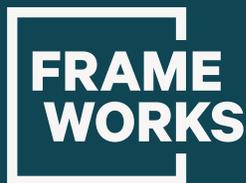INTERIM FINDINGS

Listening to Mindsets: Cultural Mindsets of Early Childhood in Australia

FrameWorks Institute, in partnership
with Curijo and Minderoo Foundation

JANUARY 2026

FRAME WORKS

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Early Childhood Mindsets Project recognises the valuable contributions from all our partners and participants, including:

- Expert Advisory Group

- Curijo – www.curijo.com.au

- Focus group participants – both online nationally and in person in Bourke, Cairns and Port Adelaide

- Local communities who assisted with hosting focus groups in Bourke on the lands of the Ngemba (Ngiyaampa) people, Cairns on the lands of the Gimuy Walubara Yidinji and Yirrganydji peoples, and Port Adelaide on the lands of the Kaurna people

- Minderoo Foundation project team

- Tiraapendi Wodli – www.tiraapendiwodli.org.au

- Tiraapendi Wodli eight–member Community Reference Group (made up of local Aboriginal leaders)

ADVISORY GROUP MEMBERS:

- Sheryl Batchelor – CEO, Yiliyapinya Indigenous Corporation
- Tessa Boyd-Caine – CEO, Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS)
- Donna Cross, OAM – Emeritus Professor, Senior Honorary Fellow, University of Western Australia
- Sharon Goldfeld, AM – Director, Centre for Community Child Health, The Royal Children's Hospital
- Anne Hollonds – National Children's Commissioner (until November 2025)
- Doug Taylor – CEO, The Smith Family
- Mandy Taylor – Executive Director, Office of the CEO, SNAICC - National Voice for our Children

We use the terminology *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples* in this report. We recognise there is diversity among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, with ~250 languages and complex links to different Country and kin throughout Australia. We also recognise differing preferences regarding the use of terminology and that many people prefer to be known by their specific group name, their Country, as Traditional Owners and Custodians and/or as First Nations People.

This report focuses on findings from a set of qualitative focus groups conducted with both non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander people, including Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) groups, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in April and June 2025, respectively. **This research recognises the rich cultural and linguistic diversity of communities across Australia. We acknowledge that people from CALD backgrounds have varied experiences. The findings presented in this report reflect the views of participants who speak English and were able to take part in online focus groups. As such, they do not fully capture the experiences of all CALD communities. Including this rich diversity would require place-based, in-person engagement within communities and is beyond the scope of the research undertaken at this stage.**

CONTENT WARNING

Two mindsets described in this report (the Otherism and Pathologising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Culture mindsets) contain harmful racist and bigoted thinking about certain groups, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Some readers may find descriptions of this type of thinking triggering. For a list of national support services, including culturally safe services, see Appendix B.

The descriptions of these mindsets are included in this report because they are present in public thinking in Australia. We understand that describing these mindsets is complicated and not without risks. However, it's important to understand these harmful assumptions so we can develop framing and narrative strategies to counter and overcome them and so we can ensure that these mindsets aren't being unintentionally triggered by the way we communicate about the early years. By describing these mindsets, we are in no way condoning them; on the contrary, we recognise them as highly toxic and we describe them with the goal of changing these harmful ways of thinking.

Executive Summary

The FrameWorks Institute acknowledges the Traditional Owners and Custodians of Country throughout Australia. We extend our respect to Traditional Custodians of the lands on which we conduct research, to Elders past and present, and to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples whose wisdom contributes to our future. The research for this report took place on Ngemba (Ngiyaampa), Baakindji (Barkandji), Murrawarri, and Kunya lands (Bourke); Kaurna lands (Port Adelaide); and Gimuy Walubara Yidinji and Yirrganydji lands (Cairns).

The early childhood sector in Australia is at an important turning point. Advocates see a chance to improve national and state programs that help children and families from pregnancy through age 5, which will make lasting changes that support children's health and wellbeing. To do this, advocates need to focus on more than just policies – they also need to consider the deeply held ideas and understandings people have about children, families and communities. This means understanding how Australians think about the early years and finding better ways to talk about and explain why early childhood matters, both now and in the future.

Undertaken by the FrameWorks Institute, in partnership with Curijo and Minderoo Foundation, this project aims to better understand how Australians think about the early years and develop framing and narrative strategies that can shift these mindsets in ways that increase support for policies that more robustly meet the needs of all young children and their families.

This project expands on previous research which shows how mindsets influence policy support for early childhood in Australia.[1] Since 2010, FrameWorks has worked with partners in Australia to identify mindsets related to children and families and to design and test framing strategies to shift these ways of thinking and build support for systemic change. The current project examines mindsets over time and includes the experiences of Australians from diverse backgrounds, particularly the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and those from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) groups.[2] Over the course of four years, FrameWorks will work with partners to identify and track mindsets related to the early years across the Australian population and develop framing recommendations to shift these mindsets and build support for systemic change. Key partners include an advisory group (composed of experts, including two representatives from Aboriginal-controlled organisations) and an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Reference Group.

This project supports the work that early years researchers, advocates and practitioners are already doing in Australia by offering new insights on mindsets that present both challenges and opportunities to change efforts. The project is in service of larger efforts to respond to in-the-moment opportunities and challenges while also shifting mindsets in meaningful and sustained ways over time.

The goals for the project are the following:

1. Measure the **distribution of mindsets** people use to think about early childhood issues across the Australian population, examining demographic and geographic differences in the relative strength of different mindsets in shaping thinking. There is a particular focus on identifying mindsets among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, as well as people belonging to CALD groups.

2. Examine relationships among mindsets to find **mindset clusters**, or ways that groups of mindsets hang together in people's thinking about early childhood issues.

3. Explore **connections between mindsets and policy/solutions support** to better understand how mindsets shape people's preferences for policy solutions.

4. Shape the **ongoing conversation about early childhood** in Australia by producing framing and narrative strategies and delivering workshops and presentations to share findings and support their use in communications.

The report that accompanies this executive summary focuses on findings from a set of qualitative focus groups conducted with both non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander people, including CALD groups, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in April and June 2025, respectively. This research recognises the rich cultural and linguistic diversity of communities across Australia. We acknowledge that people from CALD backgrounds have varied experiences. The findings presented in this report reflect the views of participants who speak English and were able to take part in online focus groups. As such, they do not fully capture the experiences of all CALD communities. Including this rich diversity would require place-based, in-person engagement within communities and is beyond the scope of the research undertaken at this stage.

We found that these mindsets are shared across demographic groups, but there are also differences between groups in terms of how strongly people hold these ways of thinking and the effect these mindsets have on how groups understand early childhood issues. These mindsets present both challenges and opportunities for the early childhood sector. In this report, we provide initial ideas for how advocates can navigate the challenges and opportunities to build support for early childhood policies and reforms.

We are using the qualitative findings described in this report to inform the design of a quantitative survey that will measure the strength and distribution of mindsets across the Australian population, as well as identify any connections among mindsets and the ways that mindsets affect support for policy solutions. The survey will shed more light on these similarities and differences and provide a more detailed and statistical sense of how they are distributed across and within populations in Australia. This survey will be fielded twice per year for the next three years to track mindsets over time. It will allow us to see any shifts in mindsets over time, as well as whether particular contextual moments affect mindsets. In conjunction with this longitudinal survey, FrameWorks will empirically test framing strategies to better communicate about the early years. All of this research will inform the development of a broader narrative strategy for the early

childhood sector, designed in collaboration with partners (including the project advisory group and an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Reference Group, among others). This strategy will give the sector the communication tools they need to shift public thinking and build support for lasting reforms to improve outcomes for children and families across Australia.

Table 1: Challenges in public thinking*

Challenge	Mindsets that underlie this challenge	Demographic similarities and differences	Strategies for navigating this challenge
Challenge #1: Individualistic mindsets keep people from seeing the effects of environments, contexts and systems, which reduces support for policies and reforms that are designed to change them.	The *Individualism* mindset is rooted in the assumption that what happens in life is primarily or exclusively due to individual choice and willpower. The *Family Bubble* mindset assumes thatparents are narrowly and ultimately responsible for children's development and wellbeing.	*Individualism* and *Family Bubble* mindsets are present among all groups but dominant among non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander groups (both non-CALD and CALD) and recessive among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants.	**Lead** with discussions of how context, place and systems shape children's outcomes to overcome individualistic thinking. **Talk** about what needs to change to better support all children and families across Australia.
Challenge #2: Assumptions that parenting and child development outcomes are natural reduce support for efforts to intervene to improve outcomes.	The *Maternal Gender Essentialism* mindset is based on the assumption that women and men have innate, inborn and fixed differences that make them suited to different types of caregiving and work. The *Passive Development (Sponge)* mindset assumes that children develop through a passive process of observing and taking in language, values and behaviour from those around them.	*Maternal Gender Essentialism* is present and dominant among all groups. *Passive Development (Sponge)* is present among all groups, but less dominant among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants (focus on role models).	**Avoid** focusing exclusively on the role of mothers in caretaking. **Instead, talk** about the ways in which caregivers, including fathers, families and others, can and should be supported. **Explain** learning as active processes in which children respond to experiences and development is a contingent process to overcome naturalistic thinking.

Table 1: Challenges in public thinking*, continued

Challenge	Mindsets that underlie this challenge	Demographic similarities and differences	Strategies for navigating this challenge
Challenge #3: Mindsets that obscure inequities reduce support for policies designed to address them.	The *Interpersonal Racism* mindset assumes that racism is about individual biases, stereotypes and prejudices, rather than about systemic injustices. The *Racial Progress* mindset views racism as something that has been addressed through laws, policies and general progress and is no longer a problem. The *Otherism* mindset assumes that there are 'in groups' and 'out groups' in society that are fundamentally different from and at odds with each other. The *Pathologising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Culture* mindset is based on the dangerous assumption that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities share a culture and a set of values that are inferior to that of 'mainstream' (i.e., white) Australian culture. It is a fundamentally racist mindset and one that is vital to shift.	*Interpersonal Racism* mindset is present among all groups, but Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants connected it with *Structural Racism*. *Racial Progress, Otherism,* and *Pathologising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Culture* mindsets are present among non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander participants, both non-CALD and CALD.	**Describe** how historical injustices – through policymaking and institutions – have led to current inequities. **Show** how policy and reform address past and present inequities to better support all children and families across Australia.
Challenge #4: Fatalistic thinking makes it hard to see what *can* be changed to better support children and families.	The *Threat of Modernity* mindset assumes that the modern world has become dangerous and that this threatens positive development and child wellbeing. The *Government as Interference* mindset assumes that the government interferes with parenting and early development. The *Government as Threat* mindset sees the government as actively threatening children and families.	*Threat of Modernity* is present among all groups but used in different ways by different groups. *Government as Interference* is present among non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander participants (non-CALD and CALD). *Government as Threat* is present among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants.	**Provide examples** of concrete and clear solutions – showing places where they are being implemented and changes they are creating – to help overcome fatalistic thinking. **Acknowledge** the past and present harms Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have experienced while emphasising the power of **culturally appropriate and responsive** government services to begin to address intergenerational trauma.

*The identification of mindsets and the noted similarities and differences among groups were derived using qualitative analysis of the total sample of participants in the focus groups.

Table 2: Opportunities in public thinking*

Opportunity	Mindsets that underlie the opportunity	Demographic similarities and differences	Strategies for leveraging the opportunity
Opportunity #1: People can sometimes see supporting children and families as a *collective* responsibility.	The *It Takes a Village* mindset assumes that how a child does in life is shaped by a network of actors in a community and that the responsibility for children's outcomes is shared.	*It Takes a Village* is dominant among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants and found among CALD participants. Did not emerge among non-CALD participants.	**Tell stories about and highlight** the role of communities in early childhood to activate the *It Takes a Village* mindset about shared responsibility and overcome the tendency to blame, shame and stigmatise parents (specifically mothers). **When talking** about the role of community in children's lives, **keep in mind** cultural differences in understandings of what community means.
Opportunity #2: People can see that racism is built into systems, but this thinking needs strong and explicit cueing for some groups.	The *Structural Racism* mindset recognises that the way that laws, rules, policies and society are set up can create racial disparities. The *Financial Constraints* mindset recognises that family financial constraints can affect access to opportunities and shape a child's development.	*Structural Racism* and *Financial Constraints* are found among all groups, but more dominant among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants.	**Describe** specific ways that structural inequities shape child development outcomes to expand understanding of how this works. **Explain** the ways that children and families can be better supported to overcome fatalistic thinking.
Opportunity #3: People can sometimes see that government is responsible for supporting children and families, but they need to be shown that it's *possible* for government to act as a partner.	The *Government as Partner* mindset that recognises government can and should play a role in supporting children's development and wellbeing.	*Government as Partner* is recessive among non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander participants (*Government as Interference* was more dominant). Did not emerge among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants (*Government as Threat* was dominant).	**Talk** about the ways government is responsible for supporting child development by working with families and communities.

*The identification of mindsets and the noted similarities and differences among groups were derived using qualitative analysis of the total sample of participants in the focus groups.

Table 3: Key similarities and differences across demographic groups*

Similarities	How this thinking is shared
Naturalistic mindsets about child development and parenting: ■ *Passive Development (Sponge)* ■ *Maternal Gender Essentialism*	■ *Passive Development* is shared among non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander participants (both CALD and non-CALD) and present among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants. ■ *Maternal Gender Essentialism* is shared among non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander participants (CALD and non-CALD) and among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants.
Thinking about threats to child development: ■ *Threat of Modernity*	■ Shared among non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander participants (CALD and non-CALD) and among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants, although employed differently to think about culture and community in the latter sessions.

