

2025

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

ELEVENTH ASSEMBLY

**Our Booris, Our Way Review
Six-monthly
Implementation Update
January-June 2025**

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

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Our Booris, Our Way Review

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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.

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Abbreviations

ACCA	Aboriginal Child Care Association
ACCO	Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation
AMC	Alexander Maconochie Centre
ATSICPP	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle
CAPO	Care and Protection Organisation
CPLAS	Care and Protection Legal Advocacy Service
CPP	Children's Placement Principle
CSP	Children's Services Program
CST	Cultural Services Team
CYF	Children, Youth and Families
CYFSP	Children, Young People and Family Services Program
CYP Act	Children and Young People Act 2008
CYPS	Children and Youth Protection System
CYRIS	CYPS Client Information System
DDTS	Digital, Data and Technology Services
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
EPR	Enduring Parental Responsibility
FGC	Family Group Conferencing
FNFST	First Nations Family Support Team
HCSD	Health and Community Services Directorate
JACS	Justice and Community Safety
MBS	Medical Benefit Scheme
NBHF	Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm
OBOWIOC	Our Booris, Our Way Implementation Oversight Committee
OBOW	Our Booris, Our Way
PDT	HCSD CYPS Practice and Development Team
RFP	Request for Proposal
SB-HSC	Strategic Board Human Services Committee
SNAICC	Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care

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Minister Foreword

Minister Michael Pettersson



The Our Booris, Our Way review was a powerful call to address the unacceptable over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in the statutory system and across the service spectrum. Its message was clear: decisions must be led by community, families must be supported to stay strong, and services must be culturally safe. That vision continues to guide everything we do.

Our work here in the ACT, guided by Our Booris, Our Way and the Next Steps for Our Kids strategy is part of a bigger national commitment to ensuring children and young people across Australia grow up safe, connected, and supported in their family, community, and culture. Our approach reflects the principles and actions of Safe and Supported: the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children, which focuses on early intervention, family preservation, and culturally safe care.

The work through Our Booris, Our Way relates directly to the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement and to the National Agreement on Closing the Gap and commits us to clear actions to deliver on the priority reforms and Target 12. By 2031, we must reduce the rate of over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out of home care by 45 per cent. These strategies and goals are not separate. They work together to create a system where children grow up strong in culture, connected to family, and supported by services that respect their identity.

This work is starting to see real progress. The ACT is one of only two jurisdictions in Australia to reduce the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care. The rate has dropped from 14 in 2023 to 11.7 in 2024, the lowest since 2016. This change is happening because of practical steps like earlier family support, stronger kinship care, and new culturally informed pathways. Teams like the First Nations Family Response and Engagement Team, and partnerships with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, are making a real difference for families.

But we know there is still a long way to go. As of June 2025, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children still make up 30 percent of those in care. Our focus ahead is clear: keep families together wherever it's safe, provide help earlier, and make sure our system is transparent and accountable. We will continue working closely with the Our Booris, Our Way Implementation Oversight Committee, community leaders and community controlled organisations to make these changes stick.

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Looking ahead, our ambition is bigger than reducing numbers. We want to build a system that truly reflects the strength and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families—a system where culture is celebrated, where children thrive in safe and loving homes, and where decisions are made in partnership with community. By staying true to the intent of Our Booris, Our Way and the commitments in our ACT and national strategies, we can create lasting change for generations to come.

I want to thank the members of the Our Booris, Our Way Implementation Oversight Committee for their leadership and commitment. Together, we are delivering on the original vision of Our Booris, Our Way and building a future where every child has the best chance to grow up strong, connected, and supported.

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Chairperson Foreword

Natalie Brown

Our Booris, Our Way implementation continues to fundamentally challenge the persistent overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the ACT's child protection system. This is not merely a bureaucratic challenge; it is a systemic injustice that demands reform rooted in First Nations governance.

While we continue to navigate the friction of working within—and at times against—existing structures, this reporting period has been defined by some progress driven by the principles of Aboriginal self-determination.

