

2025

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

ELEVENTH ASSEMBLY

Our Booris, Our Way Review - Implementation Update 2024

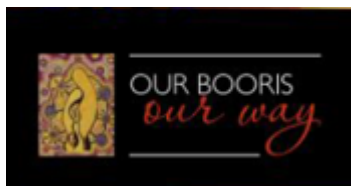
**Presented by
Michael Pettersson MLA
Minister for Children, Youth and Families
June 2025**

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Our Booris Our Way Review

Implementation Update

January-December 2024



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The ACT Government acknowledges the Ngunnawal people as traditional custodians of the ACT and recognise any other people or families with connection to the lands of the ACT and region. We acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this city and this region.

The ACT government would also like to acknowledge the value of traditional parenting practices and communal culture in child rearing. In particular, grandparents, aunts, and uncles hold a significant and respected position in families and play a vital role in the development of a child or young person's sense of identity, belonging and culture.

We believe that the experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture is a strength and protective factor in our work with families. We also understand that for thousands of years, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents, families and communities have provided safe, strong, and loving care for their children, based on cultural wisdom, shared knowledge and traditions which uphold the belief that children have a sacred value to their community.

Our Booris, Our Way Review

Implementation Update 2024

Table of Contents

Minister Foreword.....	6
Chairperson Foreword.....	8
Executive Summary.....	10
Introduction.....	16
Our Booris Today	17
RECOMMENDATION 1.....	22
RECOMMENDATION 2.....	25
RECOMMENDATION 3.....	27
RECOMMENDATION 4.....	28
RECOMMENDATION 5.....	29
RECOMMENDATION 6.....	30
RECOMMENDATION 7.....	32
RECOMMENDATION 8(A).....	33
RECOMMENDATION 8(B)	34
RECOMMENDATION 9 & 9(A).....	37
RECOMMENDATION 10(A).....	39
RECOMMENDATION 10(B) I & II.....	41
RECOMMENDATION 11(A) & (B).....	43
RECOMMENDATION 12	45
RECOMMENDATION 13	47
RECOMMENDATION 14	48
RECOMMENDATION 15.....	49
RECOMMENDATION 16	50
RECOMMENDATION 17	52
RECOMMENDATION 18	56
RECOMMENDATION 19	57
RECOMMENDATION 20	58

Our Booris, Our Way Review

Implementation Update 2024

RECOMMENDATION 21	59
RECOMMENDATION 22(A), (B) & (C).....	61
RECOMMENDATION 23	62
RECOMMENDATION 24.....	63
RECOMMENDATION 25	64
RECOMMENDATION 26(A)	65
RECOMMENDATION 26(B).....	65
RECOMMENDATION 27	66
RECOMMENDATION 28.....	67
Appendix A – Recommendation 9 and 9A – updates on early support programs from CSD, EDU and ACT Health	68

Abbreviations

ACCA	Aboriginal Child Care Association
ACCO	Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation
ATSICPP	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle
CAPO	Care and Protection Organisation
CFA	Comprehensive Family Assessment
CPLAS	Care and Protection Legal Advocacy Service
CPP	Children's Placement Principle
CSD	Community Services Directorate
CST	Cultural Services Team
CYF	Children, Youth and Families
CYP Act	Children and Young People Act
CYPS	Child and Youth Protection Services
CYRIS	Child and Youth Record Information System
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
EPR	Enduring Parental Responsibility
FGC	Family Group Conferencing
FCR	Family Connection and Restoration Team
FNFSST	First Nations Family Support Team
KHC	Kindergarten Health Checks
JACS	Justice and Community Safety
NBHF	Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm
OBOWIOC	Our Booris, Our Way Implementation Oversight Committee
OBOW	Our Booris, Our Way
SNAICC	Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care

Minister Foreword

Minister Michael Petterson



Children in the ACT should grow up safe, strong and connected to their culture. This is something I think we could all agree is central to who we are as Canberrans and what we would want for any child living here. This critical vision has been held strong in the hearts and minds of the Our Booris Our Way Implementation Oversight Committee.

This is the first implementation progress report that I have released with the Chair of the Our Booris Our Way Implementation Oversight Committee, Natalie Brown. I would like to acknowledge the continued dedication of this Committee. Their unwavering commitment and willingness to share their expertise, knowledge and experience continues to drive the ACT Government to enhance the care and protection system and continue the focus to reduce the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people living in out of home care.

The ACT Government remains committed to implementing the intent of the remaining recommendations. The ongoing partnership with the Committee ensures that we remain accountable to our commitment.

The implementation of the recommendations also contributes to the Government's commitments under the *ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement 2019-2028*, the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*, and *Safe and Supported: The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021-31*.

As of the 31st of December 2024, 238 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were living in out of home care, comprising approximately 31% of the total number of children and young people in out of home care. Addressing this overrepresentation remains a central goal of the implementation of the recommendations and requires a commitment from all levels of government, as well as genuine collaboration with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and the broader Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in the ACT.

The ACT's results in the 2024 Family Matters Report are a promising sign that change is occurring, with the ACT one of only two jurisdictions that have reduced the rate of over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people being diverted from out of home care, from 14 in 2023 to 11.7 in 2024¹. This is the lowest rate for the ACT since 2016. This reduction has been driven by a significant drop in out of home care admission rates for these children (from 13.9 admissions per 1000 children in 2023 to 5.5 admissions per 1000 children in 2024) and a greater focus on sustaining families together.

¹ [250207-Family-Matters-Report-2024.pdf](#); p22

Our Booris, Our Way Review

Implementation Update 2024

While this is a sign we are moving in the right direction, we must continue to drive meaningful changes to policies, processes and systems wherever necessary.

We have continued to work towards the implementation of the recommendations, with a number of key pieces of work having progressed in 2024. Ms Vanessa Turnbull-Roberts commenced in her 5 year term as the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People Commissioner on 26 February 2024. In this role, the Commissioner advocates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in the ACT, both individually and at a systemic level, to promote their rights and wellbeing.

Work has continued on modernising the *Children and Young People Act 2008* to establish a culturally responsive, high-functioning legislative framework for the ACT's child protection and family support system. Informed by the Our Booris, Our Way recommendations, the changes to the Act prioritise the safety, welfare and wellbeing of children and young people, preserve families, and provide earlier support to families in need. The first stage of amendments to the Act took steps towards fully embedding the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle in legislation, which is a direct response to Recommendation 5 of the Our Booris, Our Way Final Report. This structural work provides a foundation for strong and enduring positive change in our child protection system, alongside our partnership with ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders.

Aboriginal-led teams continue to provide culturally safe and informed support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families including the First Nations Family Support Team, the Family Group Conferencing team and the First Nations Kinship Liaison Officer. The First Nations Family Support Team has provided support to over 200 families and continues to develop a new practice framework which is led by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle.

The Aboriginal Service Development Branch is supporting the development of the ACT's Aboriginal Community Controlled sector in partnership with the community. In 2024 the branch supported new, emerging and established Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCO) to engage in the procurement of out of home care services, including with Yerrabi Yurwang Child and Family Aboriginal Corporation. This organisation become the first ACCO to be registered Care and Protection Organisation. The branch also worked closely with interested Aboriginal and Community Controlled Organisations on their application process to deliver various services as part of the Children, Young People and Families Panel, launched in August 2024.

We will continue to work closely with the Committee to make enduring change to the child and youth protection system, we also acknowledge the need for continued investment into early support for families. This is another key recommendation from the Our Booris, Our Way Final Report. By supporting families early, before they enter crisis, and before they find themselves at risk, we can change their interaction with the child protection system. Together we are implementing necessary systemic reforms to reduce the involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the child protection system and I look forward to continuing this important work.

Chairperson Foreword

Natalie Brown

The Our Boori's Our Way Committee began this journey more than seven years ago as part of the Review into the cases of 307 Aboriginal children and their families in contact with the ACT Child Protection System at that time. The Review's recommendations were firmly grounded in substantial evidence and guided by Aboriginal-led decision-making. In 2019, the ACT Government committed to their implementation. The Committee remains dedicated to ensuring that these changes occur and will vigorously pursue their realisation.



Evidence suggests that the Committee's efforts with the Government are yielding positive outcomes. This 2024 report details the legislative amendments to the Children and Young People Act 2008, advocacy by the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People Commissioner, increased efforts to increase the number of Aboriginal-led organisations, greater support for kinship carers and enhanced Aboriginal-led case management and oversight by the First Nations Family Engagement and Response Team, which are all contributing positively to the experiences of families.

Alongside these broad changes are the ACT results in the 2024 Family Matters Report. This report indicates a reduction in the ACT's over-representation rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care, from 14 in 2023 to 11.7 in 2024, the lowest rate since 2016. This reduction is linked to a significant decrease in out-of-home care admission rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, from 13.9 admissions per 1000 children in 2023 to 5.5 admissions per 1000 children in 2024.

While acknowledging these positive developments, the Committee remains accountable to the voices and experiences of children, young people, and families who are not yet benefiting from the opportunities available to other children in Canberra. Challenges regarding suboptimal practices, relational accountability, the implications of residential care, and the long-term trajectories of young people in such care persist. Demands for action and reform are consistently made. As time passes, the Committee remains alert to the threat of their report and recommendations being treated in a manner analogous to those of "Bringing them Home," the 1997 final report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families. Despite nearly three decades since its publication, numerous recommendations from that report remain unaddressed. Consequently, the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care has surged from 20 percent in 1993 to 44.5 percent in 2024, as reported by the Productivity Commission's Closing the Gap Dashboard.

Our Booris, Our Way Review

Implementation Update 2024

The Our Booris Our Way Committee and the community we serve recognise the enduring impact of grief and trauma across generations, as outlined in "Bringing them Home." The denial of parental experience subsequently hinders the ability of individuals to become effective parents themselves. We refuse to permit this cycle to perpetuate among children and families dependent on these critical changes.

We acknowledge that this government is committed to reducing the over-representation of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care as part of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. This commitment includes the target of a 45 percent reduction in the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care by 2031. Achieving this requires transformative changes that can be delivered by urgently implementing all Our Booris Our Way recommendations in ways that are grounded in self-determination and that deliver public accountability.

Another commitment under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap is Priority Reform 3 which focuses on transforming government institutions to ensure cultural safety, accountability, and responsiveness to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander needs. This reform addresses systemic issues, including unconscious biases and institutional racism, to improve service delivery and policy development. Reform 3 is expressed throughout our recommendations. The Committee continues to hold the government accountable and advocates for transformative approaches and relational accountability.

The Committee recognises that while there are undoubtedly circumstances where children need to be removed from their families but emphasises the critical needs for active efforts, greater efforts to break the cycle that brings us into contact with child protection authorities. We continue to regurgitate the point that the most critical needs are the increased provision of early, meaningful support services addressing key social determinants, such as housing, health, education, and justice, is paramount to prevent unnecessary entry into out-of-home care. The abundance of existing reports and recommendations necessitates real action. All Directorates bear responsibility to implement the changes required.

All members of the Our Booris Our Way Committee live in this community. We have raised children here, we possess both personal and experiential knowledge of the systems, and the recommendations that we are still striving to implement are our own words. We are resolutely committed to ensuring the comprehensive and full implementation of the recommendations and feel any lack of progress as a heavy weight to carry. Despite this, we will pledge to continue our advocacy until all recommendations are realised to their intended extent.

Our Booris Our Way
Chair

Executive Summary

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people continue to be overrepresented in the ACT's (Australian Capital Territory) child and youth protection system, and the recommendations of Our Booris, Our Way hold solutions to addressing the system failures that drive this outcome.

In this eighth progress report, the ACT Government's efforts from January-December 2024, along with our next steps, are shared. Key highlights include:

First Nations Family Support Team

The First Nations Family Engagement and Response Team have been allocating First Nations families for Family Support Responses, and statutory Appraisal responses since July 2023. In 2024 the Team has provided culturally safe and informed support to over 200 families. The Appraisal and Support Response teams include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous Practitioners to ensure that community have a choice in who they receive support from as well as navigating the need for privacy.

Modernising the Children and Young People Act 2008

Work continued on modernising the *Children and Young People Act 2008*. The first stage of legislative reforms commenced on 1 July 2024. These reforms progressed key changes to enhance child protection and family support systems in the ACT and importantly included embedding the five elements of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle into the Act. Stage 2 was passed on 26 June 2024. Further work progressed with a draft Bill publicly released in September 2024 proposing a range of additional legislative reforms, including inserting a principle of 'Active Efforts' and strengthening the placement hierarchy and cultural plans. Further consultation is required on key proposed changes to the legislation to progress this work in future.

Children Youth and Families Panel

The Children, Youth and Families (CYF) Panel was established on August 2024. The panel is a group of non-government organisations, including at this stage, one Aboriginal and Community Controlled Organisation (ACCOs) supporting children, young people, families, and carers by matching them with services that give them the help they need, when they need it, in the way that works for them. They will deliver therapeutic and culturally safe services in: sustaining families (family preservation, restoration, and intensive family support); kinship care; foster care; after care (extended support for young people transitioning to adulthood); alternate care; supported contact and transport arrangements and functional family therapy in Youth Justice.

Inaugural Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Commissioner

On 26 February 2024 Ms Vanessa Turnbull-Roberts commenced her five-year term as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People Commissioner. In March 2025 the Commissioner's Office published an. In 2024 the Commissioner's Office provided individual advocacy for 55 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, primarily involved in the ACT child protection and youth justice systems. The Commissioner also made detailed submissions to Inquiries on youth incarceration and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Safety Plan. The Commissioner's Office also conducted a range of community engagement activities including a youth forum and a community roundtable yarn.

Chief Practitioner

In September 2024 Maria Kannellopoulos was announced as the ACT's Chief Practitioner in Child, Youth and Families in CSD. The Chief Practitioner role was created to align the ACT with contemporary standards in child protection and youth justice seen across other jurisdictions. The Chief Practitioner will offer extra support to our hard working child safety staff and improve clinical decisions by strengthening processes within the child

Our Booris, Our Way Review

Implementation Update 2024

protection system to ensure they are as timely, fair and as transparent as possible, with a clear focus on the best interest of young people.

Our Booris, Our Way Review

Implementation Update 2024

Recommendation Progress as of December 2024

Rec 1:* Allocation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's cases to experienced and culturally intelligent case workers.

Rec 2: Engagement of SNAICC for training on embedding Child Placement Principle

Rec 3: Policy and practice review to explicitly embed the Child Placement Principle

Rec 4: Universal access to family group conferencing

Rec 5: Ensure full intent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle is reflected in the Children and Young People Act 2008

Rec 6:* Feasibility study Aboriginal Child Care Association

Rec 8 (A): Culturally appropriate advocate service

Rec 9: Early support programs available
Rec 9 (A): Accessible and appropriate early support programs for drug and alcohol rehabilitation, family violence, mental health, and trauma

Rec 7: Aboriginal And Torres Strait Islander Children's Commissioner

Rec 8 (B): Access to legal representation and advocacy

Rec 10 (A): Access to supports for kinship carers
Rec 10 (B)(I) & (II): Kinship care assessment process

Rec 11 (A) & (B*): Improve quality and monitoring of cultural plans

Rec 13:* Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander father inclusive practice

Rec 15: Governance and oversight of implementation of recommendations

Rec 17: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce and leadership

Rec 12: Pathways to restoration

Rec 14:* Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health assessments

Rec 16: Increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led decision making in child protection

Rec 18: Support development of the cultural services team

Rec 19: Appropriate identification, and de-identification, of children

Rec 21: ACT Indigenous Procurement Policy

Rec 22 (B): Children moved to CYPs

Rec 23:* Wreck Bay

Rec 20: Segmentation and data on kinship care

Rec 22 (A): Framework for ACT Together case work

Rec 22 (C): Fostered by ACT Together managed by CYPs

Rec 24: Appoint a project team to implement recommendations and monitor practice change

Rec 25: Data collection and analysis

Rec 26(A): Adoption and permanency arrangements
Rec 26(B): Enduring parental responsibility orders

Rec 27: Active referrals and follow-up

Rec 28: Family connection practices

Key

High Focus

Medium Focus

Monitoring Phase

Our Booris, Our Way Review

Implementation Update 2024

Introduction

This eighth progress report covers the period January-December 2024. It shares the ongoing efforts of the ACT Government to implement the recommendations from the Our Booris Our Way review.

In 2017, the Government commissioned a review into the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the child protection system in the ACT. This systemic review into the child protection system provided a better understanding of how we – government and the community – can reduce the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in care and ensure children remain connected to community and culture, supporting parents and families to safely care for their children.

Most importantly, the Our Booris, Our Way Steering Committee was an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander co-designed and led review, and a national leading example of practical self-determination.