Differences	How this thinking is different
Thinking about what shapes child development and responsibility: ■ Individualistic (*Family Bubble*) ■ Collectivist (*It Takes a Village*)	■ Individualistic thinking is dominant among non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander participants (CALD and non-CALD) and recessive among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants. ■ Collectivist thinking is dominant among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants and recessive among CALD participants.
■ Thinking about racial inequities in child development outcomes: ■ Individualistic (*Interpersonal Racism, Racial Progress*) ■ Explicitly racist (*Otherism, Pathologising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Culture*) ■ Collectivist (*Structural Racism*)	■ Individualistic mindsets are dominant among non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander participants (CALD and non-CALD). ■ Explicitly racist mindsets are present (but not dominant) among non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander participants (CALD and non-CALD). ■ Collectivist mindset is dominant among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants.
Thinking about the role of government: ■ *Government as Interference* ■ *Government as Threat* ■ *Government as Partner*	■ *Government as Interference* is present among non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander participants (CALD and non-CALD) and *Government as Partner* is recessive. ■ *Government as Threat* is dominant among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants.

The identification of mindsets and the noted similarities and differences among groups were derived using qualitative analysis of the total sample of participants in the focus groups.

CONTENT WARNING

Two mindsets described in this report (the Otherism and Pathologising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Culture mindsets) contain harmful racist and bigoted thinking about certain groups, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Some readers may find descriptions of this type of thinking triggering. For a list of national support services, including culturally safe services, see Appendix B.

*The descriptions of these mindsets are included in this report because they are present in public thinking in Australia. We understand that describing these mindsets is complicated and not without risks. However, it's important to understand these harmful assumptions so we can develop framing and narrative strategies to counter and overcome them and so we can ensure that these mindsets aren't being unintentionally triggered by the way we communicate about the early years. **By describing these mindsets, we are in no way condoning them; on the contrary, we recognise them as highly toxic and we describe them with the goal of changing these harmful ways of thinking.***

Introduction

The FrameWorks Institute acknowledges the Traditional Owners and Custodians of Country throughout Australia. We extend our respect to Traditional Custodians of the lands on which we conduct research, to Elders past and present, and to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples whose wisdom contributes to our future. The research for this report took place on Ngemba (Ngiyaampa), Baakindji (Barkandji), Murrawarri, and Kunya lands (Bourke); Kaurna lands (Port Adelaide); and Gimuy Walubara Yidinji and Yirrganydji lands (Cairns).

The early childhood sector in Australia is at an important turning point. Advocates see a chance to improve national and state programs that help children and families from pregnancy through age 5, which will make lasting changes that support children's health and wellbeing. To do this, advocates need to focus on more than just policies – they also need to consider the deeply held ideas and understandings people have about children, families and communities. This means understanding how Australians think about the early years and finding better ways to talk about and explain why early childhood matters, both now and in the future.

Undertaken by the FrameWorks Institute, in partnership with Curijo and Minderoo Foundation, this project aims to better understand how Australians think about the early years and develop framing and narrative strategies that can shift these mindsets in ways that increase support for policies that more robustly meet the needs of all young children and their families. This project expands on previous research which shows how mindsets influence policy support for early childhood in Australia.[3] Since 2010, FrameWorks has worked with partners in Australia to identify mindsets related to children and families and to design and test framing strategies to shift these ways of thinking and build support for systemic change.

This project expands on that previous research to examine mindsets over time and to include the experiences of Australians from diverse backgrounds, particularly the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and those from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) groups.[4] Over the course of four years, FrameWorks will work with partners to identify and track mindsets related to the early years across the Australian population and develop framing recommendations to shift these mindsets and build support for systemic change. Key partners include an advisory group (composed of experts, including two representatives from Aboriginal-controlled organisations) and an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Reference Group.

This project supports the work of early years researchers, advocates and practitioners by offering new insights on mindsets that present both challenges and opportunities to progress positive change. The project is in service of larger efforts to respond to in-the-moment opportunities and challenges while also shifting mindsets in meaningful and sustained ways over time.

The goals for the project are the following:

1. Measure the **distribution of mindsets** used to think about early childhood issues across the Australian population, examining demographic and geographic differences in the relative strength of different mindsets in shaping thinking. There is a particular focus on identifying mindsets among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, as well as people belonging to CALD groups.

2. Examine relationships among mindsets to find **mindset clusters**, or ways that groups of mindsets hang together in people's thinking about early childhood issues.

3. Explore **connections between mindsets and policy/solutions support** to better understand how mindsets shape people's preferences for policy solutions.

4. Shape the **ongoing conversation about early childhood** in Australia by producing framing and narrative strategies and delivering workshops and presentations to share findings and support their use in communications.

This report focuses on findings from a set of qualitative focus groups conducted with both non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander people, including CALD groups, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in April and June 2025, respectively. This research recognises the rich cultural and linguistic diversity of communities across Australia. We acknowledge that people from CALD backgrounds have varied experiences. The findings presented in this report reflect the views of participants who speak English and were able to take part in online focus groups. As such, they do not fully capture the experiences of all CALD communities. Including this rich diversity would require place-based, in-person engagement within communities and is beyond the scope of the research undertaken at this stage. More details about the methods for the qualitative research are available in Appendix A.

This qualitative study is the first phase of the broader four-year project. We are using the qualitative findings to inform the design of quantitative surveys that will measure the strength and distribution of mindsets across the Australian population, as well as identify any connections between mindsets and the ways that mindsets affect support for policy solutions.

This survey will be fielded twice per year for the next three years to track mindsets over time. It will allow us to see any shifts in mindsets over time, as well as whether particular contextual moments affect mindsets. In conjunction with this longitudinal survey, we will empirically test framing strategies to better communicate about the early years. All of this research will inform the development of a broader narrative strategy for the early childhood sector, which will be designed in collaboration with partners (including the project advisory group and an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Reference Group, among others). This strategy will give the early childhood sector the communication tools they need to shift public thinking and build support for lasting reforms to improve outcomes for children and families across Australia.

WHAT ARE CULTURAL MINDSETS, AND WHY DO THEY MATTER?

While there are numerous ways to make sense of the concept of culture, one useful way of understanding it is through cultural mindsets. Cultural mindsets (or mindsets, for short) are deep, implicit patterns of thinking that shape how we understand the world and how we make decisions. In shaping how we think, mindsets structure and produce our beliefs and attitudes and how we act in the world. The mindsets that we hold can normalise or problematise the existing social order and, in turn, shape whether we support social change and what sorts. For example, individualistic mindsets lead people to assume that life outcomes are the result of individual choice and willpower and that solutions involve people cultivating self-reliance and pulling themselves up by their bootstraps. Individualism affirms that people have control over outcomes but also makes it difficult to see how broader environments, contexts and systems affect our lives. When people think individualistically, it can lead them to conclude that policies designed to change systems – for example, the systems that produce wealth and income inequalities – are unnecessary or misguided.

We all have multiple mindsets that we can use to think about a given issue. For example, while people in Australia often think individualistically, they also have access to mindsets that allow them to see that what surrounds us, shapes us. When these more contextual mindsets are activated, they bring social systems into view and highlight the ways that context shapes outcomes alongside individual choices. They also lead us to recognise the need for policies that change contexts and systems.

Cultural mindsets are highly durable. They emerge from and are tied to cultural and social practices and institutions with deep historical roots. While we typically focus on cultural mindsets that emerge from common social practices and institutions on a national level, it's important to recognise that different people and groups will engage with these common mindsets in different ways. For example, a mindset can be more salient – more frequently drawn upon and more consistently used in thinking – for one group than for another. In addition, cultural subgroups within society also have access to distinctive mindsets that emerge from institutions and practices specific to those groups.

WHAT ARE MINDSET SHIFTS, AND WHY DO THEY MATTER?

Different types of mindset shifts frequently occur together or in sequence. These include:

- A **temporary switch** in the mindset that is active in someone's thinking.
- A **permanent displacement or replacement** of one mindset by another mindset.
- An **enduring shift** in the relative salience or dominance of a mindset within a culture.
- An **enduring change** in the contours or bounds of a mindset.

These types of shifts are not mutually exclusive. If the contours of an existing mindset change sufficiently, it can reasonably be considered a *new* mindset that has displaced the old one. For example, the bounds of existing understandings of marriage have shifted and stretched as same-sex marriage came to be understood as part of the concept of marriage. In other words, the contours of at least one mindset about marriage shifted to encompass same-sex marriage.

Those who work on mindset shifts generally focus on enduring or lasting changes in thinking – everything except the temporary shift listed above. As part of social change, shifting mindsets matters insofar as they enable other changes in the world, such as policy or systemic change. While mindset shifts aren't the only piece to the puzzle of social change efforts, they are necessary to enable other lasting changes that lead to meaningful reforms and improve outcomes.

HOW DOES CULTURAL MINDSETS RESEARCH DIFFER FROM PUBLIC OPINION AND OTHER SOCIAL SURVEY RESEARCH?

Public opinion research examines the explicit attitudes and preferences that people hold about specific issues. Cultural mindsets research explores the deeper, underlying ways of thinking that shape and explain these patterns in public opinion. Where public opinion research examines *what* people think, cultural mindsets research examines *how* people think. For example, public opinion research might show that parents are concerned about children' s screen time and social media use. Cultural mindsets research explains why this is, revealing the role that the *Threat of Modernity* mindset plays in driving these opinions.

In addition, public opinion and other survey research often segments people into distinct groups with the understanding that there are some people who hold one view and others who hold another. While cultural mindsets research can and should attend to group differences in how mindsets are held and used, it is premised on the idea that to some extent, people across groups within a society have access to common mindsets and that people can and do draw on different mindsets at different times. This focuses our attention on common ways of thinking and the strategic importance of shared ways of making meaning, while also acknowledging and making room for differences among individuals and groups in how they think about social issues.

Pairing mindsets research with segmentation research can be powerful. Mindset work can reveal the shared ways of thinking that guide understanding, emotional engagement and solutions support, while audience-specific research can help with figuring out how to best activate or deactivate these mindsets for different groups of people. In presenting findings, we focus on shared mindsets but also are careful to highlight variations in the way that groups use mindsets to inform their thinking. This work in understanding mindsets can help inform strategy and drive follow-up research.

For more on cultural mindsets and mindset shifts, see *Mindset Shifts: What Are They? Why Do They Matter? How Do They Happen?*

Findings From Qualitative Research

Australians' thinking about early childhood is shaped by a set of dominant individualistic and deterministic mindsets. These mindsets shape thinking about *what* influences development and *who* is responsible. At the same time, other mindsets allow people to recognise the role of broader systems and structures in shaping development and appreciate a more collective sense of responsibility around the wellbeing of children and families.

We found that these mindsets are shared among different demographic groups. However, there are variations in how strongly people from each group embrace these mindsets, and this affects their understanding of early childhood issues. The forthcoming quantitative survey will measure these similarities and differences and provide a more detailed and statistical sense of how they are distributed across and within populations in Australia.

Table 4: Key similarities and differences among demographic groups*

Similarities	How this thinking is shared
Naturalistic mindsets about child development and parenting: ■ *Passive Development (Sponge)* ■ *Gender Essentialism*	■ *Passive Development* is shared among non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander participants (both CALD and non-CALD) and present among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants ■ *Gender Essentialism* is shared among non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander participants (CALD and non-CALD) and among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants
Thinking about threats to child development: ■ *Threat of Modernity*	■ Shared among non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander participants (CALD and non-CALD) and among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants, although employed differently to think about culture and community in the latter sessions

Differences	How this thinking is different
Thinking about what shapes child development and responsibility: ■ Individualistic (*Family Bubble*) ■ Collectivist (*It Takes a Village*)	■ Individualistic thinking is dominant among non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander participants (CALD and non-CALD) and recessive among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants ■ Collectivist thinking is dominant among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants and recessive among CALD participants
Thinking about racial inequities in child development outcomes: ■ Individualistic (*Interpersonal Racism, Racial Progress*) ■ Explicitly racist (*Otherism, Pathologising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Culture*) ■ Collectivist (*Structural Racism*)	■ Individualistic mindsets are dominant among non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander participants (CALD and non-CALD) ■ Explicitly racist mindsets are present (but not dominant) among non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander participants (CALD and non-CALD) ■ Collectivist mindset is dominant among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants
Thinking about the role of government: ■ *Government as Interference* ■ *Government as Threat* ■ *Government as Partner*	■ *Government as Interference* is present among non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander participants (CALD and non-CALD) and *Government as Partner* is recessive ■ *Government as Threat* is dominant among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants

The identification of mindsets and the noted similarities and differences among groups were derived using qualitative analysis of the total sample of participants in the focus groups.

The mindsets we identified in the qualitative research present both challenges and opportunities for the early childhood sector. We provide initial ideas on how advocates can navigate the challenges and opportunities to build support for early childhood policies and reforms. More specific framing recommendations will be developed through subsequent research in collaboration with key stakeholders and partners.

Challenges

While there is important variation among groups, the prevailing understandings of early childhood are that individual parents are responsible, individual effort and decision-making explain outcomes, child development naturally happens, the modern world is threatening, and traditional gender roles and expectations are important to uphold. This thinking makes it difficult to see how broader factors, such as where children and families live, who else influences their lives, and past and present inequities, can shape child development outcomes and wellbeing. It also makes it hard to imagine solutions and see how policy reform can improve child development. These mindsets dampen the sense of collective responsibility for the wellbeing of *all* children and families and depress demand for using public resources to better support child wellbeing.

These challenges are summarised in Table 5 (see below). The mindsets that underpin them are described in more detail below, including an analysis of how they do and do not vary across demographic groups. We also offer initial framing strategies for navigating these challenges.

Table 5: Challenges in public thinking*

Challenge	Mindsets that underlie this challenge	Demographic similarities and differences	Strategies for navigating this challenge
Challenge #1: Individualistic mindsets keep people from seeing the effects of environments, contexts and systems, which reduces support for policies and reforms that are designed to change them.	The *Individualism* mindset is rooted in the assumption that what happens in life is primarily or exclusively due to individual choice and willpower. The *Family Bubble* mindset assumes that parents are narrowly and ultimately responsible for children's development and wellbeing.	*Individualism* and *Family Bubble* mindsets are present among all groups but are dominant among non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander groups (both non-CALD and CALD) and recessive among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants.	**Lead** with discussions of how context, place and systems shape children's outcomes to overcome individualistic thinking. **Talk** about what needs to change to better support *all* children and families across Australia.

