



AIFS Corporate Plan 2025–26 to 2028–29

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Statement of preparation

I, Liz Neville, the accountable authority of the Australian Institute of Family Studies, present the Corporate Plan as required under the paragraph 35(1)(a) of the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013*. The plan is prepared in accordance with the Public Governance Performance and Accountability Rule 2014.

This plan has been prepared for the 2025–2026 financial year and covers the four financial periods 2025–26 to 2028–29. It is to be reviewed annually, or more frequently, as required.

Liz Neville
Director, Australian Institute of Family Studies
29 August 2025



The Australian Institute of Family Studies acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognises their continuing connection to lands and waters. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and to Elders past and present.

About AIFS

We recognise that families, in all their diverse forms, are a key unit of society. They play a critical role in shaping all aspects, including social, political, cultural and economic. They also respond to and are enabled by the institutions and structures around them. When families are thriving, society is too, and vice-versa. In this we can see the profound importance of our work – discovering what works for every kind of family to thrive whilst supporting the betterment of society.

Our role

The Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) is the Australian Government's key research agency in family wellbeing.

AIFS creates and communicates high quality, impartial research into the key trends and emerging issues affecting families in Australia to inform government policy and programs and promote evidence-informed practice in the child and family services sector. We aim to explore the 'what', discover the 'why', and identify the 'so what' to help improve outcomes for children, families and their communities.

How we operate

AIFS is an independent statutory authority established in 1980 under the *Family Law Act 1975*. The Australian Gambling Research Centre (AGRC) is a secondary legislative function that was established in July 2013 under the *Gambling Measures Act 2012*. AIFS is situated in the social services portfolio, with a whole-of-government orientation that enables our research to inform a broad range of policies impacting families.

We are commissioned by the Australian Government to conduct research, evaluations and other evidence and data driven work. Additionally, AIFS may be engaged by state and territory governments noting their significant responsibility for policies and programs impacting children and families. A modest proportion of AIFS funding is provided through direct appropriation from the Australian Government, with the balance of our funding generated from commissioned work. We partner with universities, Aboriginal organisations and other non-government organisations to deliver on commissioned projects. Projects vary in size and complexity from large scale longitudinal studies, clearinghouse functions and strategic evaluations to shorter-term evidence reviews and capacity-building initiatives.

About AIFS

Our authorising environment

In March 2024, the Minister for Social Services provided AIFS with a Statement of Expectations, confirming that AIFS is the Australian Government's key research agency on family wellbeing and highlighting the Minister's expectation that we continue to produce policy-relevant, rigorous and impactful research on a broad range of family-related issues. In response, we provided the Minister with our Statement of Intent, explaining how we would deliver on these expectations. We used the Minister's statement to guide the development of our strategic research agenda, published in August 2025.

Our vision, purpose and strategic goals

We recently reviewed and refreshed the AIFS vision, purpose, and strategic goals to better clarify our role and what we are striving to achieve.

Our vision

Families of every kind thriving and contributing in a society that supports them.

Our purpose

To provide robust and independent evidence that informs policy and practice and drives positive outcomes for children, families and their communities.

About AIFS

Our strategic goals

Our strategic goals provide a long-term, whole of organisation direction and focus for our key activities. They are informed by trends and patterns impacting families, key government and community priorities, and the exercise of our role as an independent statutory agency.

AIFS' strategic goals are to:

1. Provide **research excellence** and leadership in family wellbeing
2. Be recognised as **trusted partners** and advisors to inform governments' family and gambling policies
3. Provide **accessible research** and evaluation resources to support family and community services
4. Ensure a **sustainable organisation** with a culture of excellence

Our focus for 2025–26

In 2024-25 we undertook two major pieces of work that will inform our focus and key activities for 2025-26. We:

- developed a **Strategic Research Agenda** to guide our research focus for 2025-28, with mechanisms for annual review and priority setting
- engaged a market research company to **survey senior government stakeholders** on AIFS' impact, relevance and alignment with their needs – to pinpoint areas for enhancing our approach to stakeholder engagement with commissioning agencies.