The [Our Booris, Our Way Review](#) made 28 recommendations and eight (8) sub-recommendations (totaling 36 recommendations) to the government, iteratively over a two-year period with the final report presented to the government in December 2019. Through the [Government](#) response, provided in 2020, a firm commitment to implementing the agreed recommendations of the Our Booris, Our Way Review has been made. This is recognised, most recently, in the Government's commitment for this term². It states:

Deliver on the remaining recommendations of the Our Booris, Our Way review to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people grow up connected to their family and culture.

Our commitment to implementing the recommendations is strongly integrated with our commitments under the [National Agreement on Closing The Gap](#), [Safe and Supported: the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021 – 2031](#), ACT [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement 2019-2028](#) and the Community Services Directorate's (CSD) [Next Steps for Our Kids 2022-2030](#) strategy. We have backed up this commitment with an overall investment of \$25.2 million from 2018-19 to 2024-25 and continue to build on this foundation to fund services, support options and workforce to support ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in contact with the out of home care system.

In June 2020, the Our Booris, Our Way Implementation Oversight Committee was established to monitor implementation and provide a cultural lens to guide the systemic reform necessary to meet the expectations set out in the review. The Oversight Committee meets monthly to consider the implementation progress of the recommendations and provide advice on challenges and acknowledge achievements.

From January 2024, OBOWIOC and CSD adjusted the implementation oversight approach to concentrate on the 12 recommendations that have been agreed are High Focus. Bi-monthly deep dive meetings were held to assess progress on these recommendations and agree the necessary steps to transition them into monitoring. As at 31 December 2024: 12 recommendations remain at Monitoring; 12 recommendations are Medium Focus and CSD continues to report on the progress of implementation; and 12 recommendations are categorised as High Focus and CSD is working closely with the Committee to deep dive into the key issues and what will move them to monitoring.

² <https://www.actlabor.org.au/media/342plfst/act-labor-policy-position-statement-2024-7-october-2024.pdf>

Our Booris, Our Way Review

Implementation Update 2024

From August 2024, the Committee has been supported by an independent secretariat from SNAICC (Secretariat for National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care), the national peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

This report provides an executive summary of the achievements over the last 12 months. It also provides a snapshot of key data across the out of home care system. A progress update is then provided on the activities undertaken by government over the last 12 months and an indication of the next steps to be taken towards implementation.

Our Booris, Our Way Review

Implementation Update 2024

Our Booris Today

What the data tells us

To maintain consistency with previous and future reporting, the data section in this 12 month report will show 2 data groupings. The first data grouping is from January to June 2024. The second data grouping is from July to December 2024.

As of 30 June 2024, there were 233 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in out of home care.

Of the 233 children and young people:

139 children and young people (60 per cent) were on Long-term Orders (with care residing with the Director General)

46 children and young people (20 per cent) were on Long-term Orders (3rd Party Parental Responsibility)

26 children and young people (11 per cent) were on Short-term orders (< 2 years)

16 children and young people (7 per cent) were on Interim Orders or Emergency Actions

5 children and young people (2 per cent) had no care and protection orders in place (over 18 post care supported placements)¹

1 child or young person (<1 per cent) was on Voluntary Care

As of 31 December 2024, there were 238 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in out of home care.

Of the 238 children and young people:

128 children and young people (54 per cent) were on Long-term Orders (with care residing with the Director General)

43 children and young people (18 per cent) were on Long-term Orders (3rd Party Parental Responsibility)

35 children and young people (15 per cent) were on Short-term orders (< 2 years)

22 children and young people (9 per cent) were on Interim Orders or Emergency Actions

10 children and young people (4 per cent) had no care and protection orders in place (over 18 post care supported placements)¹

No children or young people were on Voluntary Care Arrangements.

Our Booris, Our Way Review

Implementation Update 2024

Table 1 – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in out of home care, by order type

Table 1.1 – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in out of home care, by order type as at June 2018 and June 2024				
	As at 30 June 2018		As at 30 June 2024	
Order Type	278		233	
Long term orders (with DG)	185	67%	139	60%
Long-term Orders (3rd Party Parental Responsibility)	26	9%	46	20%
Short-term orders (< 2 years)	35	13%	26	11%
Interim Orders or Emergency Actions	29	10%	16	7%
No Care and Protection orders (over 19 post care-placements)	2	1%	5	2%
Voluntary Care Arrangements	1	<1%	1	<1%

Data Source: Unpublished CSD data

Table 1.2 – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in out of home care, by order type as at December 2017 and December 2024				
	As at 31 December 2017		As at 31 December 2024	
Order Type	262		238	
Long term orders (with DG)	175	67%	128	54%
Long-term Orders (3rd Party Parental Responsibility)	25	10%	43	18%
Short-term orders (< 2 years)	34	13%	35	15%
Interim Orders or Emergency Actions	22	8%	22	9%
No Care and Protection orders (over 19 post care-placements)	3	1%	10	4%
Voluntary Care Arrangements	3	1%	0	0%

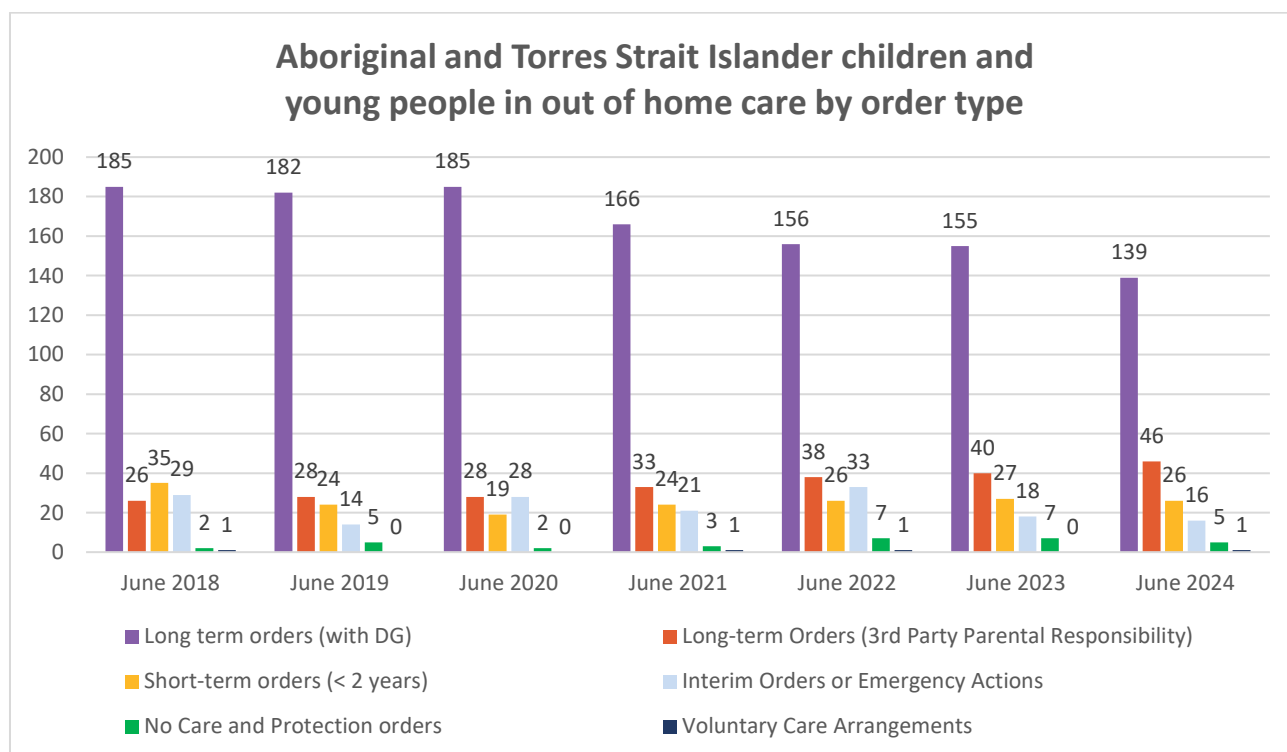
Data Source: Unpublished CSD data

¹ This category includes young people aged 18 years-old and above who are living in post-care supported placements

Our Booris, Our Way Review

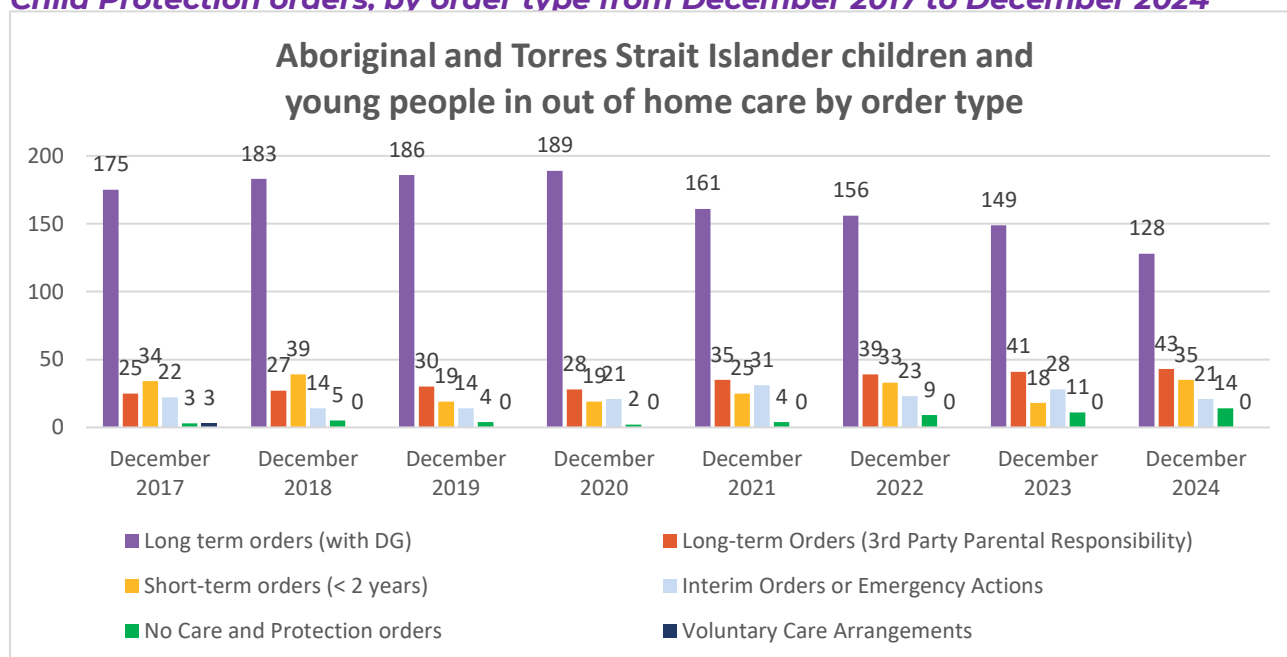
Implementation Update 2024

Figure 1.1 – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people on Child Protection orders, by order type from June 2018 to June 2024



Data Source: Unpublished CSD data

Figure 1.2 – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people on Child Protection orders, by order type from December 2017 to December 2024



Data Source: Unpublished CSD data

Our Booris, Our Way Review

Implementation Update 2024

As of 30 June 2024, of the 236 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in out of home care:

126 (53 per cent) were living in a kinship care placement (please see Figure 2 for a breakdown of kinship care)

50 (21 per cent) were living in a foster care placement

46 (19 per cent) were living in an Enduring Parental Responsibility placement

14 (6 per cent) were living in a residential care placement

No children or young people were living in other placements.

As of 31 December 2024, of the 237 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in out of home care:

128 (54 per cent) were living in a kinship care placement (please see Figure 2 for a breakdown of kinship care)

48 (20 per cent) were living in a foster care placement

43 (18 per cent) were living in an Enduring Parental Responsibility placement

18 (8 per cent) were living in a residential care placement

No children or young people were living in other placements.

Our Booris, Our Way Review

Implementation Update 2024

Table 2 – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in out of home care, by placement type

Table 2.1 – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in out of home care, by placement type as at June 2018 and June 2024				
	As at 30 June 2018		As at 30 June 2024	
Order Type	278		236	
Kinship Care	155	56%	126	53%
Foster care	85	31%	50	21%
Ex-Kinship - Enduring Parental Responsibility	12	4%	15	6%
Ex-Foster - Enduring Parental Responsibility	13	5%	31	13%
Residential care	12	4%	14	6%
Other Placements	1	<1%	0	0%

Data Source: Unpublished CSD data

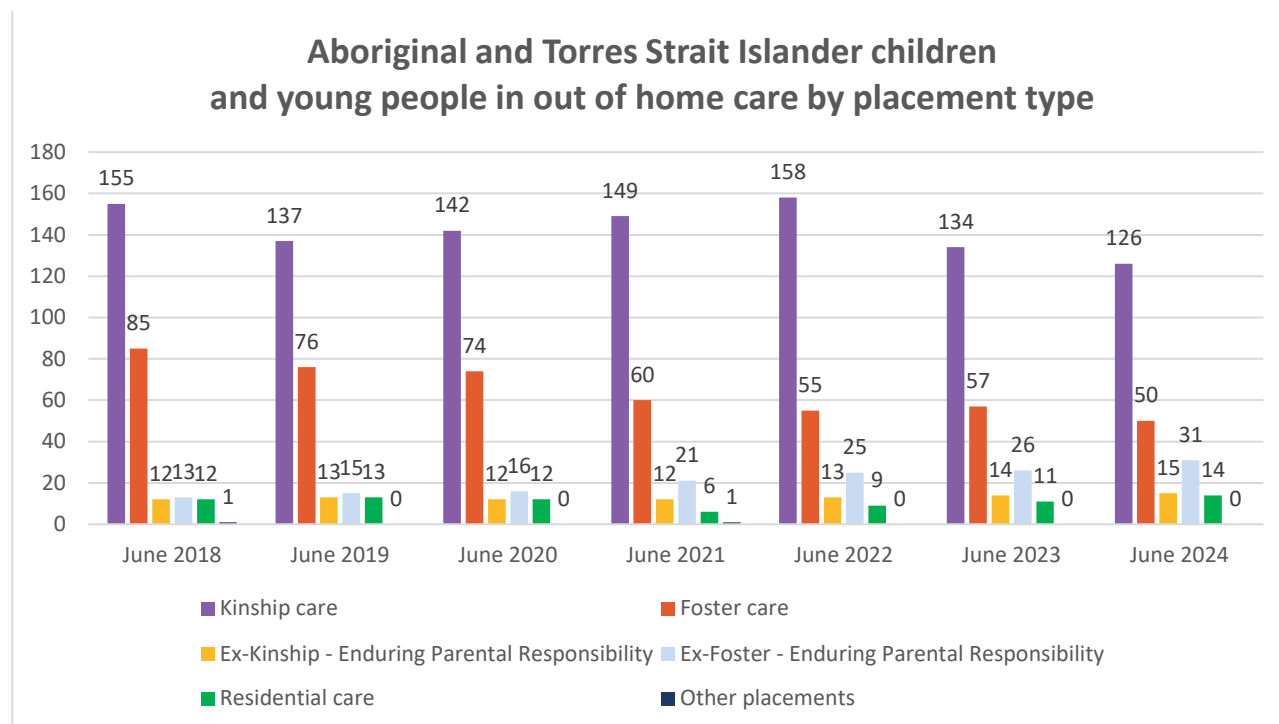
Table 2.2 – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in out of home care, by placement type as at December 2017 and December 2024				
	As at 31 December 2017		As at 31 December 2024	
Order Type	263		237	
Kinship Care	143	54%	128	53%
Foster care	87	33%	48	20%
Ex-Kinship - Enduring Parental Responsibility	13	5%	13	5%
Ex-Foster - Enduring Parental Responsibility	12	5%	30	12%
Residential care	7	3%	18	8%
Other Placements	1	<1%	0	0%