Table 5: Challenges in public thinking,* continued

Challenge	Mindsets that underlie this challenge	Demographic similarities and differences	Strategies for navigating this challenge
Challenge #2: Assumptions that parenting and child development outcomes are natural reduce support for efforts to intervene to improve outcomes.	The *Maternal Gender Essentialism* mindset is based on the assumption that women and men have innate, inborn and fixed differences that make them suited to different types of caregiving and work. The *Passive Development (Sponge)* mindset assumes that children develop through a passive process of observing and taking in language, values and behaviour from those around them.	*Maternal Gender Essentialism* is present and dominant among all groups. *Passive Development (Sponge)* is present among all groups, but less dominant among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants (focus on role models).	**Avoid** focusing exclusively on the role of mothers in caretaking. **Instead, talk** about the ways in which caregivers, including fathers, families and others, can and should be supported. **Explain** learning as active processes in which children respond to experiences and development is a contingent process to overcome naturalistic thinking.
Challenge #3: Mindsets that obscure inequities reduce support for policies designed to address them.	The *Interpersonal Racism* mindset assumes that racism is about individual biases, stereotypes and prejudices, rather than about systemic injustices. The *Racial Progress* mindset views racism as something that has been addressed through laws, policies, and general progress and is no longer a problem. The *Otherism* mindset assumes that there are 'in groups' and 'out groups' in society that are fundamentally different from and at odds with each other. The *Pathologising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Culture* mindset is based on the dangerous assumption that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities share a culture and a set of values that are inferior to that of 'mainstream' (i.e., white) Australian culture. It is a fundamentally racist mindset and one that is vital to shift.	*Interpersonal Racism* mindset is present among all groups, but Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants connected it with *Structural Racism*. *Racial Progress*, *Otherism*, and *Pathologising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Culture* mindsets are present among non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander participants, both non-CALD and CALD.	**Describe** how historical injustices – through policymaking and institutions – have led to current inequities. **Show** how policy and reform address past and present inequities to better support all children and families across Australia.

Table 5: Challenges in public thinking,* continued

Challenge	Mindsets that underlie this challenge	Demographic similarities and differences	Strategies for navigating this challenge
Challenge #4: Fatalistic thinking makes it hard to see what *can* be changed to better support children and families.	The *Threat of Modernity* mindset assumes that the modern world has become dangerous and that this threatens positive development and child wellbeing. The *Government as Interference* mindset assumes that the government interferes with parenting and early development. The *Government as Threat* mindset sees the government as actively threatening children and families.	*Threat of Modernity* is present among all groups but used in different ways by different groups. *Government as Interference* is present among non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander participants (non-CALD and CALD). *Government as Threat* is present among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants.	**Provide examples** of concrete and clear solutions – showing places where they are being implemented and changes they are creating – to help overcome fatalistic thinking. **Acknowledge** the past and present harms Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have experienced while emphasising the power of **culturally appropriate and responsive** government services to begin to address intergenerational trauma.

*The identification of mindsets and the noted similarities and differences among groups were derived using qualitative analysis of the total sample of participants in the focus groups.

CHALLENGE #1:

Individualistic mindsets keep people from seeing the effects of environments, contexts and systems, which reduces support for policies and reforms that are designed to change them.

Two mindsets – *Individualism* and *Family Bubble* – dominate people's thinking about what shapes child development and who's responsible for ensuring it goes well. These mindsets make it difficult for people to understand the role of environments, contexts and systems and lead to individualistic rather than systemic thinking.

The *Individualism* Mindset

This mindset is rooted in the assumption that what happens in life is primarily or exclusively due to individual choice and willpower. Using this mindset, people reason that doing well in life and succeeding are an individual's responsibility and no one else's. What *doing well* or *succeeding* means is variable in this thinking, but most often relates to financial success. This mindset is foundational – it is related to other mindsets that are nested within it. Put another way, individualism is such a deep and core way that people make sense of the world that it gives rise to more specific assumptions about particular issues and actors. For example, the *Family Bubble* mindset is a more specific version of individualism that shapes thinking about parental responsibility (see below).

The *Individualism* mindset was present in all focus groups but was more recessive and balanced by systemic thinking in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander focus groups. In the non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander focus groups, both non-CALD and CALD participants employed the *Individualism* mindset to reason that children who are driven and have the right *work ethic* will do well in life, regardless of their family financial status or community context.

> *'I do think that somebody who's been raised to work hard and prove themselves and [...] it's been ingrained into them that the world is a meritocracy. I do think that they would get themselves jobs because they're just driven to think like that. They're driven to think that the world is going to give them what they put out, and I think that they would do really well in life, regardless of money.'*
> (Female, non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander, CALD participant)

> *'You can have [...] someone that's got heaps of money, and because they have that attitude of money means nothing. You've got no work ethic.'*
> (Male, non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander, non-CALD participant)

> *'You hear of people from humble backgrounds or poor backgrounds [...] coming out really well, and you see others that are from very well-off families where they're spoilt-rotten, and they finish up nowhere. Drug addicts and nowhere. So [...] yes, it can help. But [...] I think it just depends on the individual and the way that individual has been parented.'*
> (Male, non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander, non-CALD participant)

Implications

Individualism presents a significant challenge to those working to build support for early childhood policies. When people reason that child and family outcomes are the result of individual choice or willpower, it is difficult to see the role of systems and broader supports in shaping development and developmental outcomes. Without an appreciation for these systems and supports, including from the government, it's hard for people to demand better policies. As a result, support for *more* investment in the early years suffers.

Individualism also makes it difficult for people to see how inequality is systemic. Instead, this mindset leads people to reason that negative outcomes are the result of an individual's poor choices or lack of willpower. This makes it hard for people to see disparities in outcomes as part of broader systemic issues that need to be addressed.

The *Family Bubble* Mindset

When thinking with this mindset, people see parents as narrowly and ultimately responsible for children's development and wellbeing. In this mindset, people reason that parents unilaterally shape children's outcomes and that parents are not affected by broader societal factors. This mindset shapes people's thinking about a number of issues related to children and families.[5]

Participants in both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander focus groups applied this mindset to think about children's issues.

Employing the mindset, participants assumed that parents are the most important influence on child development and that parents bear responsibility for a child's developmental outcomes and wellbeing. The mindset was used to reason about both positive and negative outcomes – in other words, parents were seen as responsible when development went well and when it didn't. Importantly, participants more frequently talked about mothers as being primarily responsible and more naturally able to provide caregiving compared to fathers, highlighting the gendered aspect of this mindset and its connection with the *Maternal Gender Essentialism* mindset described below.

> *'If the child is doing well, like everybody said, like, of course, the mum and family is [the] primary [...] reason for that.'*
> (Male, non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander, CALD participant)

> *'In the family unit. Something's gone wrong somewhere with the parents [a] lot of times.'* (Male, non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander, non-CALD participant)

While participants in both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander focus groups employed this mindset, it was decidedly more dominant in non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander focus groups. In Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander focus groups, the *It Takes a Village* mindset was more dominant than the *Family Bubble* (see below).

Implications

The *Family Bubble* mindset makes it difficult for people to see the importance of collective responsibility for child development and wellbeing. This mindset also leads people to blame parents (especially mothers) for children's outcomes. Moreover, it makes it difficult for people to see the role of communities, government and broader systems in shaping child development. If development is all about parents, and parents are not recognised as being influenced by the broader contexts in which they care for children, then it's hard for people to see the importance of policies and programs designed to better support children and families.

Framing Recommendations to Navigate This Challenge

Lead with discussions of how context, place and systems shape children's outcomes to overcome individualistic thinking. Explaining how broader factors, such as income and geographic location, affect child development can help shift people's thinking away from individual blame and parental responsibility. For example, explaining how the lack of access to high-quality early childhood health services in remote areas is the result of policy and legislation can help build understanding of systemic barriers to access.

Talk about what needs to change to better support *all* children and families across Australia. It's not enough to *declare* that there are structural barriers that shape children's outcomes; it's necessary to explain how these barriers influence development and explain how policy reforms address them. For example, describe what policy changes such as providing low-cost or free early care and learning services to families, regardless of income or location, look like and how they benefit families and children. Explaining what needs to change, why, and how it would help can shift people's thinking towards the broader picture of necessary reforms that are needed, rather than defaulting to thinking about individualistic, parent-centred solutions.

CHALLENGE #2:

Assumptions that parenting and child development outcomes are natural reduce support for efforts to intervene to improve outcomes.

Naturalistic mindsets also dominate people's thinking about child development and wellbeing. While each mindset presents distinct challenges for advocates and communicators, these mindsets have a common effect of leading people to reason that children's outcomes are *naturally* positive or negative, which makes it hard to see how child development can and should be better supported through policy reforms.

The *Maternal Gender Essentialism* Mindset

This mindset is based on the assumption that women and men have innate, inborn and fixed differences that make them suited to different types of caregiving and work. When employing this mindset, people assume that women are naturally more caring and innately more able to raise and care for children than men are. The mindset leads people to reason that mothers naturally have the most influence over and responsibility for child development and wellbeing. Built into this mindset is a gender binary – when people assume that women are naturally more caring, this leads them to reason that men are less caring and therefore less suited to nurturing children and supporting positive development than mothers are.

This mindset was consistently employed by both men and women, in both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander focus groups and among CALD and non-CALD participants. Across all focus groups, participants described mothers as 'naturally' nurturing compared to fathers and reasoned that mothers are innately more attuned to and better at caregiving. This essentialist thinking led participants to reason that mothers are ultimately responsible for children's wellbeing. While some participants could see that fathers were important to child development, they clearly defaulted to thinking that mothers were *really* the ones who are ultimately responsible for children's outcomes.

The exact way that mothers shape children's development is vague in this mindset. Across all focus groups, participants described a mother's influence in largely passive terms: 'being with the child'; 'shaping' the child; and being attentive to and noticing things about the child.

> *'It's important that the mother be there with the child. [...] I think that's the most important thing to grow up.'*
> (Male, non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander, non-CALD participant)

> *'I think mum has a big role to play. [...] I've met kids or seen kids with their mum, and the way their mum views the world really shapes how they interact with everyone, and their view on the world.'*
> (Female, non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander, non-CALD participant)

> *'It's a job as a mother, a natural instinct as a mother and a natural nurturer to do that.'* (Female, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participant)

THE ROLE OF BROADER NATURALISTIC THINKING

The *Maternal Gender Essentialism* mindset is a gendered version of a broader *Naturalism* mindset. In this more general mindset, there is a natural state of the world and an innate way that things are and should be. This mindset flavours how people think about parenting. It sets up the understanding that being a good parent is innate – caring is what it takes to be a good parent, and caring is natural. From this view, parenting skills aren't necessary because good parenting is natural. This mindset also leads people to reason that child development is a natural process that just takes its course and that children will develop well if the process is just left to unfold as it naturally does. This mindset sets up a decidedly anti-interventionist approach to development and an anti-science perspective. When naturalistic thinking emerged in the focus groups, it centred on a gendered binary and essentialist version of women being naturally more caring, and thus better parents, compared to other caregivers in a child's life, including fathers.

Implications

By assuming mothers are narrowly responsible for childrearing because of their natural and innate caring, this thinking leads to blame and stigma in instances where positive development outcomes are threatened. And by making mothers responsible for development, the mindset shuts down conversations about men's positive roles in parenting and healthy development. This mindset makes it difficult for people to see past unhelpful gender stereotypes. These stereotypes are harmful in a number of ways, including by exacerbating caregiving inequities at home and in the early years sector, by perpetuating rigid gender roles in the socialisation of young children, and by perpetuating gender-based family violence. In these ways, this mindset helps to further entrench sexism in Australian society.

This thinking also individualises responsibility and keeps people from recognising the structural and systemic factors that shape parenting and development. Moreover, the mindset's naturalistic bent makes it difficult for people to see the skills and knowledge that are necessary to support children's development. The result is depressed support for initiatives aimed at improving the broader conditions of development, providing resources that support young children and parents and increasing skills and knowledge for all parents.

In cementing views about what's natural, gender essentialism establishes a sense of what is right and wrong in ways that reduce support for initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality in caregiving and parenting; engaging men and fathers in maternity care, early childhood programs, and childcare; promoting positive male role models in child development and care; and supporting LGBTQ+ families.

The *Passive Development (Sponge)* Mindset

The core assumption in this mindset is that children develop through a passive process of observing and taking in language, values and behaviour from those around them. In this way of thinking, young children are seen to *absorb* knowledge and behaviours simply by being in proximity to them. While we saw this mindset employed to think about children passively absorbing things from their broader environment, it was most frequently employed to think about how children soak up knowledge and behaviours from their parents.

This mindset was evident in non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander focus groups, among both CALD and non-CALD participants. Participants talked about children being 'moulded' by and copying adults, and specifically their parents, as well as children being 'impressionable' and being like 'sponges'.

> '*You know the children. They got their own little characters. They got their own little way of thinking. They got their own mind. The only thing is you can mould them and then show them the right way. So, I think that's what they need.*'
> (Female, non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander, CALD participant)

> '*Impressionable. They literally copy what you teach them and not teach them. They see us and copy. So very impressionable.*'
> (Male, non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander, CALD participant)

> Moderator: '*How would you define what a child is?*'
>
> 1st Female, non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander, CALD participant:
> '*Someone with an innocent mind, a sponge.*'
>
> 2nd Female, non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander, CALD participant:
> '*I'll say a little human that knows nothing and is just trying to learn everything. I guess.*'

In the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander focus groups, this mindset was less dominant. Participants used this mindset to think about the importance of adult role models in shaping child development, who were seen as transmitting knowledge or values. This focus on role models was often connected to the *It Takes a Village* mindset to think about the shared responsibility of child development (see below).

