last quarter of the financial year when compared to previous quarters.

The new Strategic Plan builds on the FRC's ongoing work to increase voluntary engagement with the Commission. The plan specifically identifies the opportunity to increase options for VIM. When applying to end VIM agreements, a reason often cited by clients is that they would like to have access to more cash. Offering a greater range of options for the percentage of income to be managed, may encourage more people to take up or renew their VIM Agreement. For example,

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an option of 30 per cent of income quarantined on a SmartCard may still provide a useful tool, while leaving people more cash to spend on discretionary items. The FRC considers this may encourage greater personal responsibility by allowing for a high degree of agency over financial affairs, while still providing protection for a certain amount of money. The FRC will continue to consult with clients and partners to develop and implement measures that may assist in increasing personal responsibility and protecting children and other vulnerable people.

After the discontinuation of the CDC in other parts of Australia, and reports of subsequent increases in alcohol fuelled violence, interest in the FRC model as an alternative began to be shown by other jurisdictions, particularly by the Northern Territory and South Australia. As noted in the Hope Vale community operations report, the Commission participated in hosting a delegation from the Far West Coast Community Partnership (which represents five Aboriginal communities in Far West South Australia) who visited Hope Vale on a study trip. The FRC remains willing to share the insights gained over 15 years of operation, of what is increasingly being recognised as a nuanced and effective model to rebuild social norms through self-determination.

Information Communications Technology (ICT) upgrade

The Commission's Dynamics 2015 Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system and associated infrastructure is approaching 'end of life' in October 2023. The ICT Administrator and ICT Support Officer have been actively engaging with various teams within the Commission to gather information concerning required functionality and suitability to meet the changing needs of the Commission. A preliminary tender document has been drafted to initiate the procurement process for a data system and is under current review. Research is concurrently being undertaken as a preparatory measure should the need arise to extend the utilisation of the current system beyond its support cycle.

The FRC has noted the protection of our sensitive information assets as a challenge over the next four years of the Strategic Plan. An upgrade to our CRM and infrastructure will be a significant project for the Commission but will help us to effectively meet this challenge.

Youth crime and the Childrens Court 'trigger'

Media stories about the volume and severity of youth crime have been prevalent over the past year. As has been noted in each of the Community operations reports, the Local Commissioners in FRC communities like much of the wider Queensland community, have grave concerns for the trajectory of young people committing crime and the impacts of these crimes on the vulnerable members of their communities.

The Local Commissioners cite disengagement from school, lack of access to appropriate bridging programs, insufficient job-readiness training and vocational education and ineffective interactions with the criminal justice system as reasons for the apparent increase in youth crime in communities.

Local Commissioners and Local Registry Coordinators continue to work with schools, support services, police and youth justice to support young people and their families to make changes to the many factors which impact on antisocial and offending behaviour. However, allowing the FRC to begin receiving Childrens Court notices again could make a significant difference in tackling the complex causes of youth crime in FRC communities.



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The Commission has made a number of representations to the Queensland State Government and to the FR Board on 'reinstating' the Childrens Court trigger.

It is of course a matter for the Queensland Government to amend relevant legislation in order to restore the ability of the FRC to receive the Childrens Court trigger as intended by the FRC Act. However, in the context of what is a significant challenge and also a great opportunity to make a real impact on the trajectory of young people in FRC communities, those representations are worth repeating in this report.

The benefits to the communities within the FRC's jurisdiction should the Commission be able to recommence conference in relation to the Childrens Court trigger include:

- the opportunity to facilitate greater parental/carer responsibility for the young person's offending
- supporting the child within a legislative framework which can mandate the provision of support services to assist the family and divert the child from a future of court interactions and juvenile detention.

The FRC would be able to provide a holistic and family intervention which is lacking in other jurisdictions where parents are not mandated to shoulder responsibility for their children's offending behaviour. Until legislative amendments are made to restore the FRC's ability to receive Childrens Court notices the Commission will continue to work with partners in community, support evidence-based interventions for disengaged young people and promote employability skills training.