Data Source: Unpublished CSD data

Our Booris, Our Way Review

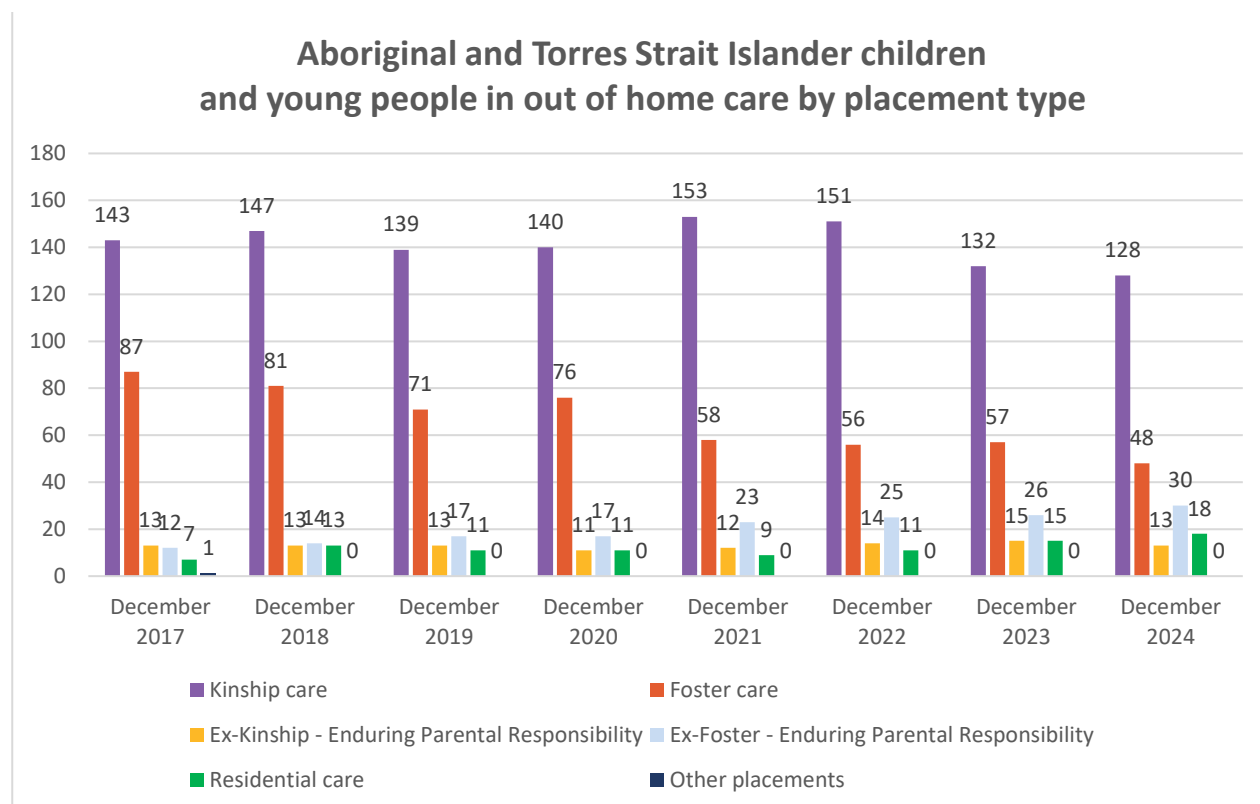
Implementation Update 2024

Figure 2.1 – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in out of home care, by placement type from June 2018 to June 2024



Data Source: Unpublished CSD data

Figure 2.2 – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in out of home care, by placement type from December 2017 to December 2024

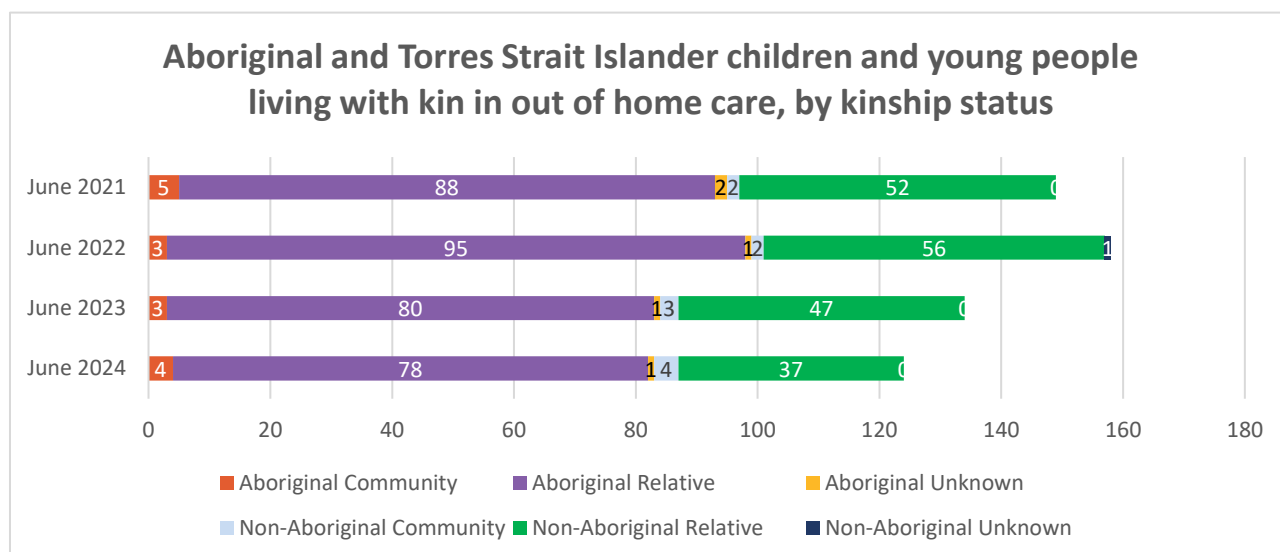


Data Source: Unpublished CSD data

Our Booris, Our Way Review

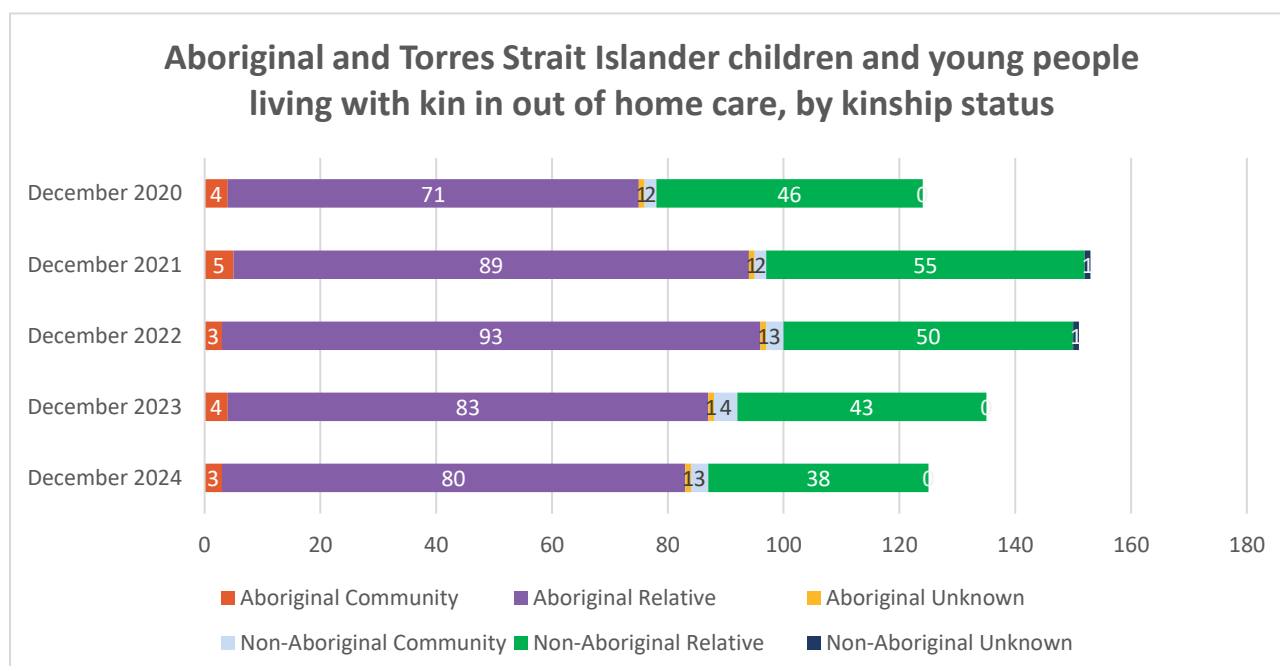
Implementation Update 2024

Figure 3.1 – Carer Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status of children and young people in kinship care from July 2023 to June 2024



Data Source: Unpublished CSD data

Figure 3.2 – Carer Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status of children and young people in kinship care from January 2024 to December 2024



Data Source: Unpublished CSD data

RECOMMENDATION 1

Allocation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's cases to experienced and culturally intelligent case workers

That allocation of cases involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are prioritised with a dedicated and experienced team of child protection workers with demonstrated cultural awareness and willingness to work with the community.

Presented by the OBOW Steering Committee June 2018. Agreed by the ACT Government August 2018.

ACTIVITIES JANUARY-DECEMBER 2024

The First Nations Family Engagement and Response Team have been allocating First Nations families for Family Support Responses, and statutory Appraisal responses since July 2023. Since this time, there are on average 20 to 30 families per month receiving a culturally safe and informed support from proficient case managers. Based on this data, there has been well over 200 First Nations families supported via this team.

The team is led by: Aboriginal Operations Manager; Aboriginal Principal Practitioner; Aboriginal Team Leader of the Appraisal Team; Three CYPP3 non-Indigenous Practitioners; One CYPP2 non-Indigenous Practitioner; Aboriginal Team Leader of the Support Response Team; One CYPP1 Indigenous Practitioner; and one CYPP1 non-Indigenous Practitioner.

The Appraisal and Support Response teams include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous Practitioners to ensure that community have a choice in who they receive support from as well as navigating the need for privacy.

The First Nations Family Response and Engagement Team have implemented the following methods of consultation and training involvement:

- Weekly Group Supervision for Complex Case Discussion.
- Monthly practice days; with a focus on training specific including Father Inclusive Practice, appropriate referral pathways (particularly warm referrals), Family Action Planning, Safety Planning, Financial Planning, and working within the 5 components of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle.
- Additionally, in-line with the Signs of Safety implementation, the Operations Manager, Principal Practitioner and both Team Leaders have volunteered to be champions and undertake intensive training to allow comprehensive understanding of the model to share and monitor learning and implementation with Practitioners in both team streams.
- Operations Manager currently sits on the Care Team for First Nations adolescents as part of complex case discussion and direction.

Our Booris, Our Way Review

Implementation Update 2024

- The team also participate in numerous Care Team Meetings with Gudan Gulwan, Yerrabi Yurwang, Karalika and Winnunga Nimmityjah. They have attended relevant services such as these to complete warm handovers for matters transferring out of the team.
- Operations Manager has also met with the program manager at Yerrabi Yurwang on two occasions face to face to discuss referral pathways and service issues.
- Practitioners undertake a case consultation for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander case with the Family Group Conferencing team.

The team also attended the Sorry Day March 2024 as well as the Yerrabi Yurwang Health Service open day, and a team yarning day with the staff of Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm on country to learn about their service and tour the property.

CYF is dedicated to shared decision-making and has fully implemented the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Care Pathway panel*. This model ensures that all proposed court orders or legal proceedings are endorsed by an entirely Aboriginal-led group. It provides consistent decision making across for all families and provides an opportunity for staff to enhance their practice and align with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principles.

In addition, CYF has continued the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Case Direction and Discussion Group*. The purpose of the Group is to provide a space for collaboration and learning that ensures active efforts are maintained in line with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principles. It aims to drive practice in accordance with these principles, ensuring case planning is culturally informed, realistic, achievable, and safe.

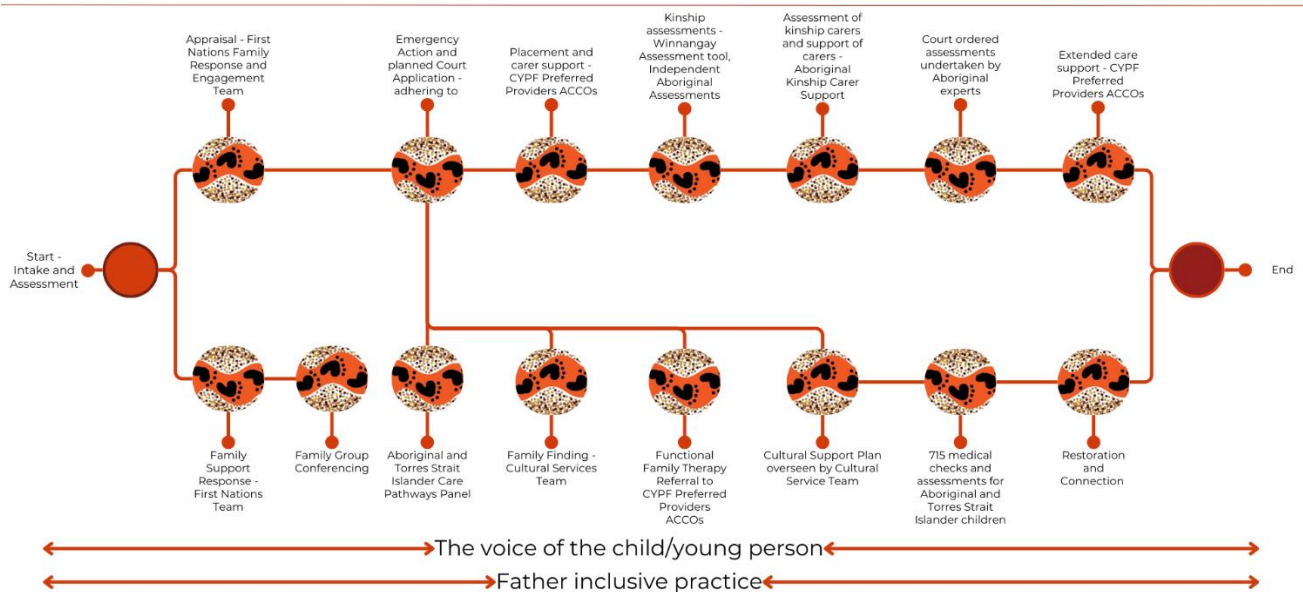
The Cultural Development Program (CDP) was delivered across 2024 (three cohorts) and continues to be part of the mandatory training requirement. It continues to be an important and critical priority to ensure that all staff are trained as it helps build trust and rapport with families, ensures accurate assessments, and develops effective responses. The Cultural Development Program (CDP) comprises six sessions, each with specific goals. Participants are introduced to the program's objectives and key entities, learn about the history and legislation affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, experience Indigenous culture through a Walk on Country, create tailored Cultural Plans for children in out-of-home care, emphasize family connections and identity, and apply learned principles to real-world case practice examples.

Across CYF we have a range of approaches informing how we work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families – please see diagram below. This system representation describes the First Nations Team as the first point of contact and the two alternate pathways including Family Support (preservation) and Appraisals (protection).

Our Booris, Our Way Review

Implementation Update 2024

Pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children



IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JANUARY-JUNE 2025

CYF will focus significant effort on recruitment to the First Nations Team and continue to review and adjust team training and development, as well as team processes for quality assurance and improvement.

CYF will also continue to convene Case Discussion and Direction Group meetings for case consultations for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families to ensure quality and consistent practice for families across all teams.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Engagement of SNAICC for training on embedding Child Placement Principle

That the ACT Community Services Directorate immediately engage SNAICC to train child protection workers on implementing the five Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (ATSICPP) within their practice.

Presented by the OBOW Steering Committee June 2018. Agreed by the ACT Government August 2018.

ACTIVITIES JANUARY-DECEMBER 2024

SNAICC training was delivered on 12-13 June 2024 and on 12-13 November 2024. Please see attendance data below:

Training Dates	Attendance
12-13 June 2024	11
12-13 November 2024	12

ATSICPP training 1 July 2024 to 31 December 2024

The training delivered on:

- ensuring an understanding that culture underpins and is integral to safety and wellbeing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and is embedded in policy and practice
- recognising and protecting the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, family members and communities in child welfare matters
- increasing the level of self-determination of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in child welfare matters
- reducing the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children in child protection and the out-of-home care system.

The training content also included:

- Ways of working in a Circle
- Perceptual positioning
- History of Child Placement Principle (ATSICPP)
- Overview of ACT statistics and findings from Family Matters Annual Report
- 6 priority areas and 5 elements of the ATSICPP
- Active efforts definition and examples across ATSICPP elements
- Timeline of historical impacts (impacts of colonisation and types of trauma)
- Effectively engaging Aboriginal families
- Aboriginal child-rearing practices
- Promoting self-determination and empowerment
- Collaborative practice and partnerships
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reflection Flower

Our Booris, Our Way Review

Implementation Update 2024

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JANUARY-JUNE 2025

CYF will continue to monitor training attendance and consideration is being given to the delivery of the training on an ongoing basis by the CYF Capability Development team.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Policy and practice review to explicitly embed the Child Placement Principle

That Child and Youth Protection Services (CYPS) immediately commence revision of policy and practices to ensure that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Child Placement Principles are explicitly designed into policy and practice. Children must be valued in a process that holds cultural rights as central to their identity and safety.

Presented by the OBOW Steering Committee June 2018. Agreed by the ACT Government August 2018.

ACTIVITIES JANUARY-DECEMBER 2024

CYF has delivered training sessions and developed staff resources in preparation for the legislative amendments, which detail the practice implications as a result of changes to the legislation. This includes highlighting the legislative requirement to consider the Child Placement Principle in all decision making related to an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child or young person.