THE IMPORTANCE OF ROLE MODELS IN ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT IS-LANDER COMMUNITIES

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants emphasised the importance of adult role models for children in passing on knowledge and modelling behaviours. Participants talked about children needing positive role models, whether they are parents, extended family or other community members. A lack of good role models was evoked to explain why some children don't experience positive development.

> *'There's a lot of stuff happening, bad stuff too. As we talked about before, there's a lot of stuff within our mob that's happening. That we need to be the role models or the better people to take control and to take the first step to show them if they don't know how to take that step too. So that was number one for us.'*
> (Female, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participant)

> *'Yeah, and role models like volunteers, you know, plus I get a sports identity down, you know, and that way, you know, to keep them interested and enthusiastic.'*
> (Male, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participant)

While role models were assumed to be integral to child development, the processes for how exactly they positively affect child development were vague and not discussed. There was certainly some passivity in this thinking, connecting it to the *Passive Development* mindset. However, there is also an ability to build on this mindset to deepen understanding of the active processes involved in child development for both children and adult mentors. It may be that connecting the active processes involved in child development, particularly in the early years, with the importance of positive role models helps to deepen people's understanding of this crucial time in children's lives.

Implications

Assuming that child development is a passive process of absorption makes it difficult to see the importance of active engagement and supportive interactions in driving healthy development. In turn, this thinking makes it hard for people to get behind policies that support these types of experiences and interactions. Moreover, assuming that children 'innately' absorb knowledge can lead to reasoning that children who experience difficulties are somehow lacking in 'natural' ability rather than lacking access to the opportunities and support they need.

Framing Recommendations to Navigate This Challenge

Avoid focusing exclusively on the role of mothers in caretaking. **Instead, talk** about the ways in which caregivers, including fathers, families and others, can and should be supported. Talking about the positive ways that fathers and other caregivers can support healthy child development can help reframe the conversation away from essentialist and naturalistic thinking.

Explain learning as active processes in which children respond to experiences and development is a contingent process to overcome naturalistic thinking. When people default to naturalistic ideas about parenting and child development, it's often due to a lack of understanding of how child development happens. Offering explanations of the active, engaged ways that children learn – and from a variety of adults, including families, communities, schools and the broader environment – can help fill this gap in understanding.

CHALLENGE #3:

Mindsets that obscure inequities reduce support for policies designed to address them.

There are a number of mindsets that structure people's thinking about existing inequities. These mindsets individualise racism as an interpersonal problem or position it as a thing of the past, reducing support for changes designed to advance equity. Meanwhile, the *Otherism* and *Pathologising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Culture* mindsets blame groups for experiencing inequities in overtly racist ways. By placing the blame for existing inequities on everything but systems, these mindsets make it difficult for people to support changes that would help to address inequities.

The *Interpersonal Racism* Mindset

The core assumption in this mindset is that racism is about individual biases, stereotypes and prejudices, rather than systemic injustices. This thinking leads people to see racism as operating through interpersonal relations and individual interactions, rather than through laws, policies or institutions. When employing this mindset to think about the early years, people reason that young children and families experience racism interpersonally, through explicit insults or judgements, or implicitly through profiling.

In focus groups, this thinking was employed by participants across demographic groups, albeit in different ways. In the non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander focus groups, CALD participants were more likely to recognise how interpersonal racism can affect children's experiences and outcomes than non-CALD participants. CALD participants discussed the significance of interactions in schools, citing bullying and exclusion based on race. While non-CALD participants also acknowledged instances of interpersonal racism, these were more likely to be understood as isolated incidents rather than being characteristic in any way of modern Australian society. This thinking is connected to the *Racial Progress* mindset described below, in which current society is perceived to have moved past racism.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants employed the *Interpersonal Racism* mindset in connection with the *Structural Racism* mindset described below. While Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants also described individual instances of racist behaviour, this thinking was found alongside an understanding of the historical and present-day racism that exists in institutions such as schools, family and child services, and government policies and laws more generally. This thinking is connected to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's past and present experiences with racism at both the interpersonal and structural levels.

'There are people, unfortunately, that won't help others of different races because they are racist.'
(Female, non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander, CALD participant)

'I've talked about diversity with families, you know, we're a very accepting, open family; lots of people of different cultures. One of [them] came up to me the other day and said, they don't play with a girl because she's brown.'
(Female, non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander, non-CALD participant)

'I've even had to teach my daughter about the racism that happens in the shopping centre – what do you call it – being profiled.'
(Male, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participant)

Implications

Assuming that racism exists predominantly or solely in the biases and prejudices of individuals makes it difficult to see the structural components of racism – the ways that systems are set up in ways that perpetuate racism and create disparities.[6] For example, this thinking can lead people to reason that racism in schools can be solved by calling out individual racist acts and encouraging students to change their behaviours, but it diverts attention away from broader changes to the education system, such as anti-racist curricula and training for teachers and staff.

When employed to think about the early years, this mindset makes it difficult for advocates and communicators to promote and build support for policies aimed at addressing racism on a systemic level. It therefore challenges sector communicators and leaders working to support and improve outcomes for CALD and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities.

The *Racial Progress* Mindset

In this mindset, racism is seen as something that has been addressed through laws, policies and general progress and is no longer a problem. When applying this mindset, people see a past in which racism was a serious problem, but a present in which it no longer is. When applied to thinking about the early years, this mindset leads people to reason that early childhood today is *not* really affected by racism.

The mindset was mostly employed by non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander, non-CALD participants, although CALD participants also employed this way of thinking at times. When using this thinking, participants reasoned that, given Australia's present-day multiculturalism, racism doesn't impact children or families as it previously did. Participants discussed incidents of racism half a century ago in comparison with today to reason that racism is largely absent from society today. People reasoned that the existence of different cultures in Australia today is evidence of how much society has progressed past racism.

> *'Sixty years ago, like I know, like I'm of Greek heritage. So, I wasAustralian born, but there were some challenges when I was younger [...]. The challenge is a lot less than my parents faced when [they] migrated over. So, I think that kind of [...] aspect of it is slowly diluting. We [have] a lot more acceptance of other people, but I guess there still [are] some aspects of that [...] I might not personally be aware of, but I certainly think it's a lot better these days.'*
> (Male, non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander, non-CALD participant)

> *'It's a lot different. Now where we live. It's very diverse. And [...] I think that's a [...] good thing.'*
> (Male, non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander, non-CALD participant)

> *'But now it's so good. But there's some people that are very racist. But now it [has] come really better than 50 years ago. They are very good. Now, yeah, you have changed a lot. So, when you know, when we first came, you go and apply for a job [...].'*
> (Female, non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander, CALD participant)

> *'You acknowledge the people are there. You acknowledge their culture, and that you try to integrate them more into society.'*
> (Female, non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander, non-CALD participant)

This mindset was not evident in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander focus groups. This is likely due to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's daily lived experiences of racism, which are at odds with the assumption that racism is a thing of the past.

Implications

By characterising racism as largely a thing of the past, this mindset obscures inequities and the lived experience of historically oppressed people, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and CALD people.[7] By denying their experiences, this mindset is directly harmful to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and CALD people.

When people see racism as no longer relevant or serious, support for efforts to address racial injustice declines. When applied to early childhood, the mindset leads people to underestimate or deny the importance of advancing equity in early childhood policy. Instead, it leads people to reason that since racism is 'over' and 'in the past', policy changes designed to address it are no longer necessary.

This thinking challenges those who are working to reform early childhood systems that are set up in ways that perpetuate racial disparities in child development outcomes. It also undermines efforts to advance policies that support the wellbeing of historically oppressed groups of people.

The *Otherism* Mindset

The core assumption of this mindset is that there are *in groups* and *out groups* in society that are fundamentally different from and at odds with each other. Thinking with this mindset, there is an *us* versus a *them*. People fill in the *us* and *them* in different ways based on gender, race or ethnicity, geography, income and even age. Another core part of this mindset is the assumption that society consists of groups competing for limited resources. The assumption is that there is zero-sum competition and that the *us* and *them* (however they're conceptualised) are in direct competition for resources. When thinking this way, people assume that the more of anything one group gets, the less other groups get. This thinking has been found in Australia and elsewhere in a variety of ways.[8]

In the non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander focus groups, this type of thinking came up in relation to immigrant and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, who were seen as *other*. While non-CALD participants were more likely to employ this thinking, some CALD participants also used this mindset. Both non-CALD and CALD participants discussed the ways in which immigrant and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and their approaches to parenting were fundamentally different and at odds with 'Australian' cultural values and norms. While not always explicitly stated, there was an underlying assumption that Australian values and norms stem from white, European-descended people, who were positioned in this thinking as the *us* of Australia.

When using this mindset, participants discussed the differences between Asian immigrants' and Australian approaches to parenting. When asked about whether culture or ethnicity shapes a child's opportunities, participants sometimes referred to South Asian and East Asian families putting too much emphasis on academics, to the detriment of children's social development. This *model minority myth* has also been found elsewhere.[9]

'Different ethnic groups and their parenting styles are based off some sort of truth. Caucasian families [....] They have a lot of emphasis on letting the child be a child. But for Asian ethnicities they might have more of an emphasis on academics [...] and then there's depression, expectations, and possibly feeling like a disappointment.'
(Female, non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander, CALD participant)

'I think some of the ethnic backgrounds [...] I'm married to a Singaporean, and I see over that way it's all education or education and religion. They got no social skills. Yeah. And I see it here. Even. There's a little young girl out the front there. I don't think she's got any friends, but she does extra around classes after school, you know, like education, it's all focused on education. Get that good job than having a good social life [...] playing sport, going to birthday parties. Social interaction is just as [...] important as education and everything else in life [...] they seem to sort of focus on one aspect of it. Instead of the whole big picture.'
(Male, non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander, non-CALD participant)

Implications

Grouping people into *us* and *them* categories and seeing the two as at odds or in competition saps support for policies designed to address inequality and injustice. If groups are fundamentally different and in competition, it is hard for one group to support policies that are seen to benefit another group. When it comes to early childhood policies, this mindset directly challenges efforts to improve contexts, boost opportunities and support parents in historically oppressed groups as a means of advancing equity and assuring that all children in Australia can thrive.

Model minority myths in which Asian Australian families are stereotyped as being more hardworking and caring more about educational outcomes[10] can also perpetuate racism against other immigrant groups, leading people to reason that if one group can overcome challenges, everyone can. This thinking obscures the historic and present-day inequities that structure how people from historically oppressed groups navigate society and makes it hard for people to see the policy reforms necessary to address these inequities.

Policy implications aside, this mindset directly informs stereotypes and racist thinking. For that reason, it is harmful and toxic in and of itself. For example, by seeing Asian parenting styles as fundamentally different from 'Australian' ones and assuming that Asian parents do not share in Australian culture, this thinking *otherises* Asian Australians.

The implications of this thinking in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is discussed below in relation to the *Pathologising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Culture* mindset, which is a more group-specific version of othering.

The *Pathologising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Culture* Mindset

This harmful mindset is based on the dangerous assumption that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities share a culture and set of values that are inferior to that of 'mainstream' (i.e., white) Australian culture. The assumption is that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture is, at base, deficient. It is a fundamentally racist mindset and one that is vital to shift. When applied to children and families, this mindset is used to explain higher rates of poverty or involvement with the criminal justice system as being the result of deficient culture and values rather than structural racism and past and present injustices. We have found this racist mindset in our work in the United States, where it is used to explain disparities in outcomes in relation to Black and Indigenous communities.[11]

This mindset appeared in the non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander focus groups, where it was employed by both non-CALD and CALD participants. There was an assumption that certain communities have poor child outcomes because 'their' culture doesn't 'value' things like education, health or 'proper' behaviour or hold the 'right' moral values. When this mindset was employed, participants reasoned that supposedly 'unstable' families, poverty, substance use and crime rates were the result of cultural characteristics passed down 'generationally'. While the culture being discussed was sometimes implicitly coded as Aboriginal, it was also explicitly described as Aboriginal in some instances. In some cases, participants explicitly expressed concern for child welfare, while at the same time implying that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture doesn't 'care' about children's wellbeing as much as Australian (white) culture. As with the *Otherism* mindset, this thinking assumes that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are *other* to supposedly *mainstream* Australian society.

> *'You know, some culture[s] looks after the kids a lot more than other culture[s]. They just neglect their kids, don't even give them any food for lunch. And it's obviously a [...] huge influence on the child if they can't eat for the whole day.'*
> (Male, non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander, CALD participant)

> *'If you look at what's happening in [...], where there is absolutely zero parental control over the local Aboriginals. We're going through supermarkets, stealing things in broad daylight. And that's because that cultural group, they let the kids do whatever they want.'*
> (Male, non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander, non-CALD participant)

> *'Up here [...] a lot of First Nations people, they're constantly in and out of different communities. So, there's no stability for the kids. So, you can't have a constant schooling or stability and*

housing, because [you're] here, there, and everywhere. And [...] it's really hard for the kids [...] I notice up here [...] people that have come from bad environments where [...] for example, we have a lot of public housing around us, and I can see those behaviours very clearly. They're not sending the kids to school because they're up all night partying, and of course, school's on during the day. They don't get up, and we're seeing that [...] come through to the adults, these people, we're trying to get them jobs. And they [...] haven't got language and literacy. They're not, you know, very smart, because they haven't had that interaction of a responsible adult teaching them much.'
(Female, non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander, non-CALD participant)

Implications

First and foremost, the assumption that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a 'deficient' culture and set of values is overtly racist and deeply problematic. This assumption underlies racist attitudes about children and families, and it must be shifted.