Using this analysis to underpin our work in 2025-26, we will undertake several key activities:

- Align our organisational structure and operating model to the new Strategic Research Agenda themes
- Develop research strategies and grow the evidence base reflecting the themes in the Strategic Research Agenda through a strong body of commissioned and self-funded work
- Develop and implement a plan to increase our profile, reach and impact with our key stakeholders across community, government and academia
- Cultivate the right mix of technical and leadership skills to deliver rigorous, independent, policy-relevant research
- Invest in our systems, processes, tools and technologies to improve quality and productivity
- Determine a pathway for building a more sustainable business model over time
- Embed cultural safety and knowledge within our organisation and deliver on our key obligations under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

Strategic plan

Vision and purpose	Strategic goals	Research themes and topics	Key activities in 2026-27
Our vision Families of every kind thriving in a supportive society.	Provide research excellence and leadership in family wellbeing and safety.	Child and family wellbeing	Embed our new organisational structure and operating model to support collaboration, integration and whole-of-organisation delivery. Deliver a focused program of commissioned and self-funded evidence-grounded work that grows understanding of the issues affecting Australian families and communities.
	Be recognised as trusted partners and advisors to inform the government's family and gambling policies.	Child and family safety	Strengthen stakeholder engagement and partnerships to increase the reach, use and impact of AIFS' evidence and advice.
Our purpose To provide robust and independent evidence that informs policy and practice and drives positive outcomes for children, families and their communities.	Provide evidence-informed resources to support family and community services.	Families and society	Build and maintain a capable, diverse and inclusive workforce with the expertise required to deliver rigorous, policy-relevant evidence and advice. Continue to invest in contemporary systems, processes, digital tools and emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, to enhance quality, efficiency and innovation.
	Ensure a sustainable organisation with a culture of excellence.	Gambling harm	Embed cultural safety, and First Nations knowledge and perspectives across AIFS' work, practice, systems and ways of working, while advancing our commitments under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

Performance and impact

In 2024-25 AIFS commenced using its new Performance Framework to ensure we maintain a rigorous and outcomes-based approach to measuring AIFS' performance against its strategic goals. Upon reviewing the effectiveness of our Performance Framework after the first year, we have undertaken minor amendments to ensure it is optimally representative of our purpose and strategic goals in 2025-26.*

Goal	No.	Measure	Measure specification	25-26	26-27	27-28	28-29
GOAL 1 Provide research excellence and leadership in family wellbeing	1.1	Committee membership	number of groups related to family wellbeing and gambling that AIFS is a member/observer on, by Commonwealth gov, S/T gov and other	30	35	35	40
	1.2	Requests for advice	number of requests to respond to initiatives on family wellbeing and gambling, by Commonwealth gov, S/T gov and other (includes submissions and other less formal public advice)	15	20	20	25
	1.3	Media coverage – growth rate	number of media mentions and as proportion of prior year number	5%	5%	5%	5%
	1.4	Media requests – growth rate	number of requests for media comment and as proportion of prior year number	5%	5%	5%	5%
	1.5	Stakeholder perception of research	number of stakeholders agreeing that AIFS produces trusted, rigorous research about Australian families as a proportion of stakeholders surveyed	75%	75%	75%	75%
GOAL 2 Be recognised and engaged as trusted research partners and advisors to inform the government's family and gambling policies	2.1	Direct approaches – win rate	number of direct approaches and the proportion won	70%	70%	70%	70%
	2.2	Competitive tenders – win rate	number of select and non-select tender invitations (open tender and panel) and proportion won	25%	25%	25%	25%
	2.3	Stakeholder perceptions of policy relevance of research	number of stakeholders agreeing AIFS research is policy relevant as a proportion of stakeholders surveyed	75%	75%	75%	75%
	2.4	Stakeholder use of AIFS research to inform policy	number of stakeholders saying they used AIFS research to inform policy as a proportion of stakeholders surveyed who are involved in policy	75%	75%	75%	75%

* Amendments to AIFS 2025-26 Performance Framework were finalised after the publication of the Institute's 2025-26 Portfolio Budget Statement.