As of 1 July 2024, amendments to the *Children and Young People Act 2008* have embedded the five elements of the Child Placement Principle in section 10 of the Act.

Existing CYF practice guidance has highlighted the requirement to reflect the Child Placement Principle in decision making for several years – as a result of the ongoing process to implement OBOW recommendations.

Since July 2024, CYF has commenced a process of updating existing practice guidance to highlight the Child Placement Principle's inclusion in the Act and outline compliance with section 10 as a framework for decision making. In addition, staff have been informed of the Principle's inclusion in the Act in a number of ways, such as guidance which explained the 2024 amendments and targeted training.

Additionally, CYF staff have been informed of their required compliance with sections 10A(a) and 10A(b), ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people participate in decision making with as much self-determination as possible, and the responsibility of CYF to protect and promote an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child or young person's cultural identity.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JANUARY-JUNE 2025

CYF will continue to update practice guidance to reflect the July 2024 CYP Act amendments, including specifying the Child Placement Principle has been embedded into the Act and must guide CYF decision making. This will be an ongoing process given the Principle's application in all of CYF's processes.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Universal access to Family Group Conferencing

That the Directorate provide (universal) access and availability of Family Group Conferencing as an essential step for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families engaging or entering the child protection system.

Presented by the OBOW Steering Committee June 2018. Agreed by the ACT Government August 2018.

ACTIVITIES JANUARY-DECEMBER 2024

During the reporting period, the Family Group Conferencing Team held 31 pre-referral consultations, and received 40 referrals.

The Family Group Conferencing Team completed 16 Family Group Conferences during this reporting period.

Due to staff turnover, the Family Group Conferencing Team operated with only one fulltime facilitator. In September of this period, one vacancy was successfully recruited to with the successful applicant completing the accredited Family Group Conferencing facilitator training.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JANUARY-JUNE 2025

An internal promotion and road show of the Family Group Conferencing team is planned to showcase the benefits of completing Family Group Conferences, and weekly information sessions will be held for internal CYF staff to attend for question time.

Continued effort in review and adjustment of team training and development, as well as team processes for quality assurance and improvement.

CYF will continue to work in partnership with ACT ACCOs in delivering community led Family Group Conferencing and Functional Family Therapy. This will improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. The 2024-2025 budget allocated \$1.990 million over four years.

RECOMMENDATION 5

Ensure full intent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle is reflected in the Children and Young People Act 2008

The child placement principle needs to be explicitly enshrined in legislation. We recommend that the Directorate commence foundation, consultation and research work required to ensure the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principles (CPP) are appropriately described in the Children and Young People Act. This will require, at a minimum, changes to both Sections 10 and 513 of the Children and Young People Act.

Presented by the OBOW Steering Committee December 2018. Agreed by the Act Government May 2019.

ACTIVITIES JANUARY-DECEMBER 2024

The ACT Government remains committed to ensuring the full intent of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle is reflected in the *Children and Young People Act 2008*. The first stage of legislative reforms was enacted through the Children and Young People Amendment Act 2023, passed by the ACT Legislative Assembly on 2 November 2023 and commenced on 1 July 2024. These reforms progressed key changes to enhance child protection and family support systems in the ACT and importantly included embedding the five elements of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle into the Act, reflecting the Government's commitment to delivering on this recommendation. Stage 2 was passed on 26 June 2024.

Work continues on the legislation to further strengthen the ways the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle is embedded holistically through the Act. A draft Bill was released publicly in September 2024 proposing a range of additional legislative reforms, including inserting a principle of 'Active Efforts' and strengthening the placement hierarchy and cultural plans. The ACT Government recognises the importance of getting the full intent of the ATSICPP to the standard of Active Efforts right in the legislation and that more consultation with all stakeholders is required to progress this work.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JANUARY-JUNE 2025

The ACT Government is considering how to continue to modernise the Children and Young People Act within this term of Government. More consultation will be required to guide future change.

RECOMMENDATION 6

Feasibility study Aboriginal Child Care Association

That a comprehensive analysis of an Aboriginal Child Care Association is conducted.

Presented by the OBOW Steering Committee December 2018. Agreed in principle by the ACT Government May 2019 and agreed 2020.

ACTIVITIES JANUARY-DECEMBER 2024

At the 6 May OBOWIOC deep dive the actions taken as part of Rec 6 were discussed in detail. CSD now propose that Recommendation 6 be moved into the monitoring and evaluation phase as the Aboriginal Services Branch is ongoing and the work is part of business as usual. The actions connected to recommendation 6 will be reported through the Next Steps for our Kids Strategy, Closing the Gap, and Annual Reporting. There will continue to be 6 monthly updates provided to the OBOWIOC.

The Community Services Directorate has supported and worked in partnership with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, new and existing Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, and government partners to deliver on various aspects of the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement and the National Agreement on Closing the Gap Priority Reform 2: Building the community-controlled sector.

The Directorate has been working with ACCOs supporting their operational capability and capacity to meet community goals to deliver across the entire human services system. This includes holistic and culturally safe wraparound services, responding to individual ACCOs needs as determined by the individual ACCOs and bringing partners together to collaboratively address challenges and explore opportunities. Through the Aboriginal Service Development Branch, and in partnership with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, Children, Youth and Families Division and the Human Service Registrar, we are also supporting organisations for opportunities to gain Care and Protection Organisation registration to participate in upcoming Children, Youth and Families Panel refreshes through a supportive conditional provider.

Through July to December the Directorate has further progressed its collective commitments to PR2 and the ACT Agreement in this period through:

- Building on the success of the implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Wellbeing Impact Assessment for the next Budget cycle and engaging with policy and program owners to support Directorate budget bids and business cases that work with ACCOs;
- Exploring opportunities to increase funding to ACCOs commensurate with need;
- Developing and promoting the [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commissioners Guide](#).
- Supporting CAPO registered ACCOs to transition in to increased service delivery under the Children, Young People and Families Panel and explore opportunities for additional ACCOs to participate in future Children, Young People and Families Panel refreshes;
- Progressing, in partnership with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body, the ACCO Strategic Policy Framework; and
- Develop an ACT ACCO Engagement Strategy, informed by Community consultations.

Our Booris, Our Way Review

Implementation Update 2024

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JANUARY-JUNE 2025

It is proposed the Aboriginal Service Development Branch and the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body will work together in 2025 to engage a consultant to explore the identified need for a peak-like body or other arrangement for the ACT Community-Controlled sector with Community and develop consensus on the pathways forward.

Work to develop an ACCO Strategic Framework in partnership with the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body is ongoing.

RECOMMENDATION 7

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Commissioner

The ACT appoint an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Commissioner with these and additional capacity to specifically intervene and engage in child protection processes. The Commissioner, on an ongoing basis, would provide monitoring, advice, and advocacy on systemic and individual cases. The Commissioner would be able to advise and influence government on a broad spectrum of issues that impact our children across both government and non-government services including for example, education, health, housing, child protection and provide independent advice on issues of culture and equity. They would also have the specific ability to engage as a party to case conferences and provide alternative pathways to resolution than court orders.

Presented by the OBOW Steering Committee December 2018. Noted by the ACT Government May 2019 and agreed in principle July 2020.

ACTIVITIES JANUARY-DECEMBER 2024

Ms Vanessa Turnbull Roberts commenced a five-year term as ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People Commissioner on 26 February 2024. During this period JACS facilitated a handover with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Families Advocate and provided briefings and administrative support to the Commissioner as she established her independent office.

In March 2025 the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People Commissioner's Office published an Annual Statement for 2024. The statement is available on the Commissioner's website at <https://aboriginalandtorresstraitislandercypc.com.au/>

The Annual Statement reports that in this first year of operation the Commissioner's Office provided individual advocacy for 55 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, primarily children and young people involved in the ACT child protection and youth justice systems. The Commissioner published a position statement on enduring parental responsibility provisions and made detailed submissions to Inquiries on youth incarceration and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Safety Plan. The Commissioner's Office also conducted a range of community engagement activities including a youth forum and a community roundtable yarn.

The Commissioner is attending OBOW meetings and providing updates directly to the Committee.

RECOMMENDATION 8(A)

Culturally appropriate advocate service

Guidance be published and made immediately accessible to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families engaged with the child protection system around the nature and role of support people as purposefully and deliberately engaged in meetings.

Presented by the OBOW Steering Committee December 2018. Agreed by the ACT Government May 2019.

ACTIVITIES JANUARY-DECEMBER 2024

This recommendation has focused on publishing guidance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families engaged with the Child Protection System and specifically sharing information on the nature and role of support people. Please refer to link for this resource: [Advocacy and support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families involved with child protection](#)

CYF is committed to collaborating with the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People Commissioner to integrate best practices and provide ongoing support to families. We recognise the importance of involving advocates and support organisations at every stage of engagement with CYF, whenever the child or family requests their presence. These advocates and support services can attend any meetings with CYF to offer information, support, and assistance in decision-making.

Access to advocacy continues to be a key requirement in CYF practice guidance, either newly developed or updated. The requirement for CYF staff to facilitate the involvement of an advocate or support person for Aboriginal and Torres Strait families is highlighted in a range of resources, such as those explaining decision making, engagement with families and key child protection processes (e.g. case planning, case conferencing).

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JANUARY-JUNE 2025

CYF will continue to reflect the best practice of families accessing advocacy and support as existing practice guidance is updated and new resources are developed.

A specific focus during the January to June 2025 period will be developing practice guidance which outlines the Internal Merits Review and External Merits Review processes. This will include the requirement for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to have access to an advocate or support person during a review of decision, including a family's right to have an advocate or support person attend during any engagement with CYF.

RECOMMENDATION 8(B)

Access to legal representation and advocacy

Funding be made available, as a matter of urgency, to professional legal and advocacy services that are culturally appropriate to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families are able to access formal legal services.

Presented by the OBOW Steering Committee December 2018. Agreed by the ACT Government May 2019.

ACTIVITIES JANUARY-DECEMBER 2024

In the 2024-25 Budget, additional funding of \$906,009 over 2 years has been provided to the Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT) (ALS) to continue the Care and Protection Legal Advocacy service (CPLAS). Full staffing (2 solicitor roles) has been in place since September 2023.

More time is needed to ensure the services become embedded in the ACT legal service landscape in this child protection space. The provision of culturally appropriate legal representation and advocacy provides a better wrap around service for families.

The Justice and Community Safety Directorate (JACS) has indicated that the next reporting period will provide an opportunity for the ALS to report on a greater number of surveys and to provide a better insight into the cultural responsiveness and effectiveness of the CPLAS. JACS expects to receive a detailed progress report from ALS soon with survey data included. This report will be shared with the Committee.

Our Booris, Our Way Review

Implementation Update 2024

CPLAS activity from January-June 2024

Referral services: The total number of matters referred to the Funded Program during the Second Review Period, the source of the referrals and the stage at which they are referred:

Source of Referral	Total
Community Organisation	13
Internal	10
Other Legal Service	1
Total	24

Stage of referral	Total
Early assistance	4
Final orders	3
Other	4
Removal	7
Variation	6
Total	24

Legal Assistance Services- Total number of clients represented in the below matter categories:

Matter Category	Total
CPLAS - Early assistance	10
CPLAS - Final Orders	8
CPLAS - Other	14
CPLAS - Removal	10
CPLAS - Variation	10
Total	52

The number of children associated with each matter, categorised by matter type:

Matter Category	Total
CPLAS - Early assistance	24
CPLAS - Final Orders	17
CPLAS - Other	22
CPLAS - Removal	20
CPLAS - Variation	24
Total	107

CPLAS activity from July to December 2024

Source of Referral	Total
Community Organisation	6
Internal	4
Other Legal Service	3
Self	14
Total	27

Stage of referral	Total
Early assistance	6
Final orders	2
Other	9
Removal	7
Variation	3
Total	27

Matter Category	Total
CPLAS - Early assistance	12
CPLAS - Final Orders	11
CPLAS - Other	18
CPLAS - Removal	21
CPLAS - Variation	15
Total	77

Matter Category	Total
CPLAS - Early assistance	27
CPLAS - Final Orders	20
CPLAS - Other	30
CPLAS - Removal	35
CPLAS - Variation	32
Total	144

Our Booris, Our Way Review

Implementation Update 2024

The number of employees delivering the funded program is 3 FTE (2 lawyers and 2 PT paralegals/admin). With an increase in service delivery and staffing numbers remaining the same, the capacity of the ALS team to undertake follow-up with clients post service delivery has remained low. ALS is currently investigating the possibility to collect survey responses digitally by converting the word document into an online form that will be accessible via QR code noting this has been successfully trialed by other service streams. ALS believe that this may be a more convenient way for clients to respond. ALS will also draw from support from the paralegal and administrative staff in the ACT practice to follow-up with clients and ensure surveys are responded to.

The service evaluation is being conducted through systematic data reporting as stipulated in the contract. Regular progress reports are submitted to JACS to provide ongoing updates on the program's performance. Additionally, detailed responses are provided to JACS upon request to substantiate claims and ensure transparency regarding the program's operations. This approach ensures that the program is effectively meeting its agreed-upon goals. Further evaluation will be considered in the context of future budget processes and additional/further funding opportunities.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JANUARY-JUNE 2025

JACS and ALS are currently working to finalise a variation to the Agreement to incorporate specifics concerning additional funding secured via the 2024 budget process and to address an underspend from the previous period. The ALS proposes utilising this underspend to develop the Early Legal Referral for Families collaboration as part of an early intervention strategy, by employing a part-time Senior Project Officer for 6 months in 2025/2026 to:

- conduct stakeholder engagement, consultation and co-design of a service model;
- strengthen relationships with other service providers; and
- implement the model in partnership with CYF including rolling out training to CYF case workers

The ALO also proposes employing a full-time solicitor to take carriage of legal assistance work arising under this model. On 22 January 2025, JACS, CSD, and ALS colleagues met to discuss the proposed early intervention model, with all parties expressing interest and valuing the project. Work is currently underway to finalise a proposal paper for submission to the CSD Executive Committee for further consideration.

RECOMMENDATION 9 & 9(A)

Recommendation 9: Early support programs available

Community feedback has strongly advocated for the need of services that provide positive support to families, early and during voluntary engagement with the child protection system.

Presented by the OBOW Steering Committee December 2018. Agreed by the ACT Government May 2019.

Recommendation 9(A): Accessible and appropriate early support programs for drug and alcohol rehabilitation, family violence, mental health, and trauma

The steering committee recommend that the ACT government fund specific programs that are timely and meet the cultural needs of the community in the ACT. These programs must address drug and alcohol rehabilitation, family violence, mental health, trauma counselling and cultural healing.

Presented by the OBOW Steering Committee December 2019. Agreed in principle by the ACT Government June 2020.

ACTIVITIES JANUARY-DECEMBER 2024

Additional supports and services continue to be developed across government, with a focus on integrated services with easy access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. A key component of this implementation is undertaking an Indigenous Expenditure Review in accordance with clauses 112-114 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. This provides an opportunity for the ACT Government to identify re-prioritisation opportunities and identification of what a 'meaningful proportion' is for particular services.

The Education Directorate (EDU) continues to implement initiatives under Phase Two of Set up for Success: An Early Childhood Strategy for the ACT (Set up for Success) contributing to recommendation 9. This includes delivering targeted provision of two days a week, 48 weeks per year, of free quality early childhood education for priority three-year-olds – those experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage. By December 2024, approximately 1300 children had been referred into this initiative with 102 of these children being Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children accessing the initiative.

The ACT has representation on the national Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership (ECCDPP). Through the ECCDPP, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people work in genuine partnership with governments to drive community-led, early childhood care and development outcomes. The ECCDPP was co-developed with SNAICC and is one of 5 policy partnerships established under Priority One of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. The objectives of the ECCDPP include to:

- Identify reforms to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to achieve their potential in the early years, and to set them up for long-term success
- action priority reforms in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-led initiatives
- identify opportunities to work more effectively across governments, Coalition of Peaks and community

Our Booris, Our Way Review

Implementation Update 2024

organisations

- Enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives, communities and organisations to negotiate and implement agreements with governments to support Closing the Gap.

To continue to meet the intent of recommendations 9 and 9a, it is proposed the OBOWIOC are provided with regular program updates to demonstrate both investment and implementation in programs relevant to the recommendation. January- December 2024 program updates from CSD, EDU and ACT Health are available at **Appendix A (at the end of this report)**.

The OBOWIOC also proposed the ACT Government agrees to use existing communication pathways to share information and services available to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. These pathways may include the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Network Facebook page. CSD will progress this work over the next reporting period.