This mindset obscures systemic racism and historical and present injustices by blaming Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for the harm they experience. This mindset leads to reasoning that inequities and injustices are the fault of individuals and their communities, rather than the result of structural racism and decades of active abuse, extraction and persecution. This thinking undercuts support for policies and programs meant to address and redress harm and injustice. When it comes to the early years, this mindset dampens support for culturally appropriate and responsive programs and initiatives for Aboriginal children and families and decreases demand for policies that are designed to provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families with the support that all families require.

Additionally, thinking that certain cultures are 'deficient' or 'inferior' leads to thinking that individuals should be acculturated into the 'mainstream' culture's way of life to improve outcomes. **It is of paramount importance to find narrative and framing strategies that can help overcome this racist thinking in relation to children and families and instead build support for properly valuing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities' practices and traditions.**

Framing Recommendations to Navigate This Challenge

Describe how historical injustices – through policymaking and institutions – have led to current inequities. Explaining how racial, gender, geographic and class inequities have come to be – and how they can intersect to amplify harm – can help build understanding of the broader forces that shape people's lives beyond their individual behaviour. Talking about how these inequities shape child development outcomes can help shift thinking away from individualistic and naturalistic thinking.

Show how policy and reform address past and present inequities to better support all children and families across Australia. Describing problems without talking about solutions leads to fatalism because the problem can seem insurmountable. Talking about what can be changed can help build a sense of collective efficacy that we, as a society, can overcome these issues together. Provide concrete examples of what can change, such as culturally responsive early years programs led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and talk about how these policy reforms can help address inequities.

Fatalistic thinking makes it hard to see what *can* be changed to better support children and families.

Another set of mindsets leads people to fear and fatalism. The *Threat of Modernity* mindset focuses on the effects of perceived threats to society and community, while mindsets about government assume that government is either a nuisance that obstructs parental control or a direct threat to children, families and communities. While the ways that fear and fatalism operate in each of these mindsets are different, they similarly make it hard to see how policy changes and reforms *can* make positive changes in the lives of children and families.

The *Threat of Modernity* Mindset

The core assumption of this mindset is that the modern world has become dangerous and that this threatens positive development and child wellbeing. When thinking with this mindset, people reason that Australian children today face challenges unlike those in previous generations. There is a nostalgia for the past that is part of this mindset and an assumption that the past was simpler and easier for children to just 'be children' and not be forced to grow up 'too fast'. This mindset was found across demographic groups within the focus groups and has been found elsewhere.[12]

When employing this way of thinking, participants talked about how different children's daily lives are now than in the past and worried about how children are currently doing in the face of rapid societal changes. There was a particular preoccupation with how technology, specifically social media, threatens children's development and wellbeing. This focus may be influenced by the recent social media minimum age legislation and policy in Australia that is aimed at adolescents.[13]

Participants' overwhelming focus on social media when employing this mindset is an example of *ageing up* when thinking about the early years – the tendency, when asked about the 'early years', to think about later stages of childhood, such as adolescence, rather than focusing on children ages 0–5 years.

> *'I think it's really hard in today's generation, particularly with a lot of distractions. In terms of social media and gadgets. And the technology that we have.'*
> (Female, non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander, CALD participant)

> *'The technologies and the society [are] kind of derailing them at the moment, so, they can't, you know, improve their own kind of personality easily. They have a lot of influence, and they can't sort of deal with this overload.'*
> (Male, non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander, CALD participant)

While this mindset often led to participants expressing nostalgia about the past, the reference points for this nostalgia varied among demographic groups. Non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander participants, both CALD and non-CALD, were likely to see technology as a threat to a vaguely defined past Australian way of life that was simpler, with fewer 'distractions' for children (see above). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, on the other hand, were much more likely to view technology as a threat to community belonging and social connection that was seen as stronger in the past. In this view, technology and social media were seen as threats to connection to community and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture more broadly.

'Since technology came in, it has been overruled and powered into our people that sometimes our people forget about their culture. The generation, that is. The Elders like I and other Elders, we know that. So, I think we need to be the teachers. We're the role models. We're the people that can make the change. So, we need to take those big steps and say, okay, put those away, we're going on country for the night'
(Male, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participant)

'It seems like there is a further disconnect of an identity moving into that social media space. They're learning about society through inaccuracies via social media as opposed to listening to the adults around them and their families around them. That adult concept that they're exposed to and before they even mature to even process that, you know, like it's getting distorted.'
(Male, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participant)

Some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants also connected this loss of community and cultural identity to other modern-day threats, such as youth crime.

'There's a lot of young kids around here that are turning to drugs and crime. And they just walk around like they've got nothing else to do. You know, so it would give them an opportunity to have a productive outlet. Help support the parents too, you know [...]. Grow relationships within Nunga kids. So many kids these days are disconnected from each other [...] it's like when I grew up, we were all together, you know. So, give them somewhere to go to be with each other.'
(Female, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participant)

Implications
Assuming that the past was simpler or easier compared to threats from modern life can lead to thinking that today's issues are insurmountable for both children and their families. This can lead people to fatalistic reasoning that it's impossible to 'get back' to those simpler times, so why try? This makes people see attempts to better support children and families as futile and reduces support for solutions.

This mindset also tends to reinforce fears and prejudices about social change. When the past is romanticised, changes designed to address longstanding inequities can be seen as threatening to an idealised past. In this way, this mindset can make progress seem problematic and like a factor contributing to the loss of better times.[14]

When this mindset is employed to romanticise a mythic, idealised past, it can lead to fear of social change and can reify existing social hierarchies. But when this mindset is employed to think *critically* about rapid changes that have affected children and families in traditional communities, the implications are quite different. When employed to think about the loss of cultural traditions and community connections among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, the *Threat of Modernity* mindset productively identifies ongoing threats and injustices affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families that need to be addressed. However, if no solutions are presented to address these injustices, even this more productive application of the mindset can lead to fatalism. It's therefore essential to put forward concrete policies and programs that respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tradition and culture and are led by and co-created with communities.

AGEING UP IN THE *THREAT OF MODERNITY* MINDSET

When the *Threat of Modernity* mindset is applied to think about social media use among children, it presents additional challenges for advocates and communicators. By focusing on social media use (as opposed to screen use), something that children in the early years are unlikely to engage in, this mindset leads to *ageing up*. This makes it difficult for people to understand and support policies and programs aimed at the early years, since that's not seen as top of mind or a high priority in this thinking. Moreover, focusing on social media as the biggest threat to children today can make it challenging for early childhood advocates and communicators looking to promote broader systemic solutions to *modern problems*, especially given strong communication from the government on the threat of technology and social media for children.

Framing Recommendation to Navigate This Challenge

Refocus conversations to what children need in the early years to overcome *ageing-up* thinking. To avoid *ageing up* in conversations about the early years, make it clear which age group you're talking about and the specific supports they need during this crucial time in child development.

The *Government as Interference* Mindset
This mindset assumes that the government interferes with parenting and early development. This mindset is related to the *Family Bubble* mindset and broader individualistic thinking in that it assumes that parents should have ultimate control over their children and that government involvement interferes with that control.

This mindset was present in the non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander focus groups and employed by both non-CALD and CALD participants. It was seen in discussions of how government was stepping into areas of childrearing that were seen as the purview of parents, such as punishment.

> 'My neighbour has got a 7-year-old daughter telling the teacher [to] F off, and she feels that she can't hit the child [...] [because] government [...] stepped in because we don't want child abuse. But it's gone too much the other way, where parents need to be able to [...] give the consequences [...] you can't do that to a teacher, or whatever, and they need a smack.'
> (Female, non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander, non-CALD participant)

> 'Governments have too much overreach [into] children's lives – way too much.'
> (Female, non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander, non-CALD participant)

This mindset was not present in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander focus groups; instead, the *Government as Threat* mindset was employed when thinking about government (see below).

Implications

This way of thinking about government as overreaching and interfering with parental control makes it difficult to see a role for government in supporting children and families and hard to support government policies and programs that do this. This way of thinking about government also cements the sense that parents, and not public systems, are responsible for child development and, therefore, when children experience challenges, the parents are to blame.

The *Government as Threat* Mindset

In this mindset, the government is seen as actively threatening children and families. This mindset was found in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander focus groups and was informed by Aboriginal experiences of family separation and systematic child removal at the hands of the government. In this view, the government is seen as a net negative, unable or unwilling to offer positive support to children, families or communities and actively making things worse through their involvement in early childhood development.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants discussed how government involvement with children in their communities is characterised by negative and abusive interactions through which government undermines Aboriginal family structures and cultural heritage and reproduction (practices in which culture is passed down from generation to generation).[15] Fear and resentment of government surveillance of Aboriginal families and fear about children being taken away by the government were common themes. Several participants had personal experiences of their children being removed and talked about the trauma on their families and the broader community.

Female, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participant 1:
'Yeah, they tried to take my little one. And I'm like, try. I'm clean. I'm about to move into a new house. Try it. Try everything you've got. And they got nothing.'

Female, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participant 2:
'And they don't realise the impact that it has on the children to rip you away from someone that makes them feel secure, makes them feel safe, makes them feel whole. You can't get that feeling just anywhere.'

Female, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participant 1:
'Removal should not be the first step.'

'But maybe if we had those support mechanisms in place it wouldn't get to the point of incarceration and child removal.'
(Male, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participant)

'I live in fear of the government every day, even though I can honestly say I'm a good mum. But when you've had your kids taken away, there's not a day that I don't worry about my little boy being taken.'
(Female, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participant)

Implications

This mindset, directly informed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander lived experiences, exposes past and present injustices that still need to be addressed. This thinking can lead people to reason fatalistically that government is incapable of supporting Aboriginal children and families, which understandably makes people suspicious and fearful of government and depresses support for programs and policies. If government is seen as a source of threat, why would people support government programs and policies? This thinking can also influence people's interactions and engagement with any culturally appropriate government supports that they are rightfully owed. While strategic framing can help to reframe the role of government, it is also necessary to centre Aboriginal voices and community organisations to provide, promote and advance culturally responsive and appropriate services for early childhood. This can help to build trust and redress the injustices that understandably inform this mindset.

THE ROLE OF INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA

In the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander focus groups, participants consistently brought up the role of intergenerational trauma in early childhood development and in how communities approach raising children. Not only do these experiences clearly inform the *Government as Threat* mindset, but they also appear to be central to how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities think about children and families today. The impact of intergenerational trauma was explicitly discussed as permeating every aspect of Aboriginal life.

> *'It is a sad, sad reality that, you know, through generational trauma and generational [...] segregation, assimilation, removal, that the skills that enabled these people to be the strongest and ongoing culture in the world. But that's gone.'*
> (Male, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participant)

We will be attentive to the role of trauma and the need for healing as we continue to study mindsets through quantitative research.[16]

Framing Recommendations to Navigate This Challenge

Provide examples of concrete and clear solutions – showing places where they are being implemented and changes they are creating – to help overcome fatalistic thinking. When people think about the threats facing children and families, including from technology and even the government itself, it can be hard not to think fatalistically about the possibility of change. Giving people concrete examples of structural solutions shows what change looks like and that it's possible, helping to overcome fear and fatalism.

Acknowledge the past and present harms Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have experienced while emphasising the power of **culturally appropriate and responsive** government services to begin to address intergenerational trauma.

It's essential not to gloss over or dismiss the real harms that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have experienced at the hands of government, particularly child separation policies. Instead, acknowledge these harms and discuss the ways in which government can and must do better. For example, talk about how government services can and must co-create culturally responsive early childhood services with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Opportunities

A set of mindsets presents opportunities to engage people in thinking about the role of policies, reforms and systems in shaping development and addressing inequities. Some of these mindsets also foster a productive sense of collective responsibility around child development and wellbeing. We describe these mindsets below, as well as how they are employed across demographic groups. Many of these mindsets were more commonly found among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants. Initial reframing strategies are described as ways to activate and strengthen the mindsets that create these opportunities.

Table 6: Opportunities in public thinking*

Opportunity	Mindsets that underlie the opportunity	Demographic similarities and differences	Strategies for leveraging the opportunity
Opportunity #1: People can sometimes see supporting children and families as a *collective* responsibility.	The *It Takes a Village* mindset assumes that how a child does in life is shaped by a network of actors in a community and that the responsibility for children's outcomes is shared.	*It Takes a Village* is dominant among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants and found among CALD participants. Did not emerge among non-CALD participants.	**Tell stories about and highlight** the role of communities in early childhood to activate the *It Takes a Village* mindset about shared responsibility and to overcome the tendency to blame, shame and stigmatise parents (specifically mothers). **When talking** about the role of community in children's lives, **keep in mind** cultural differences in understandings of what community means.
Opportunity #2: People can see that racism is built into systems, but this thinking needs strong and explicit cueing for some groups.	The *Structural Racism* mindset recognises that the way that laws, rules, policies and society are set up can create racial disparities. The *Financial Constraints* mindset recognises that family financial constraints can affect access to opportunities and shape a child's development.	*Structural Racism* and *Financial Constraints* are found among all groups but are more dominant among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants.	**Describe** specific ways that structural inequities shape child development outcomes to expand understanding of how this works. **Explain** the ways that children and families can be better supported to overcome fatalistic thinking.

Table 6: Opportunities in public thinking,* continued

Opportunity	Mindsets that underlie the opportunity	Demographic similarities and differences	Strategies for leveraging the opportunity
Opportunity #3: People can sometimes see that government is responsible for supporting children and families, but they need to be shown that it's *possible* for government to act as a partner.	The *Government as Partner* mindset that government can and should play a role in supporting children's development and wellbeing.	*Government as Partner* is recessive among non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander participants (*Government as Interference* was more dominant). Did not emerge among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants (*Government as Threat* was dominant).	**Talk** about the ways government is responsible for supporting child development by working with families and communities.

*The identification of mindsets and the noted similarities and differences among groups were derived using qualitative analysis of the total sample of participants in the focus groups.

OPPORTUNITY #1:

People can sometimes see supporting children and families as a collective responsibility.