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Performance and impact

Goal	No.	Measure	Measure specification	25-26	26-27	27-28	28-29
GOAL 3 Provide accessible research and evaluation resources to support family and community services	3.1	Stakeholder perception of accessibility	number of stakeholders agreeing AIFS research is accessible as a proportion of stakeholders surveyed	85%	85%	85%	85%
	3.2	Stakeholder perception of relevance	number of stakeholders agreeing AIFS research is relevant as a proportion of stakeholders surveyed who accessed AIFS research	85%	85%	85%	85%
	3.3	Application in practice	number of CFCA respondents who incorporated AIFS resources into their work practice as a proportion of all CFCA respondents	85%	85%	85%	85%
	3.4	Development of practice	number of CFCA respondents who believed AIFS resources were used to debate and discuss different options for action as a proportion of all CFCA respondents	85%	85%	85%	85%
	3.5	Evaluation capability	number of CFCA respondents who agreed that AIFS evaluation resources have helped build their capability to evaluate programs as a proportion of all CFCA respondents	85%	85%	85%	85%
GOAL 4 Ensure a sustainable, high performing organisation with a culture of excellence	4.1	Repeat business	percentage of contract revenue that comes from repeat customers	80%	80%	80%	80%
	4.2	Contract value	remaining value of long-term contracts (i.e. contracts which have 2+ years remaining) as a proportion of remaining value of all contracts	50%	50%	50%	50%
	4.3	Staff satisfaction	number of staff agreeing they are satisfied with their job as a proportion of staff surveyed	75%	75%	80%	80%
	4.4	Attrition rate	number of staff who concluded employment at the Institute during FY (excluding non-ongoing staff with less than 3 months remaining) as a proportion of all staff employed during the FY	20%	20%	20%	20%

Our environment and operating context

In recent decades, Australia has experienced unpredictability on many fronts, including global financial instability, rising cost of living, increased frequency and intensity of natural disasters, a global pandemic, and the ubiquity of digital technology across personal and public domains.

These changes interact with the longer-term trends AIFS has been monitoring in relation to families since our establishment in 1980, including:

- changes to marriage, cohabitation, having children and parenting
- women's increased economic participation
- shifts in gender norms and gender roles, including changing practices around parenthood
- growing awareness of the extent of violence within families
- an ageing population
- systemic racism impacting First Nations families
- an increasingly multicultural population.

Our environment and operating context

The role of evidence

Data, research and evaluation have critical roles to play in the development of policies and services for families. Timely access to robust, relevant evidence is essential in the context of the changing shape of families, the diverse challenges and adversities they experience, and the significant service and policy reform agendas aimed at driving positive outcomes for children and families. Reforms aimed at strengthening the capability of the Australian Public Service (APS) add further impetus for the use of evidence across all stages of policy and service design.

For AIFS, this means:

- expanding our capability for data and analysis about the nature of family life in contemporary Australia
- generating new evidence about the prevalence of violence and abuse and other harms on wellbeing and life outcomes, including those arising from gambling
- increasing efforts to disseminate evidence of what works and why in supporting children, young people and families to thrive
- providing independent, actionable advice, grounded in robust evidence, to inform service design and policy reform.

Research themes and topics

In August 2025 we published our **Strategic Research Agenda**, which identifies 4 key research themes that encompass the breadth of our work. The first three themes apply to the interpretation of our primary statutory research duty under the *Family Law Act* which is concerned with the study of families in Australia. The fourth theme applies to our secondary statutory function under the *Gambling Measures Act 2012*.

1 CHILD AND FAMILY WELLBEING

Research into wellbeing and functioning of families and their members, including children

- early childhood (e.g. good practice in early childhood interventions)
- child-parent and family relationships (e.g. transitions to parenthood, parenting practices, skills and resources, post-separation wellbeing, the role and needs of carers)
- inclusion and social connectedness (e.g. the role of culture and community, digital and built environments, local resources and place-based supports)
- mental health and wellbeing (e.g. mental health experiences across life stages, family experiences of natural disasters, climate change, pandemics)
- experiences of children and young people with disabilities and their families
- child, family and relationship services (e.g. implementation and effectiveness of universal and targeted prevention and early intervention services).