At the 6 May 2024 deep dive, recommendation 9 and 9a were discussed by OBOWIOC and CSD. OBOWIOC valued the updates on investments being made by the ACT Government but did not agree they had sufficient information on implementation of programs to move this recommendation to monitoring status. During the deep dive it was noted services that provide positive support to families, early and during voluntary engagement with the child protection system will increasingly be reported and monitored through Next Steps.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JANUARY-JUNE 2025

The ACT Government will continue to deliver and build early support services, including services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families

RECOMMENDATION 10(A)

Access to supports for kinship carers

The Steering Committee recommends that the Directorate be more direct and transparent with supports that are available for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kinship carers. We recommend that the Directorate design and communicate a simple, accessible, and equitable process by which kinship carers can access or apply for supports with a mechanism to dispute the findings and have circumstances re-evaluated. This process must be designed with the community to ensure that the processes do not unnecessarily compound the difficulties and trauma experienced by kinship carers.

Presented by the OBOW Steering Committee May 2019. Agreed by the ACT Government May 2019.

ACTIVITIES JANUARY-DECEMBER 2024

CYF presented a deep dive discussion to the OBOWIOC into recommendations 10A and 10B. Discussion highlighted progress to date. A summary of key points and CYF response to the committee's feedback is outlined below:

- The First Nations Kinship Liaison Officer, commenced in the Kinship Assessment and Support Team in July 2023. The focus has been developing the position in response to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Carers' needs.
- Moving forward, the role will emphasise carer support, including frontloading support for all new kinship placements and support and advocacy at critical points.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers can self-refer to the First Nations Kinship Liaison, at YumaKinship@act.gov.au.
- CYF are trialing the use of carer support plans for all new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kinship care placements, with the goal of embedding carer support plans into routine practice over time.
- Dr Dave Pasalich (Australian National University) presented to the committee about his research and partnership with CYPS to trial *Connect Training* for kinship carers. This trial includes adapting the program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. Several members of the Kinship Team have recently been trained to deliver this program to carers.
- Strategic Policy advised that new funding was secured in the recent budget to scope support systems and opportunities for informal kinship carers.

Strategic Policy conducted early planning work to investigate procurement/grant options for expending \$200,000 from the Healing and Reconciliation Fund. A final approach will be determined by the outcome of upcoming consultation with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, led by the OBOWIOC.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JANUARY-JUNE 2025

CYF Kinship carers activities are outlined in Recommendation 10 (B) I and II.

Strategic Policy will continue to work with the OBOWIOC to consider requirements for the proposed informal kinship carer services.

The ACT's work to explore support for informal kinship carers aligns with Safe and Supported: The National

Our Booris, Our Way Review

Implementation Update 2024

Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021-2031 (Safe and Supported). The First Action Plan 2023-2026 under Safe and Supported aims to improve support for grandparents, foster and kinship carers to better enable them to keep Australia's children and young people safe and supported (Action 6).

Under Safe and Supported, the Australian Government, state and territory governments and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership Group have begun work to improve support coordination for non-parent carers between Commonwealth and state and territory services. This includes a review of supports available for carers, including accessibility of financial support, with a view to support recruitment and retention. This work is being coordinated through the National Framework secretariat in the Department of Social Services (DSS).

In June 2024, DSS contracted the Australian Institute of Family Studies to undertake a review and facilitate the procurement of a First Nations organisation to assess the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers. Reviews have yet to commence but will occur in consultation with the Leadership Group in 2025.

RECOMMENDATION 10(B)I & II

Kinship care assessment process

10(b)(i) The Steering Committee recommends that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children be placed in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kinship care immediately upon removal rather than being moved to foster care while carer checks are conducted when stable family options for care are present.

10(b)(ii) The Steering Committee recommends that the process of applying and performing suitability assessment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kinship carers (Kinship Carer Assessments) is a transparent and timely process and that additional resources be applied to ensure that these are not delayed.

Presented by the OBOW Steering Committee May 2019. Agreed in principle by the ACT Government in May 2019.

ACTIVITIES JANUARY-DECEMBER 2024

CYF presented a deep dive discussion to the OBOWIOC into recommendations 10A and 10B. Discussion highlighted progress to date. A summary of key points and CYF response to the committee's feedback is outlined below:

Recommendation 10B (i)

CYF have implemented a new process called a Preliminary Kinship Decision (PKD). This process entails brief/same day initial safety checks of a prospective carer to enable children to be placed immediately with kin, without needing to wait for the kinship assessment to be finalised.

Once the PKD process is followed, further assessment is prioritised the next business day, with referrals for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kin triaged as critical.

Recommendation 10B (ii)

Suitability assessments are now completed before the first assessment interview with carers. In practice they are generally finalised for new kinship carers within 1-7 business days, though policy timeframes do allow for longer where required. This enables sensitive, timely and transparent conversations with carers as required.

A new carer information kit was developed and is provided to kinship carers when children are placed in emergency situations. For more information see '[Becoming a kinship carer – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Carers](#)'.

All staff in the CYPS kinship team have been trained in the Winangay assessment tool for Initial/Provisional Kinship Assessments. Winangay is a culturally informed assessment model and is being used for all Initial Kinship Assessments of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Carers. Alongside this, the First Nations Kinship Liaison officer provides cultural guidance and oversight to all assessors.

Winangay staff, Paula Hayden and Debbie Hinds spoke to the OBOWIOC about the history and development of Winangay resources.

Our Booris, Our Way Review

Implementation Update 2024

Carers ACT have been contracted by Children Youth and Families (CYF) to develop an online training platform for kinship carers. This online format will complement face-to-face training and support what is already delivered by CYF and Community Partners. It is anticipated that this platform will be ready for launch in the next 6 months.

In September 2024, CYF, ACT Together and Carers ACT hosted the annual Carer Appreciation event to coincide with Carers Week. Aunty Brenda Mathews was the guest speaker at this event. Aunty Brenda is the author of *The Last Daughter*, and her story was portrayed on a Netflix Documentary of the same name. Aunty Brenda spoke with carers and staff about being part of the stolen generations and her ongoing journey of healing and reconciliation.

In August 2024 CYF facilitated a barbecue and afternoon of activities for kinship carers and children to mark Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Day. This included live music, bush tucker workshop, hip hop sessions, Graffiti Workshop and a visit from the ACT Brumbies.

The First Nations Kinship Support lead a "Blokes Barbecue" in October aimed at supporting and connecting with male kinship carers

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JANUARY-JUNE 2025

In 2025, the Kinship Team will be reviewing the training offered to Kinship Carers with a view to maximising access to training opportunities delivered by community partners, and ensuring the training offering directly by CYF is targeted at key areas of need. A key focus is supporting kinship carers caring for a child on a short-term care and protection order where restoration is the primary goal. The First Nations Kinship Support Practitioner is part of this review work, including exploration of training about restoration that is tailored specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Carers.

RECOMMENDATION 11(A) & (B)

Improve quality and monitoring of cultural plans

11(A) The Steering Committee recommends that the Directorate adopt a highly consultative approach to the development of cultural plans in line with the participation, partnership, and connection elements of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle. This will drive an improvement in the quality and relevance of cultural plans to children's cultural needs.

11(B) The Steering Committee recommends the Directorate seek support and guidance on leading practice in the development, monitoring, and quality of cultural plans from local community-controlled organisations and from other jurisdictions who lead in this, for example the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA).

Presented by the OBOW Steering Committee May 2019. Agreed by the ACT Government May 2019.

ACTIVITIES JANUARY-DECEMBER 2024

CYF continue to streamline the process of completing quality Cultural Plans within the required timeframes and provide staff with training and guidance through the CYF Cultural Development Training. See Table below Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in the care of the Directorate and living in out of home care who have a Cultural Plan completed and endorsed for the latest numbers. The goal of CYF is to have Cultural Plans above 90%. This has been achieved from fourth quarter of 2022-23 through to Quarter one of 2024-25. We will strive to achieve this target again in the coming year.

The Cultural Plans monitoring process continues to be efficient, with CYF Practitioners receiving reminders in a timely manner for accessing guidance, support and completion of Cultural Plans.

Throughout 2024, the key person providing advice, support and reviewing the quality of the Cultural Plans continues to be CYPP4 Cultural Services Team Leader, alongside Family Finding First Nations staff member. Additional cultural support is provided to staff members by the First Nations Team, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Case Discussion and Direction Group and the Family Group Conference Team. CYF will continue to monitor quality and compliance of cultural plans across teams.

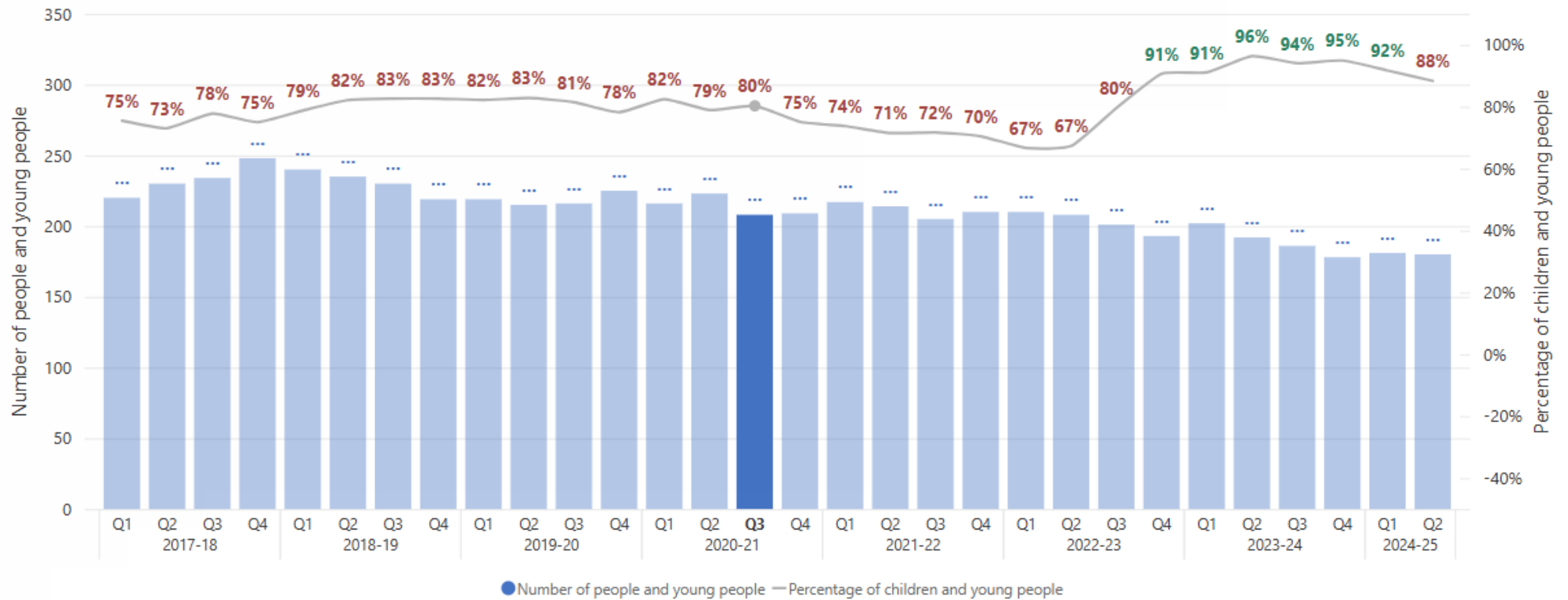
IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JANUARY-JUNE 2025

CYF First Nation senior staff members have commenced consultation regarding updating the Cultural Plans Policy and Procedure, in order to align the changes following the recent CYF reform and the contemporary cultural practice in CYF (e.g introduction of the Aboriginal Case Discussion and Direction Group).

Our Booris, Our Way Review

Implementation Update 2024

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in the care of the Director-General and living in out of home care who have a Cultural Plan completed and endorsed



RECOMMENDATION 12

Pathways to restoration

The Steering Committee recommends that prompts and triggers to considering restoration are mapped and implemented, especially when there has been a positive change in parenting capacity. Restoration needs to use a strengths-based, motivational approach and should consider restoration to family, not just to parents.

Presented by the OBOW Steering Committee May 2019. Agreed in principle by the ACT Government in May 2019.

ACTIVITIES JANUARY-JUNE 2024

From January 2024 – June 2024, two Restoration workshops were conducted with key stakeholders. In attendance were the OBOWIOC Chair and OBOWIOC members; the Public Advocate; the ACT Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People; representatives from ACT Together and Australian Childhood Foundation; Community Services Directorate's Executives and Legal. The focus of these workshops included: foster care processes; ACT Togethers' carer recruitment; practice improvement; the needs of children, parents, and carers; engagement with parties at various stages of the review process and how to be most effective in delivering outcomes.

After feedback from the workshops, the Restoration Taskforce has now been re-named Family Connection and Restoration team. The Family Connection & Restoration (FCR) team have been working directly and indirectly with families, and reviewing the circumstances of parents, children, and placement/s, looking for opportunities for restoration or to strengthen connection with family, community and culture. During this review period, FCR were involved with 26 children and/or young people across various stages of FCR involvement i.e. Desktop Reviews, Restoration Viability Review, Active Involvement, and Review & Monitoring. This is detailed below:

- Desktop Reviews: 16 children reviewed at a desktop review level.
- Restoration Viability Reviews: 2 matters progressed to Restoration Viability Reviews, with FCR involvement with 3 children across 2 families.
- Active involvement (post Restoration Viability Reviews): FCR had an active role / involvement with 4 children post Restoration Viability Reviews, whilst working through independent CFA process.
- Review & Monitoring: 1 child in an active review and monitoring capacity. 12 children post Desktop Reviews 3-6 month review meeting with partner agency.
- Case Management: FCR held case management responsibility 1 child post restoration, and working towards revocation of Child Protection order.

From July to December 2024, recruitment commenced for an Operations Manager and a CYPP3 Practitioner. FCR were successful in recruiting to the role of CYPP3 Practitioner; however, recruitment to the role of Operations Manager has not been successful. With the role of FCR Operations Manager not filled, the FCR team have been reporting directly to Deputy EGM, and utilising key Aboriginal staff in leadership roles such as the Principle Practitioner and Operations Manager, for ongoing cultural advice and practice guidance, until the role is filled.

Our Booris, Our Way Review

Implementation Update 2024

FCR team have continued to conduct fortnightly outreach sessions at Barnardos, to harness a collaborative working relationship, and identify any possible restoration opportunities.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JANUARY-JUNE 2025

The team will consider all feedback from workshops and review current practices and processes. They will work with providers to strengthen recruitment and support for existing carers. Family Connection & Restoration team will continue to work with families, and regularly review the circumstances of parents, children, and placement/s, in order to strengthen children's connection to family, community and culture, while exploring restoration opportunities. FCR will build on existing and new relationships / partnerships with key Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, Barnardos, and OzChild, support partnership building and ensure families are well supported throughout FCR involvement.

RECOMMENDATION 13

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander father inclusive practice

The Steering Committee recommendation that CSD engage with Aboriginal community leadership to develop an improved policy position, practice guides and training that include fathers through the child protection process and makes concrete efforts to engage and maintain engagement with fathers who are incarcerated.

Presented by the OBOW Steering Committee May 2019. Agreed by the ACT Government May 2019.

ACTIVITIES JANUARY-DECEMBER 2024

CYF recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander fathers, partners, grandfathers, and uncles hold pivotal and distinct roles in nurturing the care, development, and cultural identity of children. Regardless of their living arrangements—whether they are primary caregivers, reside with the family, or are geographically separated—these male figures contribute immensely to family well-being and have a profound impact on the lives of their children. CYF continue to embed the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander father inclusive practice guide* to ensure increased opportunities to participate in planning and decision-making in relation to the care and protection of their children where appropriate. This guide is public and can be found at this link: https://www.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0014/2380010/Aboriginal-and-Torres-Strait-Islander-father-inclusive-practice.pdf. There are 5 specific practice areas highlighted in the guide: Recognising strengths and celebrating these; Respecting traditional parenting practices; Change the talk; Linking Aboriginal fathers into safe spaces and appropriate services; and Keeping kids connected to fathers through regular family time.

Training for practitioners about *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander father inclusive practice* will continue to be rolled out to all staff throughout the year as well as part of foundational learning program for new starters.

The ongoing process of embedding father-inclusive practice into existing guidance has been further strengthened by the amendments to the CYP Act, particularly section 10(d): the participation principle. The participation principle outlines CYF's obligation to provide children, young people, their parents and other family members the opportunity to participate in care arrangement decision making. The inclusion of this principle (along with the other elements of the Child Placement Principle) was a key message to staff in material developed to explain the 1 July 2024 Act amendments. In addition, the material directed staff to the existing *Working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families: providing culturally responsive practice* guide. The guide outlines how staff can incorporate the Child Placement Principle into their practice.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JANUARY-JUNE 2025

Father Inclusive Practice training will continue to feature in the CYF training program.