The *It Takes a Village* mindset leads to the recognition of shared responsibility for child development and wellbeing. While not dominant across all focus groups, the mindset was strongly present in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander focus groups. This mindset can be activated to build support for public policies that support children and families.

The *It Takes a Village* Mindset
In contrast to the *Family Bubble* mindset, this mindset assumes that how well a child does in life is shaped by a network of actors in a community. When employing this mindset, people reason that communities have a strong influence on child development. In this thinking, responsibility for childrearing is distributed across families and members of the community.

This mindset was most often employed among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants, although CALD participants in the non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander focus groups also employed this thinking to some extent. In the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander focus groups, this thinking was more dominant than the *Family Bubble* mindset, while in the non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander focus groups the opposite pattern emerged.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants discussed their kinship systems as grounded in an understanding of shared community responsibility for all children. In this thinking, parenting was not seen as a private and isolated practice, but rather one integrated into family, community and culture. In the focus groups, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants described family as including extended family and ancestors. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants discussed communities raising children as an essential value and practice of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture.

‘It used to take a whole tribe to raise a whole community to raise a child.’
(Female, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participant)

‘But for us Aboriginal people, our family is not just our immediate family, which consists of mum and dad and the kids. Some include the grandparents and aunts and uncles, where our tenth cousins were very close to. We can live up. You know, there were 10 to 15 people in the home for a very long time.’
(Female, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participant)

‘I also feel in this community, if you’re not even related to them, you get the privilege to call them Aunt and Uncle and they take you into their family. They make you very welcome in the community.’
(Female, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participant)

In the non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander focus groups, this mindset emerged among CALD participants who discussed the influence of extended family and community members in the development of young children.

‘I think it’s not a single entity that is responsible for [a] child […] doing well, so like everybody mentioned, it’s […] parents, or the primary caregiver, or the school. And then the wider family like the grandparents, the siblings, aunts, uncles, and in some cases the child themselves as they mature right? […] But I think it’s a shared responsibility. Between the family that supports the child and the surroundings as well.’
(Male, non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander, CALD participant)

‘It’s definitely the community. I had that experience where I learned from everyone in the family where I lived, and friends of my cousins and my uncles and aunts. And so that’s a little different now. So, it’s hard for me to see what they are seeing, my kids. But […] I think the whole village basically should be the ones supporting. So […] the kids learn from everyone.’
(Male, non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander, CALD participant)

This mindset was not present among non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander participants. These participants employed the *Family Bubble* mindset to think about responsibility for children's outcomes.

Implications
Thinking with this mindset leads people to recognise the role of not only immediate family members but extended family members and members of the broader community in supporting positive child development. By connecting child wellbeing and development to the broader community, this thinking injects a sense of collective responsibility for children's development and wellbeing.

It is important to note, however, that the meaning of *community* is culturally dependent in this thinking. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, community entails deep connections to kin, culture, place and language. These deep ties to the land and to each other are distinct from how non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander people perceive community. Advocates will need to be attuned to the specificities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander understandings and experiences to co-create culturally responsive policies and programs to support child development and wellbeing in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Moreover, communicators will need to be responsive to the different ways that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and CALD groups conceive of shared responsibility for child development so they can draw from and expand upon this mindset in culturally specific ways.

Framing Recommendations to Leverage This Opportunity

Tell stories about and highlight the role of communities in early childhood to activate the *It Takes a Village* mindset about shared responsibility and overcome the tendency to blame, shame and stigmatise parents (specifically mothers). Giving people examples of how communities already play a role in children's lives and connecting these examples to what more communities can and should do to support children and families can help to centre the shared responsibility for children's development and wellbeing. This can counterbalance the overemphasis on parental, and especially maternal, responsibility that is a product of the *Family Bubble* and *Maternal Gender Essentialism* mindsets.

When talking about the role of community in children's lives, **keep in mind** cultural differences in understandings of what community means. For example, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience community as connecting to family, kin, ancestry, language and land. This experience of community is a cultural strength that can be highlighted as such in communications with and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. However, this understanding of community is distinct from people from CALD and non-CALD groups. Being clear in your communications about what you mean by community among different groups and being culturally sensitive to differences across groups will help refocus the conversation about children and families towards shared responsibility and away from individualistic thinking.

OPPORTUNITY #2:

People can see that racism is built into systems, but this thinking needs strong and explicit cueing for some groups.

Two mindsets – *Structural Racism* and *Financial Constraints* – allow people to see the roles of broader systems and structures in shaping child development. Each of these mindsets helps people recognise how past and present racial and income inequities affect children's and families' wellbeing. These mindsets represent opportunities to leverage and expand on to help build support for policy reforms and address inequities.

The *Structural Racism* Mindset

This mindset recognises that the way that laws, rules, policies and society are set up can create racial disparities – that systems can be racist. Thinking in this way, people recognise how the legacy of the white Australia policy, combined with racist policies towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, continues to contribute to disparities between groups and perpetuates racism through current policies in areas such as child protection and education. When applied to thinking about children and families, this mindset opens people up to the ways structural barriers based on race shape how children develop, such as lack of access to quality childcare and education and punitive interactions with the criminal legal system.

This mindset was present and employed in both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander focus groups and non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander focus groups, although it was more dominant in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sessions. In non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander groups, this mindset was mostly employed to think about structural racism in access to education.

> *'There are still issues, I think, for people from different backgrounds, living in Australia, I think, in terms of opportunities. Yeah, in terms of seeing themselves in the schooling system as well, which is still predominantly […] focused on the sort of Anglo-centric style of education.'*
> (Male, non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander, non-CALD participant)

It was also occasionally used to push back against racist thinking about 'inferior' cultural values, with an explicit acknowledgment that broader issues were at play.

> *'So, I don't think […] their lack of education or their truancy is actually reflective of their cultural values. I think that one is more reflective of the government.'*
> (Female, non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander, CALD participant)

> *'Where there are higher populations of Indigenous kids. I don't think that their behaviour is reflective of their culture. I think it's more of a systemic issue.'*
> (Female, non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander, non-CALD participant)

In the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander focus groups, this mindset was employed to think about the racist dimensions of current systems and policies that remove Aboriginal children from their families. Participants discussed the current removal of children, incarceration of children and parents, denial of family rights and the repression of Aboriginal culture and language as connected to 'protection' policies of the past and discussed the negative effects of these systems and policies on children and families. When employing this mindset, participants talked about the need for policy change, specifically around child removal laws.

> *'That's too common among Aboriginal mothers, is that they reach out for help and they end up getting their kids taken from them. It's tunnel vision point of views [...]. There's systemic racism in that business, in that organisation. Every paperwork that they have on me when my kids were taken into care described me as an Aboriginal woman.'*
> (Female, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participant)

> *'The majority of the system that controls, the system that we live by, is white. And we're just a few percent. There's a lot of barriers. And they don't see the barriers. And we are living in a white man's world.'*
> (Female, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participant)

Implications

This mindset helps people see deeply entrenched racism within systems and how this affects people's lives. When people apply this mindset to think about children and families, they recognise how systems and structures contribute to racial disparities in child outcomes. The mindset thus offers an alternative to individualistic and naturalistic thinking and makes it easier to see how changing policy is vital to improve child development outcomes and address disparities.

Because they are more likely to experience racism in family services, education, the criminal legal system and elsewhere, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are quickest to apply this mindset and recognise the mechanisms by which structural racism operates in early childhood. While non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander people, both CALD and non-CALD, can sometimes see how structural racism operates, this thinking is less dominant and requires more intentional cueing to become active and shape thinking. Because the mindset facilitates understanding of how structural racism influences child outcomes and how addressing it can advance equity, it is important to find and use frames and narratives that can activate this mindset.

There is, however, a trap in this mindset. Without clear and concrete solutions to address the racism embedded in systems and policies and a way to implement them, this mindset leads to fatalistic thinking. We call this the *systems paradox*. Helping people to see problems in systems is only half the battle because without an efficacious sense that they can be addressed and without a concrete action plan to do so, systems thinking can quickly spiral into fatalism as people understand systems to be opaque and intractable. To overcome this, early years communicators need to clearly connect a set of actions to systemic changes and, through systems, to better and more equitable outcomes for children and families.

The *Financial Constraints* Mindset

In this mindset, people recognise that family financial constraints can affect access to opportunities and shape a child's development. Unlike the *Family Bubble* mindset, which assumes narrow parental responsibility and insulation from contextual factors, this mindset opens people up to broader factors that shape parents' and families' financial resources and stability.

This thinking was found in both the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander focus groups and the non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander focus groups. Among non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander participants, both non-CALD and CALD, this mindset was at times employed to think about financial barriers that children and families face to accessing resources, activities or services that benefit children's development. There was also discussion about how money allowed access to better educational and development outcomes.

'It [money] provides access [...] I even look [at] an example with my kids that have got private health insurance [...]. Our society is structured [so that money] can provide additional access.'
(Female, non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander, non-CALD participant)

'Maybe it's something to do with housing prices or [...] rent prices, or [...] if kids are falling behind or failing at life, and maybe it's something to do with the fact that their parents are under so much pressure to meet these extraordinary high prices that we have to deal with.'
(Female, non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander, non-CALD participant)

'I'm not saying that someone who's from a disadvantaged family is not going to do well [...]. But all I'm saying is, the road is easier for the other group.'
(Male, non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander, non-CALD participant)

Even when the *Financial Constraints* mindset was evident in conversations, people frequently defaulted back to the *Family Bubble,* again showing the dominance of this latter way of thinking.

'Obviously being financially well off – your parents being financially well off in your childhood is a big advantage. You get to do all of the things that maybe you wouldn't be able to do if you didn't have that privilege. But I do think that a good childhood doesn't come because of money. It comes because of upbringing. I think somebody born into a poor family could still be an amazing human being once they're an adult without having that kind of money.'
(Female, non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander, CALD participant)

'Yeah, I think it has an effect. It has an effect, but it's not like a direct effect. It's not like the more money you have the better you are.'
(Male, non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander, non-CALD participant)

Among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants, the *Financial Constraints* mindset was more dominant. Participants discussed how financial pressures impact parents' ability to care for their children and how the high costs of services are barriers to access for children and families. They talked about the access that comes with money in reference to education, health care and other types of services and resources for adult family members and children. Participants linked family financial situations to the wider economy.

'Yeah, it's all about access. And obviously, if you've got the money, you've got the opportunity to [...] do whatever. Like you were saying, I feel privileged because I don't, because I have to go private. And I can afford that. Just recognising that.'
(Female, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participant)

'I'd say most families nowadays would probably need two parents working to be able to afford everything in terms of living, food, access to health, or medications. But I guess if you are low income, you are going to find it harder, aren't you? Especially living remote with the cost.'
(Female, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participant)

'Don't blame the young generation for turning out half the way they do because you look at their opportunities and what's actually available and how easy it's going to be for them to get a job, to get a house, to get a car. They see a nice car and they're like, I'm never going to have the opportunity to ever own that, so I'm going to steal it. It's how the system has made it very, like you said, setting up to fail. There's a lot of that in the [...] youth system or in the system in general where they're automatically set. All that's there for me is stealing in prison because it's harder to get a house, it's harder to get jobs, I don't get enough money to survive.'
(Female, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participant)

Implications

This mindset allows people to connect the economy and inequitable distribution of resources to access to opportunities for children and child development. It opens space for thinking about how the economy can be redesigned to more equitably distribute resources and opportunities.

However, in the same way that the *Structural Racism* mindset is susceptible to fatalism that results from the systems paradox, this mindset needs to be paired with communications about concrete solutions and examples that show what can be done to redesign the economic system to better support children and families.

Framing Recommendations to Leverage This Opportunity

Describe specific ways that structural inequities shape child development outcomes to expand understanding of how this works. For example, connect the dots to explain how structural racism affects families' interactions with the criminal legal system and how this in turn affects children's development and wellbeing. This can expand understanding of systems and structures that shape development.

Explain the ways that children and families can be better supported to overcome fatalism. When you describe an entrenched issue like structural racism or income inequality affecting children and families, it's important to also talk about policy reforms that can help address the issue. For example, talk about reforms such as increased paid parental leave, including better considerations for all families (e.g., removing primary and secondary carer labels), or access to free childcare for everyone. This helps to avoid fatalism because people can see the broader changes that can better support children and families across Australia.

People can sometimes see that government is responsible for supporting children and families, but they need to be shown that it's *possible* for government to act as a partner.

When people can see how government is responsible for supporting children and families across Australia, including being responsible for addressing past harms and inequities, this makes it easier for them to demand policy solutions that better support children and families. The *Government as Partner* mindset presents this opportunity and expands people's understanding of government responsibility. However, this mindset is quite recessive and needs to be deepened and expanded upon to be fully leveraged by advocates and communicators.

The *Government as Partner* Mindset

This mindset is based on the assumption that government can and should play a role in supporting children's development and wellbeing. When this mindset is active and shapes thinking and discussion, there is a sense that government has a responsibility to provide and care for people by making services such as education and health care available.

While this thinking has been found in other research in Australia,[17] it was recessive in these focus groups and was not evident at all in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander focus groups where the *Government as Threat* mindset was dominant.

In the non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander focus groups, the *Government as Partner* mindset was occasionally present among non-CALD and CALD participants but much less prevalent than the *Government as Interference* mindset.

> '*I mean, I would say, in some ways a very direct role the government would play even in terms of [...]. I'm in Victoria Free Kindergarten. You know that there's a direct [...] impact on children's growth and learning, and Medicare in terms of the health system.*'
> (Female, non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander, non-CALD participant)

> '*The environment and the policy that government has put in place, I think supports the wellbeing and the success of a child as well. Here in Australia.*'
> (Male, non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander, CALD participant)

Implications

This mindset offers a productive understanding of the role of government in the lives of children and families and as such needs to be expanded and deepened to build public understanding of and support for ways government can support child development. While people can sometimes see the role of government in providing basic services in times of crisis and extreme need, this thinking needs to be expanded so that people can see a role for government in supporting child and family wellbeing – not just for avoiding crisis or providing an end-of-the-line safety net.