The formal signing of the Partnership Agreement in March 2025 between the Our Booris, Our Way Implementation Oversight Committee (OBOWIOC) and the former Community Services Directorate (CSD), now Health and Community Services Directorate (HCSD) is a foundational covenant for ongoing collaboration and shared decision-making. It enshrines our collective responsibility to ensure that the full implementation of recommendations leads to outcomes defined by us and implemented in partnership with the state.

As a committee tiring under what we see as a responsibility to drive the achievement of full implementation, we faced several challenges following the signing of this agreement. Young people who had been part of the system were lost. We didn't want to see this repeated, but we know that not all children and families are seeing the impact of the work, and we know that's not good enough.

Despite the challenges, the data, as well as some qualitative reporting, indicate some meaningful shifts. Whilst this decline is encouraging, it reinforces the need to accelerate our work to fully address the overrepresentation crisis.

Embedding culturally safe practice across this system requires continuous vigilance. Looking ahead, a dashboard has been designed to track, monitor, and hold the system accountable using our own measures of success. Information will be more transparent to community via a public facing dashboard. Importantly, our calls for Indigenous data sovereignty is also progressing.

Although this report highlights progress in policy and structure, we know that the true measure of success is not found in documents, but in the lived experiences of our families. We must ensure that the aspiration of policy is matched by the reality of practice on the ground. This work requires sustained effort and the consistent rebuilding of trust that continues to be systematically destroyed.

I extend my deepest gratitude to my fellow Committee members—Charmaine Barratt, Sharon Williams, Barb Causon, Robyn Martin, Justin Church, and Helen Wright (ATSIEB representative)—for their unwavering commitment to our Booris. Our collective focus remains resolute: ensuring every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child grows up safe, strong, and connected to their culture, family, and community, free from the threat of removal.



Executive Summary

While good progress is occurring, 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. The recommendations of Our Booris, Our Way aim to improve the system and address the issues within it that drive this overrepresentation.

This ninth progress report shares the ACT Government's efforts between January and June 2025 to fully implement the recommendations of the review, along with next steps planned for the next six-month period. Key highlights in this six-month period include:

Signing of a Partnership Agreement between the OBOWIOC and HCSD

In March 2025, a Partnership Agreement was signed between the Our Booris, Our Way Implementation Oversight Committee (OBOWIOC) and the Health and Community Services Directorate (HCSD).

The Partnership Agreement details how the full implementation of the Our Booris, Our Way (OBOW) recommendations will be driven by ongoing collaboration, the principles of shared decision making and Aboriginal self-determination to improve cultural, physical and socioemotional health and wellbeing outcomes of families within the child protection system.

Establishment of the First Nations unit

Following consultation with the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, a number of teams have been combined into one unit under the newly appointed Acting Senior Director, First Nations. This unit combines teams that implement culturally safe practice at specific points on a family's continuum when allocated for support from Children, Youth and Families (CYF).

New referral process for Family Group Conferencing

A new referral process has been designed and implemented for the Family Group Conference team to receive direct referrals from the Cultural Planning team following any entry into care. This ensures that there are more referral pathways to an FGC than previously, and that practice in accordance with the Placement Principle continues to be incorporated by ensuring the family are part of the decision making and journey.

Access to support for kinship carers

There has been significant positive feedback from community and carers about the vital role of the First Nations Kinship Liaison Officer and an identified resource will be redirected to add an additional First Nations position within the CYF Kinship Team.

The carer support plan template was updated and simplified during this period based on carer feedback and to align with Signs of Safety implementation. The Kinship Team continues to embed carer support plans into practice.

To further support carers, Carers ACT launched the Foster and Kinship Carers Resource Hub on 7 July 2025. This online resource provides a centralised, accessible platform to support the vital work of foster and kinship carers in the ACT.

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Establishment of the ACT Aboriginal Children's Forum (AACF)

The ACT Aboriginal Children's Forum (AACF) was established and brings together ACCOs, service providers and ACT Government officials that work with Aboriginal children, young people and families to help improve outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people in the Territory.

The AACF aims to improve changes to systems, policies, and practices so that Aboriginal children and young people grow up strong, safe, and connected to their culture, families, and communities through consistent interpretation and application of policy and practices across the service system.

First Nations Children in Care (FNCIC) dashboard

Work is nearing completion 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 in the ACT.