The Practice Recommendation Dashboard, currently in development, will facilitate the monitoring of practice in alignment with this recommendation.

RECOMMENDATION 14

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health assessments

The Steering Committee recommends that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have the appropriate Health Assessment annually to ensure they receive the appropriate preventative and primary health services in the ACT. This should be included as an essential process within the Annual Review process.

Presented by the OBOW Steering Committee May 2019. Noted by the ACT Government May 2019 and agreed July 2020.

ACTIVITIES JANUARY-DECEMBER 2024

The CYF Child and Youth Record Information System (CYRIS) has been updated to enable the recording and monitoring of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Assessments, including the creation of a diary entry to provide staff with an annual “alert” mechanism for upcoming assessments. In addition, the CYF Pediatric Nurse position monitors the CYRIS database and will liaise and work with staff to schedule the annual assessments with an appropriate service.

The Annual Review Report template was amended with prompts for the Case Managers to record the outcomes, recommendations, and progress of the annual health checks. Therefore, the annual health assessment would fall in line with the Annual Review Report reporting period. This would constitute another avenue for the children, carers, and parents to remain informed.

The Monitoring and Review Framework records the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health assessments available under Medicare number 715 which are noted in the Annual Review documents for children and young people in kinship and foster care with Barnardos.

A deep dive has been completed with consultations occurring with:

- Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) and specifically with key representative from National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation who are working in partnership with RACGP to embed the use of the MSB715 assessments with General Practitioners across Australia and reviewing the current templates being used;
- Interstate Child Protection jurisdictions
- current Agencies with full case management responsibilities; and Canberra Health Services.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JANUARY-JUNE 2025

Over the next 6 months CYF will:

- continue to embed the practice of information sharing and recording of completion of Assessments on CYRIS for all children and young people
- increase awareness of MSB715 with Carers to ensure yearly reviews occur and are recorded.
- continue to work with Canberra Health Services to embed a co-ordinated approach for the initial OOHC Health Assessment to include MSB715 health assessment templates within their assessments.
- ensure the CYF Health Liaison Officer regularly meets with CYF Practitioners and NGOs to inform, train and assist with ensuring completion of assessments and recording on CYRIS.
- undertake further work to ensure mechanisms are in place for new providers, as part of the Next Step for Our Kids initiative, have embedded MSB715s within the case plans for children and young people.

RECOMMENDATION 15

Governance and oversight of implementation of recommendations

The Steering Committee recommends that an Implementation Oversight Committee of five members be established to meet at least on a quarterly basis to receive updates from the Directorate and other relevant parties to address progress and ascertain whether the implementation has stayed true to the original intent of the recommendations.

Presented by the OBOW Steering Committee September 2019. Agreed by the ACT Government December 2019.

ACTIVITIES JANUARY-DECEMBER 2024

The OBOWIOC continued to meet monthly to review the implementation of the OBOW recommendations. From August 2024 they were supported by an independent secretariat function provided by Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC).

In 2024, the OBOWIOC developed a Governance Principles Package which was provided to the Minister in April 2024. The Package included a Terms of Reference, Code of Conduct, OBOWIOC Risk matrix and rating, OBOWIOC member skills and experience matrix and OBOWIOC membership skills, subcommittee, and recommendation register. This package was noted by Government in September 2024.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JANUARY-JUNE 2025

The OBOWIOC will continue to operate in partnership with the ACT Government to work towards full implementation of the recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 16

Increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led decision making in child protection

The Steering Committee recommend that every opportunity be taken to engage the child and family in decision making, particularly using conferencing mechanisms to promote shared understanding and facilitate participation of families in decision making for their children.

Presented by the OBOW Steering Committee December 2019. Agreed by the ACT Government July 2020.

ACTIVITIES JANUARY-DECEMBER 2024

CYF continue to embed Family Led Decision Making processes with a focus on discussing and developing strategies that protect the safety and wellbeing of children and young people primarily through bringing together parents, extended family members, the child/young person, CYF and service providers. Family-led decision-making aligns closely with the Child Placement Principles in several key ways. It emphasises prevention by actively engaging families to identify and address safety concerns, seeking alternatives to statutory intervention before more intrusive measures are necessary. The approach fosters partnership and participation by involving both families and services in the planning and decision-making processes, ensuring that decisions reflect the needs and preferences of those directly affected. It supports connection by maintaining children's ties to their kin and community, thereby strengthening their networks. Additionally, it prioritises placement by exploring, identifying, and mapping kinship options, ensuring that children can be placed within their family networks whenever possible.

Another development to highlight CYF's responsibility to use family led decision making was the introduction of the *Charter for Parents and Families involved with ACT child protection services*³. 'Families' includes immediate and extended family, and other people who are important to a child. This encompasses kinship and other culturally defined relationships. The Charter enables parents and families to feel heard and to be involved with decisions about their children as much as possible, while ensuring the safety and wellbeing of children and young people always comes first. It also seeks to improve transparency about the reasons for a child protection action or decision.

The Charter was announced to CYF staff with the expectation it will guide fair and just experiences for the families engaged with child protection. The Charter can be accessed by staff and the public online (along with an easy read short version⁴).

A permanent appointment of the ACT Chief Practitioner was made in August 2024. Leading the Clinical Services and Practice Assurance (CSPA) Branch, the Chief Practitioner guides improvements in CYF services. This includes supporting and advising staff through the amendments of the Act, CYF's system change and reform,

³ https://www.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/2380661/Charter-for-Parents-and-Families-involved-with-ACT-child-protection-services.pdf.

⁴ https://www.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/2380662/Charter-for-Parents-and-Families-involved-with-ACT-child-protection-services-short-version.pdf

Our Booris, Our Way Review

Implementation Update 2024

and delivering the recommendations of the Next Steps for our Kids strategy, including the recommendations of Our Booris Our Way.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JANUARY-JUNE 2025

The focus for the next 6 months and beyond will be on ensuring that key legislative and practice reforms including Family Led Decision Making are embedded into practice.

RECOMMENDATION 17

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Workforce and Leadership

The Steering Committee recommend that CSD focus on attracting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to join CYPS and invest specifically in the recruitment and development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff members into leadership and executive positions.

Presented by the OBOW Steering Committee December 2019. Agreed by the ACT Government June 2020.

ACTIVITIES JANUARY-DECEMBER 2024

In 2024, CSD and the Committee worked together through a series of deep dives to better understand initiatives undertaken to date, new systemic factors influencing the progress of this recommendation and the steps needed to move its progress forward. CSD (with the support of CMTEDD) and the Committee are committed to continue to work together to leverage best practice models and the steps needed to move its progress forward. As CSD recruitment practices are part of Whole of Government policies and practices, CSD is working closely with CMTEDD on these practices.

The table below, CSD Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Workforce Data, provides workforce data across CSD from Quarter 3 2022-23 to Quarter 2 2023-24. Both CSD, overall, and CYF, specifically, continue to exceed the ACTPS employment target of 3% for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, demonstrating a strong and ongoing commitment to workforce diversity.

As of 31 December 2024, there were 35 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff in leadership roles across CSD, reflecting the positive impact of recruitment and development initiatives.

While there were some fluctuations, workforce representation remains resilient. In Q4 of the 2023-24 financial year, 7.1% (87 staff) of CSD's workforce identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, adjusting to 6.4% (79 staff) in Q2. Within CSD, CYF maintained a strong presence, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff making up 9.5% (44 staff) in Q4, slightly decreasing to 8.3% (39 staff) in Q2.

Identified positions also increased overall. CSD had 55 identified positions in Q4, increasing to 60 in Q2, with CYF also increasing from 27 to 31 across the two six-month periods.

Despite these variable shifts, the data overall highlights continued strength in workforce representation well above the ACTPS employment target. Looking ahead at figures for Q3 we can see these numbers will again continue to increase.

Our Booris, Our Way Review

Implementation Update 2024

CSD Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Workforce Data								
Item	Q3, 2022-23 31/03/2023	Q4, 2022-23 31/12/2023	Q1, 2023-24 30/09/2023	Q2, 2023-24 31/12/2023	Q3, 2023-24 31/03/2024	Q4, 2023-24 30/06/2024	Q1, 2024-25 30/09/2024	Q2, 2024-25 31/12/2024
% of CSD staff who are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	5.4%	5.9%	5.9%	6.8%	7.0%	7.1%	7.0%	6.4%
Number of CSD staff who are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	61	68	69	81	84	87	85	79
Number of CSD identified positions	37	46	49	54	54	55	63	60
Number of CSD identified positions that are vacant	Data not available	Data not available	Data not available	Data not available	Data not available	12 21.8%	20 31.7%	16 26.67%
% of CYF staff who are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	6.5%	7.9%	7.7%	9.0%	8.9%	9.5%	9.1%	8.3%
Number of CYF staff who are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	28	35	34	41	42	44	42	39
Number of CYF identified positions	12	20	23	26	26	27	31	31
Number of CYF identified positions that are vacant	Data not available	Data not available	Data not available	Data not available	Data not available	3 11%	10 32%	10 32%

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Attraction, Retention and Development Plan 2024-2026

These workforce achievements are underpinned by diversity and recruitment work undertaken across the directorate for the past few years. Continued growth in our workforce numbers and strengthening of cultural awareness and sensitivity is expected to continue with the progress of commitments under the [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Attraction, Retention, and Development Plan 2024-2026](#) (*the Plan*). CSD is working closely with the Cultural Transformation Branch in CMTEDD on recruitment practices, including leveraging best practice models from other jurisdictions, and also providing cultural support and development to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff.

A dedicated SharePoint page has been established for CSD personnel to find details about the [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Attraction, Retention, and Development Plan 2024-2026](#). This platform will allow tracking of progress towards its objectives and goals, as well as identification of accountable work areas. This will be updated on a regular basis to ensure contemporary information is transparent to the Directorate. Communication with relevant stakeholders regarding required actions and input has commenced, with reporting templates and guidelines provided for consistency. This action is designed to instill accountability and ownership across CSD in achieving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons, rather than being seen as a Corporate Services / Human Resources initiative only.

The following information outlines progress made against action items in the Plan:

Attraction

CSD has made continued progress in attracting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander candidates through various initiatives:

1. Positions descriptions are routinely reviewed to ensure cultural considerations and expectations of cultural awareness are included.
2. Job advertisements are circulated through targeted channels, including:
 - a. multiple paid advertisements with First Nations providers
 - b. working with the CSD Communications and Media team to create social media profiles linking to advertised roles
 - c. writing to relevant staff/Executive encouraging the sharing of advertised vacancies within their professional and social online networks
 - d. writing to ACTPS networks, eg Yarning Brew, sharing advertised opportunities and encouraging them to share the advertisement with their professional and social networks.
3. Engagement with student hubs and participation in career events are ongoing.
4. Targeted recruitment and career advancement support are also in progress, with position descriptions now including expectations of cultural awareness.
5. Assessment and selection practices are being streamlined to create a culturally safe environment. Some examples include:
 - a. providing details of the panel to applicants prior to interview
 - b. offering online or in person options to candidates
 - c. ensuring a yarning physical set up for interviews
 - d. including a welcome/acknowledgement of country
 - e. panel members sharing their history and offering the candidates the opportunity to do the same
 - f. contacting all applicants with feedback after selection processes are finalised.
6. A recruitment strategy and fact sheet to support inclusive recruitment was completed in late 2024. CSD currently reviewing our factsheet in line with draft Whole of Government initiatives.

Our Booris, Our Way Review

Implementation Update 2024

Retention

CSD has made progress in retaining Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff through various initiatives:

7. a cultural capability training model has been proposed and experiential learning opportunities implemented, including workshops such as Bush Food and Medicine, and Traditional Aboriginal Weaving offered in 2024
8. the average length of service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff increased from 4.57 years in July 2023 to 4.8 years by November 2024, indicating positive retention trends
9. efforts to promote connection and support networks have included the promotion of the whole-of-government Yarning Brew and staff-led work to explore establishing a CSD Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff-led network
10. onboarding processes are being reviewed to ensure cultural safety, with a culturally safe lens to be applied in early 2025
11. managers have been consistently encouraged and supported to participate in experiential learning opportunities to foster a culturally responsive workforce, and communications have been undertaken to raise awareness of cultural load
12. work is underway to develop a peer-to-peer mentoring program and individual development plans.

Overall, these actions have contributed to a steady increase in workforce representation and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff.

Development

CSD has continued to progress work to develop the capabilities and careers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff:

13. the CYPP paraprofessional scheme is in progress, with guidelines being negotiated with the Union. The Supervisor Development Program and the Advanced Leadership and Management Program have prioritised Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation, with some staff already engaged. Additionally, work is underway to develop a peer-to-peer mentoring program and individual performance plans
14. workforce data collection has been enhanced through the PowerBI dashboard, aiding in workforce planning and learning and development planning.
15. CSD and CMTEDD are currently piloting a cultural care / safety plan program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, to support staff, with the view to rolling the program across whole of government
16. a graduate placement has been successfully facilitated in an ACCO. Actions to support future Graduate ACCO placement options are in progress with ASD and CMTEDD
17. As of 31 December 2024, there were 35 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff in leadership roles, reflecting the positive impact of these development initiatives.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JANUARY-JUNE 2025

CSD will continue to work with the Cultural Transformation Branch on its workforce strategies. It will also remain committed to continuing to grow, develop and retain its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce through the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Recruitment, Development and Attraction Plan.

RECOMMENDATION 18

Support development of the cultural services team

The Steering Committee recommend that the Cultural Services Team be supported to develop through:

- *Defining specific policies and processes that guide their practice, engagement, responsibility and influence with families and case workers, particularly around decisions and pathways for children;*
- *Assess work level standards and equivalency with case workers (post new EBA levels and standards);*
- *Recognising and valuing specific, in demand skills;*
- *Defining policy and processes for escalation of concerns and for them to be considered in a timely and appropriate manner;*
- *Reviewing employment contracts with a view to ensuring permanency to build a stable team;*
- *Developing mechanisms that enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander team members to be supported in their personal development plans with clear pathways to further professional development, and*
- *Establishing pathways for development and promotion to senior levels within the organisation.*

Presented by the OBOW Steering Committee December 2019. Agreed by the ACT Government July 2020.

ACTIVITIES JANUARY-DECEMBER 2024

Throughout 2024, the Cultural Services Team (CST) maintained an ongoing review of current practices, engagement strategies, and roles in influencing decisions and pathways for children, collaborating closely with families, case workers and community organisations. CST continued to offer cultural advice and remained committed to upholding the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principles, with dedicated expertise in family finding and providing crucial support and guidance to case workers in developing Cultural Plans for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in care.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JANUARY-JUNE 2025

It is acknowledged that there are a number of vacancies across the CST program with a few staff supported through other teams in CYF. In late 2024 the senior Aboriginal staff across CYF came together to develop up options that address for gaps in service given the new reforms in CYF and better integration of services across teams. This work will be progressed in the first six months of 2025.

RECOMMENDATION 19

Appropriate identification, and de-identification, of children

The Steering Committee recommend that the Directorate develop specific guidelines and processes to define their role in relation to the identification and de-identification of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children that makes explicit the limit of the Directorate's role and the need for independent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community oversight and assurance of the process.

Presented by the OBOW Steering Committee December 2019. Agreed by the ACT Government July 2020.

ACTIVITIES JANUARY-DECEMBER 2024

The 'Recording the cultural identity of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children and young people' policy has been in place since October 2022. It reinforces the importance of ensuring early and accurate recording of the identity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait children and young people. A monitoring mechanism is in place to reconcile the number of children and young people in the CSD, Director-General care and confirming appropriate actions have been undertaken with family and the cultural services team.

The amendments to the Act introduced a new provision requiring the identification of whether a child is an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander as soon as practicable (section 360(4)). This provision outlines the importance of maintaining a child's connections to family, culture, and community, recognising these connections as crucial to their best interests, safety, and wellbeing throughout all phases of child protection. It also highlights that early identification is essential for fully implementing all five elements of the Child Placement Principle.

CYF staff have been informed of this new provision in staff guidance which specifically outlines the 2024 Act amendments. This includes referencing the existing CYF policy: *Recording the cultural identity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people* (available to staff on the CYF intranet and publicly online⁵). The Act amendment guidance states CYF staff have a continued responsibility to comply with the existing policy by engaging with a child's family, kinship networks and community as early as possible to determine their cultural identity. In addition, the guidance highlights to staff that this is now a legislative requirement.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JANUARY-JUNE 2025

CYF will continue to update existing guidance to include the legislative requirement of identifying an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child as soon as practicable. This is being completed as part of a larger process to update resources to reflect all of the amendments introduced on 1 July 2024. A related component includes reflecting CYF's legislated responsibility to protect and promote an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child's cultural identity (section 10A(b)).