Expanding on and strengthening the *Government as Partner* mindset will involve government in early childhood services and initiatives that are designed in partnership with children and families and demonstrate examples of what government partnership with communities looks like and the benefits it can provide. It's essential that these examples are culturally responsive and appropriate, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Framing Recommendation to Leverage This Opportunity

Talk about the ways government is responsible for supporting child development by working with families and communities. Describing how government is and should be part of the *village* supporting children and families can leverage and expand the *It Takes a Village* mindset and connect it to thinking about government as a partner.

Conclusion: Next Steps for Mindsets Research

The findings from this research provide a deeper understanding of the mindsets that guide and shape thinking about early childhood in Australia. Looking at differences and similarities across demographic groups within these focus groups gives us insight into the ways in which some mindsets are more or less dominant in particular groups. The focus groups with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people allowed for a deeper understanding of how these communities employ mindsets related to early childhood. Moreover, by centring the lived experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and collaborating closely with Aboriginal researchers and partners, this research has aimed to incorporate principles of cultural inclusivity and responsivity.

There is more to learn about how these mindsets are distributed across groups, how mindsets relate to one another and how they relate to support for policy solutions. We are also interested in how these mindsets change over time. These are questions we will address in the upcoming quantitative survey that will measure the strength and distribution of mindsets across the Australian population, including measuring any similarities or differences across demographic groups. The survey will also identify any connections among mindsets and the ways that mindsets affect support for policy solutions. This survey will be fielded twice per year for the next three years to track mindsets over time. It will allow us to measure similarities or differences across demographic groups, shifts in mindsets over time and whether particular contextual moments affect mindsets.

The mindsets described in this report will be included in the upcoming quantitative survey that will include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-First Nations participants and an oversample of CALD participants.[18] This survey will serve as the baseline for a tracker that we field twice per year for the next three years. In conjunction with this longitudinal survey, we will empirically test framing strategies to better communicate about the early years.

This research will feed into the development of a broader narrative strategy designed in collaboration with partners, including the project advisory group, an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Reference Group and framing champions in the child and family sector. The narrative strategy will be developed for and with the child and family sector to move mindsets and shape the policy context to better support young children and their families across Australia. It will provide guidance for how advocates can effectively navigate current policy reform needs while shifting mindsets over time. Researching, measuring and actively working to shift mindsets are essential to building a society in Australia that truly values and supports early childhood.

Appendix A: Methods and Sample Composition

This phase of the research project received ethics approval from Bellberry Limited for the non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander focus groups, including CALD participants, on 12 March 2025 and from the Aboriginal Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander focus groups on 13 May 2025. The research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants complies with the AIATSIS code of ethics and aligns with the principles of Indigenous Self-Determination, Indigenous Leadership, Impact and Value, and Sustainability and Accountability.[19]

The qualitative focus groups were conducted in two rounds: one round of sessions with non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander participants, including CALD participants, in April 2025 and another with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants in June 2025. The methods for each are described below.
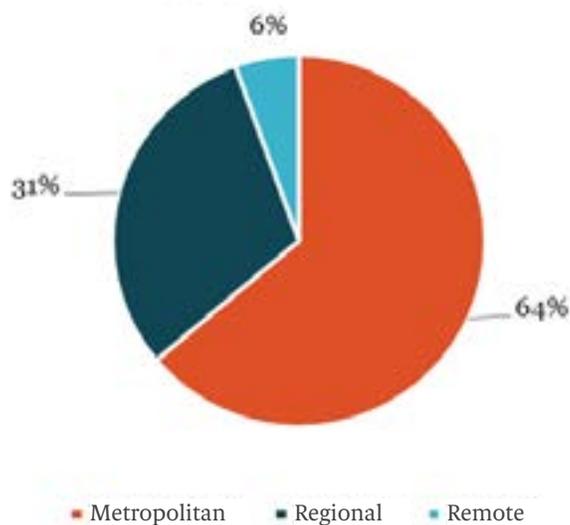
Focus Groups with Non-Aboriginal and Non-Torres Strait Islander Participants, including CALD Participants

Six two-hour online focus group sessions were conducted with a total of 36 participants (six participants per focus group) between 8 and 11 April 2025.
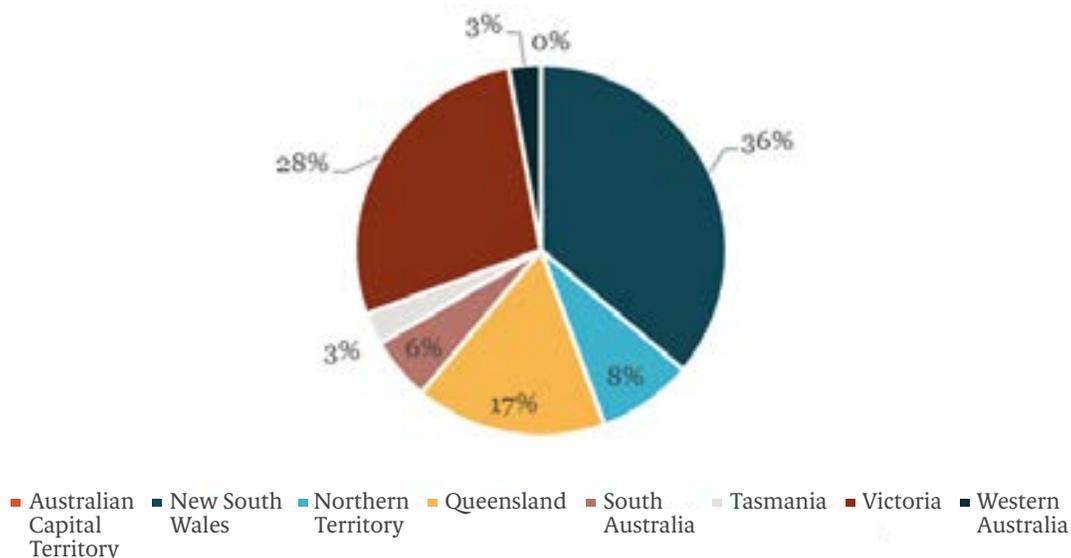
Participants were recruited through Instinct and Reason, a global and local Australian market research and social research consultancy. A diverse sample of participants were recruited in terms of age (over the age of 18), gender identity, income level, education level, political affiliation and parental status, including an oversample of CALD participants. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants were excluded from these sessions because they were included in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-only sessions described below.

Of the 36 participants, 37 percent were male (n = 17) and 53 percent were female (n = 19), and over half were parents and had children (58 percent; n = 21) compared to those who did not have children (42 percent; n = 15). The majority were employed (n = 35), with only one participant unemployed. In total, over half of the participants were from a non-CALD background (56 percent; n = 20) and a total of 16 participants were from a CALD background (44 percent). The participants' geographical locations and states are summarised below.

Geographical location

6%

31%

64%

■ Metropolitan ■ Regional ■ Remote

Geographical state

3% 0%

28%

36%

3% 6%

17% 8%

■ Australian   ■ New South   ■ Northern   ■ Queensland   ■ South   ■ Tasmania   ■ Victoria   ■ Western
   Capital   Wales   Territory   Australia   Australia
   Territory

The focus group session was divided into two parts: one section that focused on understanding cultural mindsets and a second section in which participants were asked to engage in a storytelling activity.

For the first section focused on understanding cultural mindsets, participants were asked to engage in group conversation through various prompts about children and families and related issues.

For the storytelling activity, each group was split into two breakout rooms online to complete the task, and the group feedback and discussion resumed in the main room. Participants were provided with a template they could voluntarily complete when discussing the tasks. The group was given the following context for developing a story in a small group: '*For this activity, you'll be imagining you are part of a local community group, and you need to talk about a programme your group has to help young children to do well and thrive. You'll be creating some stories to talk about this work.*' The moderator also engaged the group in a follow-up conversation after the activity.

Focus Groups (Yarning Circles) with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Participants

A total of three two-and-a-half hour in-person yarning circle focus groups were conducted with a total of 20 participants. Eight participants from the Bourke community in New South Wales participated in a session conducted on 4 June 2025 (on Ngemba [Ngiyaampa], Baakindji [Barkandji], Murrawarri, and Kunya lands). Five participants from the Cairns community in Queensland participated in a session conducted on 11 June 2025 (on Gimuy Walubara Yidinji and Yirrganydji lands). Seven participants from the Port Adelaide community in South Australia participated in a session conducted on 12 June 2025 (on Kaurna lands). Tina McGhie and Belinda Kendall from Curijo facilitated and moderated the sessions.

Curijo is an Aboriginal-owned and led consultancy organisation, engaged as a research partner for the project. Their involvement included co-designing the research process and tools, facilitating the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander yarning circles and co-interpreting the analysis, themes and findings of the research. Co-CEO Belinda Kendall is a Barkindji, Wailwan, Worimi and Wiradjuri woman living on Wiradjuri Country and Co-CEO Tina McGhie is a Wiradjuri-Ngunnawal woman living on Dharawal Country.

Participants were recruited through local community connections with Tina and Belinda and through existing partnerships with Minderoo Foundation. A recruitment flyer was co-designed with Curijo and Tiraapendi Wodli, the project's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Reference Group.

Consistent with the criteria for the focus groups conducted with the non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander participants, including CALD participants, only Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants over the age of 18 were recruited. A mix of parents and non-parents, males and females, and varied employment status were encouraged in the recruitment of participants; note that the final sample is not a representative sample reflective of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population. Because recruitment was facilitated locally and not through a research provider, participants voluntarily provided the demographic information collected.

As illustrated below, of the total 20 participants, 30 percent were male (n = 6) and 70 percent were female (n = 14), and over half were parents and had children (60 percent; n = 12) compared to those who did not have children (40 percent; n = 8).

The yarning circle focus groups were divided into two sections based on the AIATSIS-approved Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander yarning sessions guide. The guide was co-designed with Curijo with input from Tiraapendi Wodli.

In the sessions, participants were informed of the project's specific relevance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to ensure there was cultural relevance to the project and their participation in the broader project.

For the first section focused on understanding cultural mindsets, participants were asked to engage in group conversation through various prompts about children and families and related issues. These prompts were presented and moderated in the same way as in the non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander focus groups. For the storytelling activity, participants were asked to consider a programme to help young children to do well and thrive in ways that were relevant to their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Study Analysis

The online focus groups with the non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander participants, including CALD participants, were recorded via Zoom, and transcripts were automated through this recording process. The in-person yarning circle focus groups with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants were recorded by professional videographers, and transcripts were automated through these recordings.

Transcripts, along with the video recordings, were analysed. Additional information such as moderator notes, debriefing discussions between researchers and moderators and notes from the storytelling activity were used as vital complementary information in the data analysis process.

The researchers conducted a qualitative data analysis by thematically coding mindsets, narratives and discourse interactions using a flexible, pre-determined coding guide. Coding was used to identify existing mindsets, identify any new mindsets, highlight key quotes to narrate mindsets and highlight any significant discourse interactions through the cultural context discussions and storytelling activity.

FrameWorks researchers used MAXQDA software to code and analyse the transcripts. FrameWorks and Curijo also conducted analysis and interpretation meetings together to discuss themes, clarify findings and co-interpret the analysis.

Appendix B: List of National Support Services

Below is a list of national support services, including local and culturally safe services.

Name	Description	Contact information
Lifeline		Tel: 13 114
13YARN		Tel: 13 92 76
Brother to Brother	A 24-hour crisis line staffed by Aboriginal men, including Elders, with lived experience.	Tel: 1800 435 799
Beyond Blue		Tel: 1300 224 636
Mental Health Triage Line		Tel: 13 14 65
Indigenous Suicide Postvention Services	Support for individuals, families and communities affected by suicide or other significant trauma.	Tel: 1800 805 801
headspace		Tel: 1800 650 890
Care Leavers Australasia Network		Tel: 1800 008 774
Domestic and Family Violence Helpline		Tel: 1800 671 458
ReachOut		Online: au.reachout.com
Black Dog Institute		Online: blackdoginstitute.org.au
1800 RESPECT	A national sexual assault and family and domestic violence counselling line for anyone who has experienced, or is at risk of, physical or sexual violence. This service is designed to meet the needs of people with disabilities, Indigenous Australians, young people and individuals from CALD backgrounds. Online counselling is also available.	Tel: 1800 RESPECT (1800 737 732) Online: 1800 RESPECT

Name	Description	Contact information
Blue Knot Helpline	Staffed by trained, trauma-informed counsellors, this support line offers information, support and referral to adult survivors of childhood trauma and abuse and to partners, family and friends of survivors.	Tel: 1300 657 380 Mon–Sun: 9am–5pm (AEST) Online: Blue Knot Helpline
Bravehearts Information and Support Line	Open to anyone wanting information, advice, referrals and support regarding child sexual assault.	Tel: 1800 272 831 Mon–Fri: 8:30am–4:30pm (AEST) Online: Bravehearts Information and Support Line
Counselling Online	A free online and SMS/text-based service for Australian residents concerned about or affected by alcohol and other drugs.	Online: Counselling Online
DrugInfo (Alcohol and Drug Foundation)	A telephone and online service for anyone who needs relevant, up-to-date information about alcohol and other drugs.	Tel: 1300 858 584 Online: DrugInfo
eheadspace	A free and confidential telephone and online service for young people aged 12–25. Qualified youth mental health professionals provide support to young people worried about their mental health or experiencing issues such as depression, bullying and isolation. Support is also available to concerned parents or carers.	Tel: 1800 650 890 Mon–Sun: 9am–1am (AEST) Online: eheadspace
Family Drug Support Australia	A telephone support service for users, families and carers in crisis due to alcohol and other drug use.	Tel: 1300 368 186 Online: Family Drug Support
Family Relationship Advice Line	Provides information on family relationship issues and advice on parenting arrangements after separation. It is for anyone – including step-parents, young people and friends – affected by family relationship or separation issues. Referrals to local services are also offered.	Tel: 1800 050 321 Mon–Fri: 8am–8pm; Sat: 10am–4pm (AEST) (excluding national public holidays) Online: Family Relationship Advice Line
Gallang Place	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander corporation providing counselling, advocacy and support services in Brisbane.	Tel: (07) 3899 5041 Online: Gallang Place