2 CHILD AND FAMILY SAFETY

Research into violence and maltreatment within families, including the experiences of children

- domestic, family and sexual violence (e.g. gender-based violence, child abuse and neglect, adolescent experience and use of violence, coercive control, elder abuse, systems abuse, system and service responses to those who use violence)
- online safety (e.g. safeguarding of online spaces for young people, supports for parents to navigate and support 'digital childhood')
- family law, child support, child safety and out-of-home care systems (e.g. post-separation parenting and financial arrangements, service responses to child safety concerns).

Research themes and topics

3 FAMILIES AND SOCIETY

Research into family dynamics and the changing relations between families and social institutions

- family demography (e.g. shifting trends in fertility, cohabitation, marriage, separation and divorce, ageing families, intergenerational relationships)
- policies affecting families including family and work (e.g. mothers'/parents' employment, education and skills, unpaid care), family and housing (e.g. housing affordability and security), economic inclusion (e.g. poverty, income security and support), health (e.g. service access and equity), migration (e.g. settlement experiences), and technology and the digital environment (e.g. regulation of online environments).

4 GAMBLING HARM

Research into gambling harm to individuals and their families

- impacts of gambling on families and affected others
- consumer protection/harm reduction measures to prevent gambling harm in families
- community views on gambling policy settings, including impacts on children and young people.

Our approach to research

AIFS' approach to research is applied and policy relevant, coming from a tradition of social science and strengthened by our multidisciplinary expertise. We draw together expertise from a broad range of disciplines including sociology, psychology, social work, economics, political science, demography, law, public health and data science.

Our core research activities include:

- large-scale quantitative studies, including longitudinal surveys
- secondary data analysis and data linkage
- qualitative research and stakeholder consultations
- literature reviews and evidence synthesis
- monitoring, process and outcome evaluations
- knowledge translation and capacity building.

Our research is generated through a combination of AIFS-initiated and commissioned projects. In particular our:

- AIFS-initiated and led research allows us to respond to critical trends and emerging issues for families in Australia and contribute independent insights to inform policy and practice
- commissioned research for government departments and agencies addresses specific policy questions and program needs, drawing on our multidisciplinary research expertise and methodological rigour.

Our approach to research

Ways of working

We are committed to creating research environments that are safe, respectful and inclusive for all participants. We are also committed to upholding the principles of self-determination in our work with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people. This includes respecting Indigenous knowledge systems, partnering with First Nations organisations, and ensuring that research processes and outcomes are culturally safe, inclusive and community led. Further, our work recognises the critical role of lived experience in shaping meaningful research. AIFS seeks to incorporate the voices of individuals, families and communities into its work, ensuring that research reflects the realities of those it seeks to inform and support.

Partnerships and collaborations

Meaningful partnerships are essential to delivering impactful, relevant and responsive research. To this end, AIFS:

- partners with **representative and community organisations and service providers** to ensure research is grounded in lived experience and practical application
- engages with **government agencies** to align research with national priorities and inform evidence-based policy
- collaborates with **academic institutions** to foster interdisciplinary research and methodological innovation
- works with **international research bodies** to contribute to and learn from global best practices and comparative insights.

Partnerships are formalised through collaborative agreements, joint initiatives and shared governance arrangements.

Key relationships

Some of our key relationships include:

Government

- Department of Social Services
- Attorney General's Department
- Department of Education
- Department of Health, Disability and Ageing
- Department of Defence
- Department of Veterans' Affairs
- Department of Home Affairs
- Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Sport and the Arts

Other specialist/statutory government agencies

- Australian Bureau of Statistics
- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
- Australian Human Rights Commission
- Domestic Family and Sexual Violence Commission
- eSafety Commission

Legal and regulatory bodies

- Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia
- National Legal Aid
- Community legal centres

- Australian Media and Communications Authority
- State and territory gambling regulators

Peak bodies

- SNAICC: National Voice for our Children
- Families Australia
- Family Relationship Services Australia
- Relationships Australia

Frontline child and family support services

- Child and family services
- Community services
- Human services

Academic institutions, research and non-profit organisations (including universities)

Others

- Members of the public
- AIFS Human Research Ethics Committee
- Project advisory groups

Risk oversight and management

Our risk governance, policies and practice

Our approach to governance is based on accountability, transparency and fairness. Risk governance is the responsibility of the Director and the Executive Leadership Team, with independent assurance provided by the **Risk and Audit Committee (RAC)**. We also have the following in place to manage risk:

- Our **Risk Management Policy and Framework** – reviewed at least annually, this framework aligns with the Commonwealth Risk Management Policy 2023 and the principles of managing risk outlined in the AS/NZS ISO 31000:2018 Risk Management – Guidelines.
- Our **Risk Register**, reviewed at least quarterly.
- Our **Privacy Management Plan**, reviewed at least annually.
- **Internal and external auditors** provide independent examinations and evaluations of policies, procedures and systems to manage risk within acceptable tolerances.