⁵ https://www.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/2386810/Recording-the-cultural-identity-of-Aboriginal-and-Torres-Strait-Islander-children-and-young-people-policy.pdf

RECOMMENDATION 20

Segmentation and data on kinship care

The Steering Committee recommend that the CYPs adopt the Family Matters definition of kinship when applying the ATSICPP and as a discreet reporting group whenever providing data on kinship care.

Presented by the OBOW Steering Committee December 2019. Agreed by the ACT Government June 2020.

ACTIVITIES JANUARY-DECEMBER 2024

Work continues to include a definition of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kinship carer in the legislation and to strengthen the established hierarchy at section 513 of the *Children and Young People Act 2008*. These elements are being incorporated into the Stage 3 draft Bill, which is currently in progress.

Disaggregated data on kinship care is now provided in the front data section of this report. CSD also provides similar data to a number of National publications, including:

- The [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children](#) report from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). This report presents data on First Nations children in the child protection system. The most recent report was published on 27 February 2025, includes 2022-23 financial year data. This data also includes the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle. Refer to tables 10.4, 10.7 and 10.10.
- The [SNAICC Family Matters Report 2024](#) – an annual publication that tracks progress towards ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people grow up safe, cared for and connected to their families, communities and culture. Refer to “Placement in out-of-home care” section (from pg 32), including Figure 16 (pg 33) and Table 4 (pg 35).

The [Report on Government Services 2025](#), Part F Community Services, [Section 16 Child protection services](#), was released on 30 January 2025, including data for the 2023-24 financial year. This section reports on the performance of governments in providing child protection services across Australia. Refer to Table 16A.22.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JANUARY-JUNE 2025

CSD will continue to improve and expand on the use of this data in reports as listed above.

RECOMMENDATION 21

ACT Indigenous procurement policy

The Steering Committee recommend that future procurement for child protection services must be aligned to the ACT Government Indigenous Procurement Policy as it relates to the funding of specific Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services and must evidence alignment and fulfilment of the ATSICPP in their placement of children, recruitment of carers, assessment of kinship carers and case work.

Presented by the OBOW Steering Committee December 2020. Agreed by the ACT Government July 2021.

ACTIVITIES JANUARY-DECEMBER 2024

Update on Procurement – Children, Young People and Families Panel

During the reporting period the Directorate has progressed procurement activities to establish a new Children, Young People and Families Panel. The Panel will comprise appropriately qualified and experienced non-government organisations including Aboriginal and Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) to deliver statutory and non-statutory services to children, young people, families, and carers. ACCOs have been encouraged to submit a proposal with support provided through the Aboriginal Service Development Branch. ACCO participation has been supported by the Aboriginal Services Development Branch.

The Children, Young People and Families Panel was progressively established from 1 September 2024. Transitional arrangements to the new Panel will take 18 months with the Panel fully operational from January 2026. Panel Refreshes may occur during this period. The transitioning arrangements for the Panel commenced with the extension of current contracts for Barnardos and Uniting for a period of 6 months to 30 December 2024. These extensions allowed the Territory to progressively stand up the new panellists.

Detailed transition planning has commenced and is focusing on contract management, governance, and operations of the new Panel. The Panel will be established through a phased approach to ensure continuity of services and supports for children, young people, families and carers and a smooth transition to Panel operations.

Contract clauses to reflect the Territories expectations for the delivery of services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, families and carers families have been drafted in the contract documentation. Delivery against these clauses will be monitored as part of the Next Steps Performance Management Framework (to be co-designed with Panel Providers and key stakeholders).

Update on ACT Indigenous Procurement Policy

In 2024-25, the ACT Government will undertake a comprehensive review of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Procurement Policy, including by establishing a governance committee, with appropriate oversight, and in consultation with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body.

The review will include consultation with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community to ensure its cultural effectiveness and capacity to maximise opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enterprises and ensure alignment with the commitments under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, including improved engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Our Booris, Our Way Review

Implementation Update 2024

Update on review of ACT Children and Young People (Care and Protection Organisation) Standards 2018

The Regulation, Assurance and Quality (RAQ) Branch in CSD has commenced a review of the ACT Children and Young People (Care and Protection Organisation) Standards 2018 (CAPO Standards). This work has been occurring against the backdrop of the work to introduce the ACT Child Safe Standards (CSS) Scheme. RAQ have mapped the CAPO Standards with the CSS and contract clauses with the view of ensuring the CAPO Standards contain measures to support culturally safe environments and practices for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people and measures to assess cultural competency.

The RAQ Branch is planning consultation activities with key stakeholders including CAPO providers, the *Our Booris, Our Way* Implementation Oversight Committee and the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People Commissioner.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JANUARY-JUNE 2025

Details on the Children, Youth and Families Panel establishment and operations will continue to be provided to the Committee into the future.

OBOWIOC will have the opportunity to participate in the consultation on the ACT Indigenous Procurement Policy and the review of the ACT Children and Young People (Care and Protection Organisation) Standards 2018.

RECOMMENDATION 22(A), (B) & (C)

Quality of case work and allocation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children under A Step Up For Our Kids

22 (A) The Steering Committee recommend that there be a framework developed and implemented for the formal monitoring and supervision of the quality of case work being conducted by ACT Together in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children on long term orders.

22 (B) The Steering Committee recommend that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children that move to long term orders, from January 2020, must be managed by Child and Youth Protection Services and not transferred to ACT Together until a framework is in place to monitor the quality of casework

22 (C) the Steering Committee recommend that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who are fostered by ACT Together staff, must be managed by the Directorate and that this transition be completed by June 30, 2020.

Presented by the OBOW Steering Committee December 2019. Agreed by the ACT Government July 2020.

ACTIVITIES JANUARY-DECEMBER 2024

The Monitoring and Review Framework (MRF) has been developed and implemented. The MRF process continues to be facilitated and monitored through the monthly contract management meetings.

Ongoing Children, Youth and Families review, and joint moderation of cases are undertaken on cohorts and reported on a quarterly basis, in line with the MRF process. This further ensures that culturally enriched and informed plans, support all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families while they are in care. Confirming the fostering status of ACT Together staff is a permanent agenda item discussed during the monthly contract management meeting with CYF and ACT Together.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JANUARY-JUNE 2025

Children, Youth and Families will continue to review and undertake joint moderation and practice discussions for children and young people. Reports are prepared on a quarterly basis, in line with the MRF process. This further ensures that culturally enriched and informed plans support all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families while they are in care. The MRF has commenced and will continue expansion to include new panel providers as they become active. Further consideration will be undertaken to review how this tool could be rolled out across other providers.

RECOMMENDATION 23

Wreck Bay

The Steering Committee recommends that CSD undertake a proper consultation process with the Wreck Bay community about an appropriate service and support model including family and early support, and child protection issues that promotes better outcomes for the community. The timeframes associated with this consultation should be determined by the Wreck Bay community.

Presented by the OBOW Steering Committee December 2019. Agreed by the ACT Government July 2020.

ACTIVITIES JANUARY-DECEMBER 2024

Negotiations between the ACT Government and the Commonwealth continue around development of a new Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to support ACT service delivery arrangements in the Jervis Bay Territory. In the meantime, the ACT Government continues to collaborate with the Commonwealth on opportunities to improve service delivery under existing structures.

The ACT Government is also providing support to the Commonwealth as it considers any role of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Commissioner in the Jervis Bay Territory.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JANUARY-JUNE 2025

CMTEDD will continue to lead discussions for the ACT Government with the Commonwealth to progress a new MoU. Timeframes to progress actions remain dependent on agreement between the Commonwealth and ACT Governments. Opportunity to accurately identify service provision arrangements under a new MoU would support ACT's service delivery functions including in providing family and early support, and child protection services to promote better outcomes for the Jervis Bay Territory community.

RECOMMENDATION 24

Appoint a project team to implement recommendations and monitor practice change

The Steering Committee recommends that the ACT Community Services Directorate form a dedicated implementation team with skills in project management, community engagement, and outcomes measurement to plan, engage community and implement recommendations in both Child and Youth Protection Services and ACT Together. Staffing of such a team must include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This implementation team would provide quarterly reports to the Implementation Oversight Committee.

Presented by the OBOW Steering Committee December 2019. Agreed by the ACT Government July 2020.

ACTIVITIES JANUARY-DECEMBER 2024

The Our Booris Our Way Implementation team continues to provide support to Directorates, the Our Booris Our Way Implementation Oversight Committee and the OBOW Secretariat team in relation to the implementation and oversight of recommendations.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JANUARY-JUNE 2025

In 2025 the OBOW Implementation and Secretariat team will drive to finalise the development of a Partnership Agreement between OBOWIOC and CSD. It is the first of its kind in the ACT and sets out an improved way of working together to ensure the full intent of the recommendations are met and reflected in meaningful, lasting change within CSD and the child protection system.

RECOMMENDATION 25

Data collection and analysis

The Steering Committee recommends the Directorate establish formal key performance indicators in collaboration with the Implementation Oversight Committee and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, for measuring the reduction of children entering the system, improvements in their experience in the system, and the provision of pathways to restoration and exiting care. These key performance indicators can then be formally and independently evaluated from this baseline in five years.

Presented by the OBOW Steering Committee December 2019. Agreed by the ACT Government July 2020.

ACTIVITIES JANUARY-DECEMBER 2024

Work has continued on refining the content and processes to ensure timely and accurate data delivery to OBOWIOC. A Standard Operating Procedure and Quality Checklist have been developed and are being tested and refined. Further engagement with the OBOWIOC is planned to jointly consider future iterations of the reports. The outcome of joint work will inform the enduring work program of reporting and it is anticipated the next report iteration would take in the vicinity of 6-10 months to develop and embed the associated processes.

Reports have been produced and shared regularly with the OBOWIOC between February and December 2024, with some delays in some months. Quality assurance activities have proven to be effective resulting in consistently produced reports for the consideration of the Minister and the OBOW Committee.

Steps have been taken to review the Queensland Child and Family Commission *Principle Focus* report for the development of a similar report in the ACT. Work has commenced on the production of a reporting dashboard focusing on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people interfacing with and experiencing out of home care. The dashboard is expected to be finalised in 2025.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JANUARY-JUNE 2025

Ongoing reporting for the Committee will be reviewed to ensure it is fit for purpose and focuses on supporting the Committee to fulfil its remit for overseeing the implementation of the OBOW recommendations.

A schedule of meetings/workshops is to be developed with CYF, the data team, and representatives from the OBOWIC to co-design the data dashboards.

RECOMMENDATION 26(A)

Adoption and permanency arrangements

The Steering Committee recommends that following the community consultations that have occurred, the Directorate move to formalise the policy position in legislation and remove the possibility for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children being adopted.

Presented by the OBOW Steering Committee December 2019. Agreed in principle by the ACT Government July 2020.

RECOMMENDATION 26(B)

Enduring Parental Responsibility orders

The Steering Committee recommend that EPR (Enduring Parental Responsibility) only be available for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kin and carers, and this be clarified in a formal policy position from the Directorate.

Presented by the OBOW Steering Committee December 2019. Noted by the ACT Government July 2020.

ACTIVITIES JANUARY-DECEMBER 2024

CYF made a commitment to the OBOWIOC that no new EPR matters would progress in relation to non-Aboriginal carers until further policy work to establish agreed safeguards to culture and connection had been completed.

An interim policy for Enduring Parental Responsibility (EPR) for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in non-Aboriginal care arrangements is in place and outlines the mandatory conditions which must be met by a carer who is non-Aboriginal, in seeking support from the Director-General to progress an EPR application on behalf of an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander child. There are four stages of the assessment process to reflect the significance of this decision and to date there have been no new matters progressed.

In December 2024, CSD received SNAICC's Final Report: Independent cultural advice to the Community Services Directorate to advance implementation of the Our Booris, Our Way Review recommendations 26(a) and 26(b). CSD is working through the report to inform the proposed amendments to the *Children and Young People Act 2008* in the Stage 3 draft Bill and any potential future amendments to the Adoption Act.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JANUARY-JUNE 2025

CSD will continue work through the SNAICC report and consider proposed amendments to adoption in the Adoption Act or the Children and Young People Act 2008. When a government position is formalised, this will be communicated alongside any other implementation and engagement steps required.

RECOMMENDATION 27

Active referrals and follow-up

The Steering Committee recommend that when referring a child or family to a program or service and where the family agrees, the case worker accompany the family to the new service to introduce them onto the service. The case worker should ensure that families have practical supports in place to access these services. The case worker must then monitor the delivery of services to ensure that they are of a high quality, appropriate and delivered to families.

Presented by the OBOW Steering Committee December 2019. Agreed by the ACT Government July 2020.

ACTIVITIES JANUARY-DECEMBER 2024

CYF are continuing to embed active referrals across all teams including the First Nations Family Support team. This process ensures that when referring a child or family to a new program or service, and with the family's consent, the case worker is advised to accompany them to introduce them to the service. This process, known as a "warm referral," involves a pre-discussion with the family to agree on the suitability of the service. A meeting is then scheduled at a convenient time for all parties involved, with the case manager attending alongside the family and any identified support persons to ensure a smooth and comfortable transition.

In addition to facilitating the referral process, case workers are responsible for ensuring families have practical supports in place to access these services. This includes assisting with transportation, covering financial costs associated with the service, providing alternative accommodation if needed, and offering support for groceries and clothing. These practical supports are integral to ensuring that families can fully engage with the services provided.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JANUARY-JUNE 2025

Work will continue to develop an implementation framework that will support, strengthen, and monitor practice required to continue to meet a number of practice related recommendations (including recommendation 3, 16, 27, 28). This work will be led by the Chief Practitioner from the new Clinical Services and Practice Assurance (CSPA) Branch within Children, Youth and Families.

As part of the reform process in CYF and the establishment of the CYF Panel Providers in 2024/25, the newly established Referrals Team within the Information, Resources and Referrals Unit was established in February 2025. This unit will provide referrals through a phased implementation starting with referrals to the CYF Panel Providers, consisting of Sustaining Families in the first instance and then expanding to other services as they commence service delivery including Kinship and Foster care services, Post Order Support services, and contact and transport services.

RECOMMENDATION 28

Family connection practices

The Steering Committee recommend that family connection, otherwise referred to as contact, must be revisited for each child currently subject to an interim, final short term, or final long-term order. Family connection arrangements must be aligned to contemporary, evidence-based practice to support growth of resilient family relationships. Family connection should be frequent, facilitate high quality relationship building and be in natural settings to facilitate the growth and maintenance of family relationships.

Presented by the OBOW Steering Committee December 2019. Agreed by the ACT Government July 2020.

ACTIVITIES JANUARY-DECEMBER 2024

CYF are committed to ensuring that family connection is frequent and facilitates high quality relationship building to facilitate the growth and maintenance of family relationships. These arrangements are tailored to align with the stage of CYF involvement and the specific goals outlined in the Care Plan and Case Plan. For instance, if the Care Plan aims for both restoration and concurrent permanency planning, contact arrangements will serve dual purposes: maintaining important connections while supporting the restoration process. Similarly, when the focus of case management is on family preservation, restoration, permanence, or transition, contact will always prioritise maintaining these vital connections. When organising contact arrangements for a child, case managers must carefully consider the child's needs and preferences. This includes assessing factors such as the child's age and the geographical distance between the child and their parent or significant person. Based on this assessment, case managers work with family member and carers to determine the appropriate frequency, location, and duration of contact.

The Family Connection & Restoration (FCR) team have been working directly and indirectly with families, and reviewing the circumstances of parents, children, and placement/s, to strengthen Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander children's connection to family and culture, while exploring restoration opportunities. During this review period, FCR were involved with 26 children and/or young people across various stages of FCR involvement i.e. Desktop Reviews, Restoration Viability Review, Active Involvement, and Review & Monitoring. Through our work, FCR have been working hard to ensure family connection occurs regularly and consistently, to allow children to build strong connections and familial bonds with their birth parents, siblings, and extended family. This is done to prevent further disconnection from family and culture, and aims to strengthen the quality of these important relationships, now and into the future.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JANUARY-JUNE 2025

The new CYF Practice Framework, Signs of Safety, emphasises the importance of family connection practices. As Signs of Safety is implemented, staff guidance will be aligned with this framework and legislative changes to strengthen family connection practices.

Appendix A – Recommendation 9 and 9A – updates on early support programs from CSD, EDU and ACT Health

Community Services Directorate

Next Steps first 4-year Action Plan

An increase in access to early support programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families is being delivered through the [Next Steps Strategy](#) and [Action Plan](#).

During the reporting period the Directorate has progressed procurement activities to establish a new Children, Young People and Families Panel. The Panel will comprise appropriately qualified and experienced non-government organisations including Aboriginal and Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) to deliver statutory and non-statutory services to children, young people, families, and carers. Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations have been encouraged to submit a proposal with support provided through the Aboriginal Service Development Branch. ACCO participation has been supported by the Aboriginal Services Development Branch.