HCSD has developed the first iteration of the First Nations Children in Care (FNCIC) dashboard. This high-level data seeks to demonstrate, using HCSD activity data, the relationship between the changed approach in service provision and out of home care outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. The first iteration is being tested before it will be presented to the OBOWIOC to assist with tracking and monitoring recommendation implementation.

Establishment of referrals team

A new referrals team was established in March 2025 to align with the new service system, specifically targeting early intervention for children and families and preservation supports. Currently there are 3 providers, with a further 2 expected to commence in the latter half of 2025.

The team currently consists of a Director, Team Leader, a Practitioner and an Administrative Support Officer, with further recruitment on foot.

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Recommendation Progress as of June 2025

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 10 (A): Access to supports for kinship carers Rec 10 (B)(I) & (II): Kinship care assessment process	Rec 7: Aboriginal And Torres Strait Islander Children's Commissioner	Rec 8 (B): Access to legal representation and advocacy	Rec 15: Governance and oversight of implementation of recommendations
Rec 17: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce and leadership	Rec 11 (A) & (B*): Improve quality and monitoring of cultural plans	Rec 13*: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander father inclusive practice	Rec 16: Increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led decision making in child protection
Rec 18: Support development of the cultural services team	Rec 12: Pathways to restoration	Rec 14*: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health assessments	Rec 22 (B): Children moved to CYPs
Rec 23*: Wreck Bay	Rec 19: Appropriate identification, and de-identification, of children	Rec 21: ACT Indigenous Procurement Policy	Rec 22 (C): Fostered by ACT Together managed by CYPs
Rec 24: Appoint a project team to implement recommendations and monitor practice change	Rec 20: Segmentation and data on kinship care	Rec 22 (A): Framework for ACT Together case work	Rec 27: Active referrals and follow-up
	Rec 25: Data collection and analysis	Rec 26(A): Adoption and permanency arrangements Rec 26(B): Enduring parental responsibility orders	Rec 28: Family connection practices
Key High Focus Medium Focus Monitoring Phase			

Introduction

This ninth progress report outlines the actions taken between January and June 2025 as part of the ACT Government's ongoing commitment to implementing 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 Out of Home Care system in the ACT.

This was to be a systemic review into the child protection system and to provide a better understanding of how the government can reduce the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in care, ensure children remain connected to community and culture and support parents and families to safely care for their children.

The OBOW Steering Committee was a wholly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander committee responsible for co-designing and leading the review in line with the ACT Government's commitment to self-determination.

The [OBOW Report](#) made 28 recommendations and 8 sub-recommendations (totaling 36 recommendations) to the ACT government over a 2-year period with the final report presented to the government in December 2019.

The [ACT Government](#) has made a firm commitment to fully implement the recommendations of the OBOW Report in collaboration with the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

In June 2020, the OBOWIOC was established to monitor the implementation of recommendations and provide a cultural lens to guide the systemic reform necessary to meet the expectations set out in the report. The OBOWIOC meets monthly to consider the progress made against implementation.

During this 6-month period OBOWIOC have continued to meet with the HCSD, Justice and Community Safety (JACS) and Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development (CMTEDD) directorates at monthly meetings where progress has been reported on and discussed.

This report provides an update on key activities and outcomes against each recommendation during the reporting period and describes the planned focus of directorates in the next six months.

Our Booris Today

What the data tells us

As of 30 June 2025, there were 220 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in out of home care.

Of the 220 children and young people:

- 113 children and young people (51 per cent) were on Long-term Orders (with care residing with the Director General)
- 45 children and young people (20 percent) were on Long-term Orders (3rd Party Parental Responsibility)
- 39 children and young people (18 per cent) were on Short-term orders (< 2 years)
- 19 children and young people (9 per cent) were on Interim Orders or Emergency Actions
- 4 children and young people (2 per cent) had no care and protection orders in place (over 18 post care supported placements)¹
- No children and young people were on Voluntary Care Arrangements.