Name	Description	Contact information
Griefline	Provides support to people experiencing loss and grief, at any stage in life. Online counselling is also available.	Tel: (03) 9935 7400 (National) 1300 845 745 (National landline only) Mon–Sun: 12pm–3am (AEST) Online: Griefline
Kids Helpline	Provides confidential telephone and online counselling services to young people aged 5–25 years old for any reason.	Tel: 1800 551 800 Online: Kids Helpline
Kurbingui	Aboriginal community organisation providing social and emotional wellbeing and youth services in Brisbane.	Tel: (07) 3235 9999 Online: Kurbingui
MensLine Australia	A telephone and online support service for men with family and relationship concerns. MensLine is staffed by professional counsellors who are experienced in men's issues.	Tel: 1300 789 978 Online: MensLine Australia
Men's Referral Service	Offers a confidential telephone service provided for men by men. Intended for men who want to stop their violent or abusive behaviour towards their family members. Women can also seek information and help for their male partner, husband, relative or friend.	Tel: 1300 766 491 Mon–Fri: 8am–9pm; Sat–Sun: 9am–5pm (AEST) Online: No to Violence – Men's Referral Service
Mind Australia Carer Helpline	Provides free, confidential information, support and referral for family, carers and friends of people with a mental illness.	Tel: 1300 554 660 Mon–Fri: 9am–5pm (AEST) Online: Mind Australia
National Alcohol and Other Drug Hotline	Provides confidential advice about alcohol and other drugs to individuals, family and friends, general practitioners, health professionals and business and community groups. The hotline will automatically redirect you to the Alcohol and Other Drug Information Service operating in your state or territory.	Tel: 1800 250 015 Online: National Alcohol and Other Drug Hotline
QLife	Provides early intervention, peer-supported telephone counselling and referral services for people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and/or intersex.	Tel: 1800 184 527 Mon–Sun: 3pm–12am (AEST) Online: QLife

Name	Description	Contact information
Samaritans	Provides anonymous crisis support for issues such as relationship or family problems, loss and bereavement, financial or job-related worries, illness, addiction and suicide.	Tel: 135 427 Online: Samaritans
SANE Australia	Provides information, guidance and referrals to people who are affected by or need support to manage mental health concerns.	Tel: 1800 187 263 Mon–Fri: 9am–5pm (AEST) Online: SANE Australia
Suicide Call Back Service	Provides telephone, video and online counselling to people 15 years and older who are affected by suicide, which can include feeling suicidal, being worried about someone, caring for someone suicidal, being bereaved by suicide and health professionals supporting people affected by suicide.	Tel: 1300 659 467 Online: Suicide Call Back Service
Sydney Aboriginal Family Support Service	Aboriginal-owned counselling and support service in Sydney.	Tel: 0410 539 905 Online: Sydney Aboriginal Family Support Service
Wellways Helpline	A peer-led, volunteer support and referral service that provides information to people experiencing mental health issues, as well as their families and friends.	Tel: 1300 111 400 Online: Wellways Helpline
Youth Beyond Blue	Provides information and confidential telephone and online counselling for young people aged 12–25 years old, who may be experiencing anxiety, depression or suicidal ideation.	Tel: 1300 224 636 Online: Youth Beyond Blue

Endnotes

1. See previous FrameWorks research reports: FrameWorks Institute and Emerging Minds. (2021). *Reframing children's mental health*. https://www.frameworksinstitute.org/resources/reframing-childrens-mental-health/; The Kids Research Institute Australia and FrameWorks Institute. (n.d.). *Core story for early childhood development and learning.* https://www.thekids.org.au/projects/HPER/core-story/; L'Hote, E., Kendall-Taylor, N., O'Neil, M., Busso, D., Volmert, D., & Nichols, J. (2018). *Talking about the science of parenting: A FrameWorks MessageMemo*. FrameWorks Institute. https://www.frameworksinstitute.org/app/uploads/2020/03/prc_message_memo_2018.pdf; Volmert, A., Kendall-Taylor, N., Cosh, I., & Lindland, E. (2016). *Perceptions of parenting: Mapping the gaps between expert and public understandings of effective parenting in Australia: A FrameWorks Research Report*. FrameWorks Institute and Parenting Research Centre. https://www.frameworksinstitute.org/app/uploads/2020/06/PRC_MTG_Report_May_2016_final.pdf. See also Finlay-Jones, A., Gregory, A., Penny, J., Cahill, R., Mitrou, F., & Harman-Smith, Y. (2024). *Mental models underpinning early child development systems and outcomes in Australia*. Report prepared for the Early Years Catalyst group. https://www.socialventures.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/EYC-Mental-Models-FINAL-with-Corrections-2.pdf.

2. We use the terminology *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander* peoples in this report. We recognise there is diversity among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, with ~250 languages and complex links to different Country and kin throughout Australia. We also recognise differing preferences regarding the use of terminology and that many people prefer to be known by their specific group name, their Country, as Traditional Owners and Custodians and/or as First Nations People.

3. See previous FrameWorks research reports: FrameWorks Institute and Emerging Minds. (2021). *Reframing children's mental health*. https://www.frameworksinstitute.org/resources/reframing-childrens-mental-health/; The Kids Research Institute Australia and FrameWorks Institute. (n.d.). *Core story for early childhood development and learning.* https://www.thekids.org.au/projects/HPER/core-story/; L'Hote, E., Kendall-Taylor, N., O'Neil, M., Busso, D., Volmert, D., & Nichols, J. (2018). *Talking about the science of parenting: A FrameWorks MessageMemo*. FrameWorks Institute. https://www.frameworksinstitute.org/app/uploads/2020/03/prc_message_memo_2018.pdf; Volmert, A., Kendall-Taylor, N., Cosh, I., & Lindland, E. (2016). *Perceptions of parenting: Mapping the gaps between expert and public understandings of effective parenting in Australia: A FrameWorks Research Report*. FrameWorks Institute and Parenting Research Centre. https://www.frameworksinstitute.org/app/uploads/2020/06/PRC_MTG_Report_May_2016_final.pdf. See also Finlay-Jones, A., Gregory, A., Penny, J., Cahill, R., Mitrou, F., & Harman-Smith, Y. (2024). *Mental models underpinning early child development systems and outcomes in Australia*. Report prepared for the Early Years Catalyst group. https://www.socialventures.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/EYC-Mental-Models-FINAL-with-Corrections-2.pdf.

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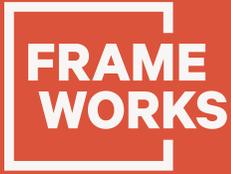
5. See the literature review and Hendricks, R., Volmert, A., & Kendall-Taylor, N. (2019). *Cultivating nature: Mapping the gaps between expert and public understandings of early development in Australia*. FrameWorks Institute. https://www.frameworksinstitute.org/resources/cultivating-nature-mapping-the-gaps-between-expert-and-public-understandings-of-early-development-in-australia/; L'Hote, E., Kendall-Taylor, N., O'Neil, M., Busso, D., Volmert, D., & Nichols, J. (2018). *Talking about the science of parenting: A FrameWorks MessageMemo*. FrameWorks Institute. https://www.frameworksinstitute.org/app/uploads/2020/03/prc_message_memo_2018.pdf; Bales, S. N., & Kendall-Taylor, N. (2014). *Finding the Southern Cross: A FrameWorks MessageMemo for the Centre for Community Child Health*. FrameWorks Institute. https://www.frameworksinstitute.org/app/uploads/2020/03/au_mm.pdf.

6. See Lyew, D., Volmert, A., John, J., Vierra, K., & Moyer, J. (2023). *The terrain of spatial justice.* FrameWorks Institute. https://www.frameworksinstitute.org/resources/the-terrain-of-spatial-justice/; Lindland, E., & Kendall-Taylor, N. (2021). *Communicating about intergenerational urban poverty and race in America: Challenges, opportunities, and emerging recommendations*. FrameWorks Institute. https://www.frameworksinstitute.org/resources/communicating-about-intergenerational-urban-poverty-and-race-in-america-challenges-opportunities-and-emerging-recommendations/.

7. See Lyew, D., Volmert, A., John, J., Vierra, K., & Moyer, J. (2023). *The terrain of spatial justice*. FrameWorks Institute. p. 37. https://www.frameworksinstitute.org/resources/the-terrain-of-spatial-justice/

8. See Rao, S., & Sweetland, J. (2025, July 1). *Fast Frames — Mindsets and movements: Otherism* [Video]. FrameWorks Institute. https://www.frameworksinstitute.org/articles/fast-frames-mindsets-and-movements-otherism/.

9. See Hendricks, R., & Sweetland, J. (2019). *Making room for more: Building support for young dual language learners in the US. A FrameWorks Communications Playbook*. FrameWorks Institute. https://www.frameworksinstitute.org/resources/making-room-for-more-building-support-for-young-dual-language-learners-in-the-us/.

10. For more information on how this showed in an American context, see Down, L., Levay, K., Miller, T., & Volmert, A. (2019). *Communicating about student motivation: Challenges, opportunities, and emerging recommendations*. FrameWorks Institute. https://www.frameworksinstitute.org/resources/communicating-about-student-motivation-challenges-opportunities-and-emerging-recommendations/.

11. See Lyew, D., Volmert, A., John, J., Vierra, K., & Moyer, J. (2023). *The terrain of spatial justice*. FrameWorks Institute. https://www.frameworksinstitute.org/resources/the-terrain-of-spatial-justice/.

12. See Hendricks, R., Volmert, A., & Kendall-Taylor, N. (2019). *Cultivating nature: Mapping the gaps between expert and public understandings of early development in Australia.* FrameWorks Institute. https://www.frameworksinstitute.org/resources/cultivating-nature-mapping-the-gaps-between-expert-and-public-understandings-of-early-development-in-australia/; L'Hote, E., Kendall-Taylor, N., O'Neil, M., Busso, D., Volmert, D., & Nichols, J. (2018). *Talking about the science of parenting: A FrameWorks MessageMemo*. FrameWorks Institute. https://www.frameworksinstitute.org/app/uploads/2020/03/prc_message_memo_2018.pdf; Bales, S. N., & Kendall-Taylor, N. (2014). *Finding the Southern Cross: A FrameWorks MessageMemo for the Centre for Community Child Health*. FrameWorks Institute. https://www.frameworksinstitute.org/app/uploads/2020/03/au_mm.pdf.

13. Fardouly, J. (2025). Potential effects of the social media age ban in Australia for children younger than 16 years. *The Lancet Digital Health,* 7(4), e235-e236. https://www.thelancet.com/journals/landig/article/PIIS2589-7500(25)00024-X/fulltext; Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts. (2025). Online Safety Amendment (social media minimum age) Bill 2024 – fact sheet. Australian Government. https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/department/media/publications/online-safety-amendment-social-media-minimum-age-bill-2024-fact-sheet.

14. This is similar to the *Unity through Restoration* mindset we've found in previous research in the United States, which focuses on an idealised past that is thought to be simpler and therefore *better* than modern-day society. See Volmert, A., Brennan, S. F., Vierra, K., Hestres, L., & Miller, T. L. (2025). *Which unity? Whose diversity? Cultural mindsets around pluralism in the United States.* FrameWorks Institute. https://www.frameworksinstitute.org/resources/which-unity-whose-diversity/.

15. Cultural heritage and reproduction are part of Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP). For more information on ICIP, see: Arts Law Centre of Australia. (2024). *Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP)*. https://www.artslaw.com.au/information-sheet/indigenous-cultural-intellectual-property-icip-aitb/.

16. For resources related to healing, see: The Healing Foundation. (2025). "About Us." https://healingfoundation.org.au/about-us/.

17. See L'Hote, E., Kendall-Taylor, N., O'Neil, M., Busso, D., Volmert, D., & Nichols, J. (2018). *Talking about the science of parenting: A FrameWorks MessageMemo.* FrameWorks Institute. https://www.frameworksinstitute.org/app/uploads/2020/03/prc_message_memo_2018.pdf; Volmert, A., Kendall-Taylor, N., Cosh, I., & Lindland, E. (2016). *Perceptions of parenting: Mapping the gaps between expert and public understandings of effective parenting in Australia: A FrameWorks Research Report*. FrameWorks Institute and Parenting Research Centre. https://www.frameworksinstitute.org/app/uploads/2020/06/PRC_MTG_Report_May_2016_final.pdf.

18. The *Pathologising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Culture* mindset will not be included in the survey for ethical reasons, since exposure to it could distress participants, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants. The broader *Otherism* mindset, which does not explicitly name particular groups, will be included in the survey.

19. For more information, see the AIATSIS code of ethics: AIATSIS. (n.d.). "Code of Ethics." https://aiatsis.gov.au/research/ethical-research/code-ethics

About FrameWorks

The FrameWorks Institute is a nonprofit think tank that advances the mission-driven sector's capacity to frame the public discourse about social and scientific issues. The organisation's signature approach, Strategic Frame Analysis®, offers empirical guidance on what to say, how to say it and what to leave unsaid. FrameWorks designs, conducts and publishes multimethod, multidisciplinary framing research to prepare experts and advocates to expand their constituencies, build public will and further public understanding. To make sure this research drives social change, FrameWorks supports partners in reframing through strategic consultation, campaign design, FrameChecks, toolkits, online courses and in-depth learning engagements known as FrameLabs. In 2015, FrameWorks was named one of nine organisations worldwide to receive the MacArthur Award for Creative and Effective Institutions.

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