We are committed to promoting a proactive, positive risk culture across the Institute. Staff understand they have a role to play in managing strategic and operational risk, and manage risk as part of their day-to-day work. In particular our staff:

- undertake risk assessments for all projects and are required to report regularly on risks, controls and treatments.
- develop privacy impact assessments on all projects that involve handling personal or sensitive information.
- receive strategic advice on our research through a range of expert advisory groups – including the AIFS Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) which provides ethical oversight and governance in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council requirements.

Risk oversight and management

Our key risks

Our 9 strategic risks include:

- **Project management and governance:** Ineffective project management and governance would hinder the ability to manage the delivery of our research program.
- **Research excellence and leadership:** Failure to lead and deliver rigorous and valuable research on family wellbeing that reflects the challenges for Australian families.
- **Policy impact:** Insufficient understanding of family and gambling issues, and the relevant policy landscape, to effectively inform government policy and solve complex policy issues.
- **Partnership and collaboration:** Failure to build and maintain positive relationships with relevant government entities, other research entities and the broader community to position AIFS as a trusted provider of research and advice.
- **Publication and socialisation:** Findings from research are not communicated in a timely, accessible, effective or impactful way.
- **Value for service providers:** Our research and resources do not support family and community service providers in designing, delivering and evaluating their services.
- **People and talent:** Inability to attract and retain people with the right capabilities or to maintain the wellbeing of our people.
- **Financial management and sustainability:** Failure to secure sustainable sources of funding to enable research excellence and leadership.
- **Research systems and processes:** Ineffective, out-of-date research protocols, procedures and tools to meet business needs and maintain AIFS' productivity.

Risk oversight and management

Our 8 enterprise risks include:

- **Financial management:** Failure to efficiently use and manage government and commissioned funding to address costs of service delivery and sustain operational activities.
- **Frameworks, processes and tools:** Lack of alignment and consistency in the governance and management frameworks, processes and tools employed across the Institute to drive efficiencies and enable robust decision making.
- **Skills requirement and role clarity:** Required and expected skills for staff and leaders are not clearly defined or communicated, causing misalignment between employee skills and organisational needs.
- **Change management:** Limited understanding, communication and engagement by and between business areas impacting effective change management.
- **Complexity and compliance burden:** Balancing compliance demands with service delivery, may limit understanding and application of controls and processes.
- **Business interruption:** Events that create an interruption in business activities - failure of a system/s that the Institute relies on, pandemic or significant weather event.
- **Cyber security:** Failure to prevent or recover from unauthorised access to critical infrastructure, systems and other cyber security threats.
- **Data breach:** Failure to protect critical, sensitive and confidential data against a data breach.

Risk oversight and management

Risk mitigation strategies

The key mitigation strategies that AIFS uses to manage its strategic and enterprise risks are:

- Our **Strategic Research Agenda** aligns our research themes and topics with critical trends and emerging issues affecting families. This ensures our work is relevant and responsive to current policy and practice directions, drives greater cohesion across our research activities, supports opportunities for partnerships and collaborations, and positions our research and knowledge translation to better inform systems, policies and programs intended to support Australian families.
- Our **Stakeholder Engagement Framework** supports the building and monitoring of key external stakeholder relationships, including environmental scanning of government policy opportunities.
- Robust **project management and finance systems and processes** provide project managers with effective project management tools to manage their research projects and the Executive Leadership Team with visibility and assurance on project status.
- **Controls, delegations and approval systems** provide effective guidance and assurance of our business processes.
- **Our workforce plan** ensures we can attract, develop and retain the right skills, knowledge and expertise within our workforce, including an increase in our proficiency in data, digital technologies and developing purposeful leaders who are dedicated to a culture of integrity and stewardship.