

**2021**

**THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE  
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

**TABLING STATEMENT**

**A Step Up for Our Kids - Snapshot Report Update  
and  
Our Booris Our Ways Implementation Update**

**Presented by  
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**Minister for Families and Community Services**

**May 2021**

Madam Speaker, I am pleased to be able to present together the six-monthly progress reports for the:

- Government Response to the recommendations from the *Our Booris, Our Way* Review – Six-monthly Update; and
- *A Step Up for Our Kids* Out of Home Care Strategy 2015-2020 (Strategy) Snapshot Report.

The *Our Booris, Our Way* Final Report was provided to the Government in December 2019 and comprises 28 recommendations and 8 sub-recommendations (a total of 36 recommendations) to inform systemic improvements to child protection systems, policies and practices in the ACT.

Since the first interim recommendation was received in August 2018, we have been able to make substantial progress around a number of these recommendations. In July 2020, I provided an update on this progress when I tabled the formal Government Response to the *Our Booris, Our Way* Review.

The Government has made a firm commitment to fully implement the recommendations of the *Our Booris, Our Way* Review in collaboration with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. The Government has backed up this commitment with funding in the 2020-21 Budget bringing the overall investment to \$15.7 million from 2018-19 to 2023-24.

Systemic reform takes time, and the frustration felt by community members through this process is understandable, particularly when we are talking about something as vital as improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families.

This is the reason I have committed to provide an update on progress against each of the *Our Booris, Our Way* recommendations every six months. Just as important, this report also provides information on what will be done in the following six months.

This helps keep the Government accountable to our commitments and provides the community with an opportunity to see the ongoing change that will lead to better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

This first six-monthly update reports on activities and outcomes from July to December 2020.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the *Our Booris, Our Way* Implementation Oversight Committee. Since being established in June 2020, the Committee has worked closely with the Government to monitor and drive these much needed reforms, providing a valuable cultural lens to this process. The Committee is instrumental in making sure that Government understands and addresses the original intent of the *Our Booris, Our Way* recommendations and that we are accountable to the community for our commitments.

As shown by the key activities over the next six months and the case studies, the active efforts across the Community Services Directorate to implement the recommendations from the *Our Booris, Our Way* Review are not occurring in isolation.

The Directorate is acutely aware of the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in the statutory child protection system. Child and Youth Protection Services continue to identify better ways of working in order to respond to the issues, drive change in this area and to understand the reasons for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people entering care.

Included in the service delivery response is the development of strategies to reduce the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people entering care, improve their experience and outcomes while in care, and where appropriate, exit children from care through restorations.

The six-monthly progress report *on A Step Up for Our Kids* has been presented to the Legislative Assembly since April 2018 with the last Snapshot Report tabled during the December 2020 sitting week.

In considering the Snapshot Report, it is important to note that the data is internal operational data that can be updated and changed between reporting periods, and caution should be exercised when using and interpreting data in this report and comparing between reporting periods.

Another caveat I would like to identify with regard to the Snapshot Report before I move on to the data is related to the transition to the new record management system known as the Child and Youth Record Information System or CYRIS on 1 October 2019.

The transition to CYRIS provided Child and Youth Protection Services with an opportunity to review and expand the carer data collected in order to gain further insight into carer approvals and demographics.

The process to approve and renew carers is complex and the review identified that new measures were required to provide better reporting on what occurs in day-to-day practice. As a result, the current carer measures have not been updated as the data is not comparable. The new measures will be included in the next Snapshot Report presented to the Legislative Assembly during the October 2021 sitting week.

This Snapshot Report highlights the following:

- The new entries into care for the first half of the 2020-21 financial year is 72, which is higher than in the past two financial years but is lower than the 2016-17 and 2017-18 financial years.
- The number of children and young people exiting care (68) is higher than it has been in the past three years (58 for 2018-19 and 2019-20 and 65 for 2017-18). Of the 68 children and young people exiting care in the current quarter (Quarter 2), 23 identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.
- Placement types within out of home care remain relatively stable with the majority of children and young people in kinship care placements (394) as at 31 December 2020.
- We continue to see a lower number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people entering care over the past years given our investments in Functional Family Therapy and Family Group Conferencing as extension of the implementation of *A Step Up for Our Kids*. However, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people represented 26 per cent of those entering care in the first half of the year which remains an unacceptable level of over-representation. Disappointingly, this compares with 20 per cent in the same period in 2019-20 and 13 per cent in the same period in 2018-19. So, whilst it represents a reduction from 34 per cent in the same period 2017-18 and 30 per cent in the same period 2016-17, the situation calls for a renewed focus and a clear understanding of what is driving the increase in this period.
- What this means in terms of numbers is 19 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people entered care in the first half of 2020-21. This compares with 12 in the same period in 2019-20, 7 in 2018-19, 28 in 2017-18 and 33 in 2016-17.

- The number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the care of the Director-General with a cultural care plan in place has again declined slightly. As at 31 December 2020, 180 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children had a cultural plan in place (85 per cent) compared to 181 (93 per cent) for the same period the previous year.
- Child and Youth Protection Services remains committed to ensuring quality cultural plans are in place and has recently established a new Cultural Panel to support this work. In addition to the step-by-step procedure and practice guide to support staff to develop and maintain a cultural plan, all outstanding care plans will be referred to the cultural panel for review.
- We continue to support children, young people and their families through prevention services with a positive trend towards those being supported not entering care.
- Between 1 July and 31 December 2019, there were ninety (90) children and young people whose families had agreed to participate in a Uniting prevention service. Of the 90 children and young people twelve months after commencing with the preservation service, 84 did not enter care within 6 months of support commencing and 80 had still not entered care within 12 months of support commencing.

I remain acutely aware of the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the out of home care system and remain committed to driving change in this area as shown by the work the Community Services Directorate is doing as part of responding to the recommendations from the *Our Booris, Our Way* Review as articulated in the six-monthly implementation update which I will also table today along with the Snapshot Report.

In closing, I would like to assure members that I acknowledge the importance of the work being undertaken in the Government Response to the *Our Booris, Our Way* Review and *A Step Up for Our Kids* to the Canberra community. As such, I am committed to providing updates on subsequent reforms occurring within the out of home care system and providing the combined six-monthly progress report on an ongoing basis.

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