The Panel was established from August 2024 to provide the service packages of Sustaining Families; Kinship Care; Foster Care; After Care and Targeted Support Services including Alternate Care, Supported Contact and Transport Arrangements and Functional Family Therapy – Youth Justice. Detailed transition planning has commenced and is focusing on contract management, governance, and operations of the new Panel. The Panel continues to be established through a phased approach to ensure continuity of services and supports for children, young people, families and carers and a smooth transition to Panel operations.

The Sustaining Families Package will deliver earlier support for families, strengthened preservation and diversion from the statutory child protection system.

ACT 3-year-old Screening Pilot

Work has begun to investigate the delivery of a 3-Year-Old Screening pilot. A project group has been established with representatives from Canberra Health Services, Community Services Directorate, ACT Health, Education, and Transport Canberra and City Services (TCCS). The group has held two meetings and is reviewing best practices for the project plan and evaluation.

This action relates to Action 4 in the Phase 2 Children and Young People Action Plan of the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement: investigating the feasibility of developmental checks to make sure children have the best possible start to their education. The pilot aims to enhance early childhood development by identifying developmental, behavioural, and health needs in 3-year-old children, with a focus on supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. It is proposed the program will be implemented in 2025. Prior to this, consultations will take place with key stakeholders, families and care providers to ensure the approach taken is culturally appropriate.

CSD is working in partnership with other ACT Government directorates to test the feasibility a 3-year-old development check in early childhood education and care settings. In 2024, a key decision was made to invite Koori preschools to participate in the pilot. The 3-year-old check will help to identify Aboriginal and Torres

Our Booris, Our Way Review

Implementation Update 2024

Strait Islander children with developmental concerns and link them with appropriate services and supports earlier.

Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence responses

In 2024, the ACT Government renewed contracts with 4 Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) and Aboriginal-led organisations who provide a range of community-led family and sexual violence services. The 4 organisations are Yhurwun Bullan (formerly Clybucca Dreaming), Sisters in Spirit Aboriginal Corporation, Yeddung Mura, and WhISPERS Softball Corporation. This extended funding arrangements from September 2024 until June 2026 and increased total funding for these programs to over \$4 million between 2023-2026. They are funded through the *National Partnership Agreement on Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence Responses 2021-2030 (FDSV NPA)*, which is a matched funding arrangement between the Commonwealth and ACT Government. This investment is increasing the capacity of accessible and appropriate supports for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families experiencing family violence.

Yerrabi Yurwang has continued to deliver the Nara-Gana-Wali Strengthening Families Program. Reporting indicated the program is providing effective and holistic support for Aboriginal women and children impacted by family violence.

These programs have improved outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families by reaching individuals affected by violence who may not engage with mainstream services. They also have contributed to the restoration of children to the care of their mothers through early intervention and prevention efforts to disrupt intergenerational experiences of DFSV.

Also in September 2024, the Domestic Violence Prevention Council Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Expert Reference Group (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ERG) prepared *The Long Yarn* report to prevent and respond to family and domestic violence experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT. *The Long Yarn* makes important updates to the 12 recommendations in the *We Don't Shoot our Wounded* report released in 2009. *The Long Yarn* calls for a greater focus on addressing structural racism, cultural safety in all services, healing, and working with men and boys while emphasising the need for holistic supports. The ACT Government has committed to working with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to continue to implement recommendations from *The Long Yarn*.

In 2025, the ACT Government is working with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ERG to determine priority recommendations to *The Long Yarn*, and work towards a formal Government Response.

The ACT Government receives funding through the FDSV NPA to pilot innovative responses to people using domestic and family violence. Some of this funding will be used to support behaviour change for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have used or are at risk of using domestic and family violence. The ACT Government will fund Yeddung Mura Aboriginal Corporation and Kids First Australia to adapt and deliver the Caring Dads Program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dads living in the ACT.

The Caring Dads program is an evidence-based behaviour-change program that helps fathers understand the impact of their behaviour by harnessing their motivation to be good dads. This will be the first time in Australia the Caring Dads program has been specifically adapted for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander fathers.

Throughout 2025, the ACT Government will continue consultation on the ACT Domestic, Family, and Sexual Violence Strategy, with guidance from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ERG and DFSV ACCOs a priority in delivering a Strategy which meets the needs and expectations of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

Our Booris, Our Way Review

Implementation Update 2024

The ACT Government receives funding through the National Partnership Agreement on Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence Responses 2021-2027 to pilot innovative responses to people using domestic and family violence. Some of this funding will be used to support behaviour change for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have used or are at risk of using domestic and family violence. The ACT Government will be supporting Yeddung Mura Aboriginal Corporation and Kids First Australia to adapt and deliver the Caring Dads Program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dads living in the ACT. The Caring Dads program is an evidence-based behaviour-change program that helps fathers understand the impact of their behaviour by harnessing their motivation to be good dads. This will be the first time in Australia the Caring Dads program has been specifically adapted for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander fathers.

ACT Education Directorate

Three-year-old preschool program

The delivery of the free Three-year-old preschool program has continued, and at Quarter 4 2024, the program was being delivered through 80 providers representing 141 ECEC services. In Q4 3213 children were enrolled, and of these 54 children (1.7%) were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. In Q4 89% of programs were being delivered by a degree-qualified early childhood teacher or by educators working towards an early childhood teacher qualification; 46% of early childhood teachers have registered for ACT Teacher Quality Institute (TQI) accreditation, and 11% of programs were delivered by educators with a diploma qualification.

As reported in the 2023-24 Annual Report, there has been an improvement in four-year-old preschool enrolment numbers for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children indicating that the work under Set up for Success is yielding positive results.

Koori Preschool and Early Entry to preschool

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children can also attend Koori Preschool and Early Entry to preschool meaning they can access up to 30 hours per week of quality early childhood education before starting formal school. This supports Priority 2 of the Early Childhood Care & Development Policy Partnership: Increasing the base entitlement to 30 hours per week of subsidised Early Childhood Education and Care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 0–5.

EDU continued the support for the delivery of free early childhood education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander three-year-olds at Wreck Bay's Gudjahgahmiamia Multifunctional Aboriginal Community Service Early Learning Centre (MACS ELC). This supports progress towards the National Agreement on Closing the Gap and supports the Wreck Bay Aboriginal community by providing greater access and equity in early childhood education and care (ECEC) service offerings and fostering better long-term educational outcomes for children in the Jervis Bay Territory. Two early childhood community coordinators continue to support a community of practice between Gudjahgahmiamia and Jervis Bay School to foster purposeful relationships between the settings to help children transition smoothly and improve sharing of expertise between educators.

Whilst there are currently no ACCOs delivering ECEC in the ACT, the Education Directorate has expanded the provision of Koori Preschool. From 2024, an additional 66 places are available for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander three and four-year-old children, increasing available places from 110 to 176.

Our Booris, Our Way Review

Implementation Update 2024

Development of professional learning for culturally inclusive and responsive early childhood educational practices

Between July and December 2024, EDU continued its partnership with Community Early Learning Australia (CELA) to develop professional learning for culturally inclusive and responsive early childhood educational practices. CELA worked deeply with the ACT's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and an Expert Panel to inform the development of the professional learning, to ensure it reflects local culture and meets the community's needs now and into the future, particularly around cultural safety and integrity. Expert Panel members participated in their capacity as Aboriginal community members with knowledge or understanding of early childhood and/or the needs of families. They were remunerated for their time, acknowledging the cultural load they may have experienced whilst participating and to emphasize the value of their contribution. The group concluded at the end of 2024.

To accompany the professional learning package, EDU engaged LaToya Kennedy, a proud Ngunnawal and Waradjuri woman of Kalari Art, to produce a digital artwork. The artwork titled 'Sharing Knowledge' depicts the strong connections and learning pathways our educators provide and represents equality, respect, opportunities, trust and growth between our educators and our growing babies and children.

Connection to Country excursions for preschool children were also made available from Term 4 2024 to Term 2 2025 at Birrigai Outdoor School. These excursions provide preschool children the chance to connect with and explore Ngunnawal Country and develop their knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, being and doing.

EDU partnered with Yerrabi Yurwang Child and Family Aboriginal Corporation for the delivery of the Aunty Agnes Shea Scholarship program. The scholarship program aims to increase the qualifications for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff working in Koori Preschool and ECEC services and aims to attract Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members to join the early childhood profession.

The Education Directorate is also exploring delivering a scholarship program in partnership with an ACCO, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the ECEC sector to increase their qualifications. It is anticipated that the scholarship program will be established in the second half of 2024.

The Education Directorate is supporting ECEC settings through the provision of Anti Bias Project Approach online learning modules as part of the Set Up for Success Early Childhood Strategy. The online modules support ECEC settings to explore topics relating to Anti Bias approaches in Early childhood.

These modules assist ECEC educators to examine their practice through a lens of Anti-Bias, to create learning environments that challenge bias and promote diversity. Anti-bias education helps young children develop positive attitudes towards diversity, equity, and inclusion, laying the foundation for respectful and empathetic relationships later in life.

The Anti-Bias resources were promoted to ECEC educators on 25 June 2024.

The Education Directorate, through the Targeted Support Team, provides consultative support to schools regarding children who are in out of home care. This service includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who are part of the care system. Part of the role of the liaison is to build capability and understanding of school staff on how best to support children and young people who are in the various types of out of home care i.e. residential, kinship and emergency care placements.

Our Booris, Our Way Review

Implementation Update 2024

ACT Health Directorate

Watson Health Precinct – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Alcohol and Other Drug Residential Rehabilitation Facility

The joint resubmission of the Development Application (DA) for the Watson Health Precinct, including the youth facilities and for the Winnunga Nimmityjah facility was submitted on 20 June 2024. ACT Health continues to work with Winnunga Nimmityjah to finalise the design and construction planning. The Development Application (DA) for the Watson Health Precinct has been a protracted process due to legislative changes to tree protection and bushfire mitigation requirements. ACT Health Directorate (ACTHD) have collaborated with representatives from Winnunga Nimmityjah to address these requirements. Development Application approval was received for the whole precinct in December 2024. Deposited plans under development as part of the Watson site subdivision process.

- ACTHD continues fortnightly coordination meetings with Winnunga Nimmityjah to progress the final design and construction planning for the delivery of the Watson Health Precinct.
- Handover of cleared site at Watson Health Precinct to Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health and community services.
- Commencement of Winnunga Nimmityjah construction project at Watson Health Precinct.
- Continued coordination with representatives of Winnunga Nimmityjah as adjacent projects progress through construction.
- Finalisation of Watson Health Precinct subdivision.
- Finalisation of construction grant funding agreement for an alcohol and other drug residential rehabilitation facility.

Kindy Health Checks

The Kindergarten Health Check (KHC) data collection program continues. ACT Health continue discussions with the ACT Education Directorate regarding sharing data with schools to assist with program planning, including those with specific programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

ACT Health provided data for annual reporting for the CYP lens 2024 refresh, which included parent-reported fruit & vegetable intake, physical activity levels, BMI & social, emotional & behavioral wellbeing which included proportions applicable to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Kindergarten population.

Involvement of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Partnerships team has been prioritised for the KHC Governance Committee and discussions regarding potential evaluation projects. The Education Directorate, Canberra Health Services, Community Services Directorate, and Capital Health Network are all represented on the Governance Committee.

As part of the KHC Data collection program, there are ongoing discussions around data sharing with the Education Directorate and/or individual schools. There are also ongoing discussions and planning especially around evaluation, with specific consideration to be given to work needing to consider data related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, starting with appropriate community engagement with specific considerations of data sovereignty.

A 5-year report for the KHC between 2019-2023 will be released in 2025-26.

Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm

Implementation of recommendations from the 2023 Review into governance supporting the NBHF development process commenced.

Our Booris, Our Way Review

Implementation Update 2024

Agreement was reached on core Community members moving forward to support the strategic project to progress critical work on ACCO and residential services. Community members are now considering, and providing direction on, how to deliver a community wide EOI process to bring on board diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation to move the project forward.

From January to June 2024, 2 programs were run at the NBHF where approximately 30 participants took part in formal program activities. Participants journeys are all different and the impact of the NBHF is hard to quantify at the individual level. Although all NBHF participants are adults, the nature of the holistic support offered by NBHF staff ultimately benefits participants, their children, and their families.

The ACT Government has engaged sector experts, Ngaimpe Consulting, for 12 months to support NBHF readiness for Community-control and later residential services. Ngaimpe Consulting started work with the NBHF in early February. ACTHD, in partnership with CSD, are developing a transparent and open process to seek an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation, or consortium, to work in partnership ACT Government to transition the NBHF to Community-control.

A range of supports are in place to support ACCOs generally. This includes CSDs recently released ACCO Establishment and Expansion Fund (AEEF). The AEEF aims to support new and existing ACT ACCOs to build organisational capacity and capability to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across the ACT. The AEEF is designed to support the growth and sustainability of ACCOs delivering services within the ACT, consistent with ACT Government commitments under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap Priority Reform 2: Building the Community-Controlled Sector, and the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement 2019-2028.

For the period 1 Jan to 30 June 2024, ACTHD funding for the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm was:

- Net Operating Expenses \$711,994.00

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Youth Mental Health Service

The Yulang Report highlighted significant gaps in mental health service provision for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. To address this need, the 2024-25 ACT Government Budget has funded one full time equivalent (FTE) position for two years to coordinate a community-led project to co-design a new specialist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led mental health service for children and young people that will support self-determination, agency, and choice. This project is the first step in addressing the need to strengthen the mental health service sector to deliver more culturally responsive mental health services by and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

A project officer was recruited towards the end of 2024 and project planning is currently underway.

Perinatal Mental Health – Try-Test-Learn Pilot initiatives

The ACT Health, Perinatal Mental Health project is progressing Try-Test-Learn initiatives. These are part of commitments under the National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement Bilateral Schedule and Goal 5 of the ACT Health Directorate Maternity in Focus: First Action Plan 2022-2025 that aims to improve access to mental health and wellbeing support for individuals and families through increased early access to services and supports.

Planning and implementation of two Try-Test-Learn initiatives has commenced to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mothers and their babies:

Clybucca Dreaming – Intensive Case Management Support Try-Test-Learn:

Our Booris, Our Way Review

Implementation Update 2024

Clybucca Dreaming has been engaged to commence a Try-Test-Learn pilot initiative to provide an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Intensive perinatal Case Management Support Program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mothers in the ACT. The Clybucca Dreaming Initiative has been successfully supporting clients in the perinatal period since June 2024.

It has supported clients in culturally appropriate and holistic ways, including in the provision of Elder and Cultural Connection, support for clients to engage independently with social services, and provision of practical supports to meet client's perinatal needs. Initial reporting for the Clybucca Dreaming Initiative has indicated that most clients reported improved mental health and wellbeing and reduced mental health vulnerabilities. Options are being considered for further evaluation of the Clybucca Dreaming Try-Test-Learn Initiative. Subsequent learnings will further inform future research and evaluation considerations.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Perinatal Mental Health Research Try-Test-Learn:

On 28 March 2024 Elders, Leaders and esteemed community members were invited to an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Perinatal Mental Health Research Proposal design workshop. Workshop attendees shared stories and reflections on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health and provided insights and ideas to formulate the design of a Try-test-learn research initiative. The research initiatives aims to identify opportunities for service system improvements to better meet the perinatal mental health needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mothers. Procurement processes to progress the research initiative have commenced and are expected to be finalised before the end of 2024.

Following the March 2024 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Perinatal Mental Health Research Proposal design workshop, planning for implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Perinatal Mental Health Research Try-Test-Learn has continued.

Culturally appropriate initiation and implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Perinatal Mental Health Research Try-Test-Learn will inform processes to ensure the best identification of opportunities for service system improvements to better meet the perinatal mental health needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mothers and birthparents.

ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention, Postvention and Aftercare Service

The ACT's culturally appropriate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suicide prevention, aftercare, and postvention services commenced operating in 2023. This service is being delivered by Thirrili, an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service and operates from a site in Phillip. Thirrili has worked closely with the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to co-design a model of case management that incorporates a range of service elements and will eventually offer a range of supports across the lifespan. At this stage, Thirrili's focus is on providing advocacy support to individuals and developing strong relationships with relevant ACT organisations to support people across the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, including children and young people. Thirrili continues to strengthen its relationships with other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services and involvement in youth focused areas such as Headspace and Bimberi Youth Justice Centre.

Thirrili will continue to provide advocacy support and work to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have access to culturally safe services in prevention, postvention, and aftercare. Thirrili is also continuing to build its workforce to reach more vulnerable community members in the future. It is seeking to ensure the service is fully staffed, including the appointment of an ACT Coordinator.