Table 1 – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in out of home care, by order type as of June 2019 and June 2025

	As at 30 June 2019		As at 30 June 2025	
Order Type	247		220	
Long term orders (with DG)	177	72%	113	51%
Long-term Orders (3rd Party Parental Responsibility)	28	11%	45	20%
Short-term orders (< 2 years)	23	9%	39	18%
Interim Orders or Emergency Actions	14	6%	19	9%
No Care and Protection orders (over 19 post care-placements)	5	2%	4	2%
Voluntary Care Arrangements	0	0%	0	0%

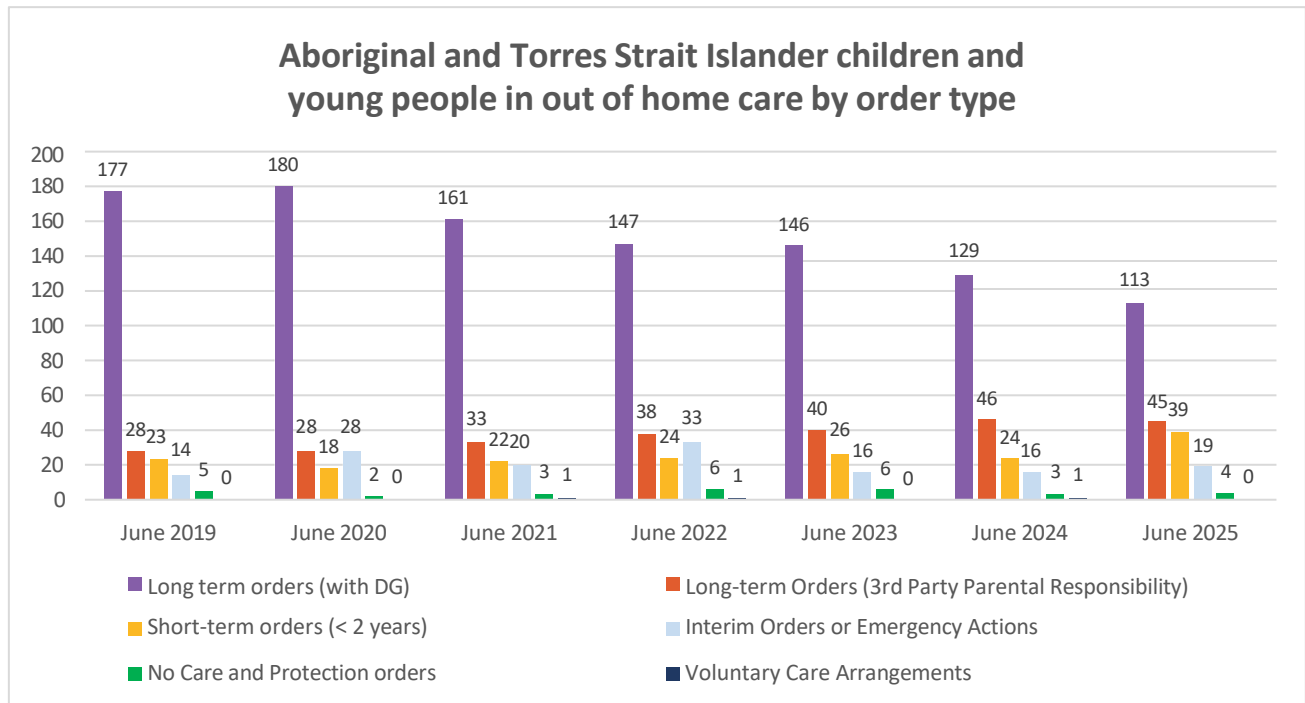
Data Source: The Child and Youth Record Information System (CYRIS) -25 Quarterly Snapshots Unpublished HCSD data

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

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Figure 1 – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people on Child Protection orders, by order type from June 2019 to June 2025



Data Source: Unpublished HCSD data The Child and Youth Record Information System (CYRIS) - Quarterly Snapshots

Of the 217 placements of children and young people living in out of home care as of 30 June 2025:

- 109 (50 per cent) were a kinship care placement (please see Figure 3 for a breakdown of kinship care);
- 44 (20 per cent) were a foster care placement;
- 18 (8 per cent) were an Ex-Kinship Enduring Parental Responsibility placement;
- 29 (13 per cent) were an Ex-Foster Enduring Parental Responsibility placement;
- 7 (3 per cent) were a residential care placement; and
- 10 (5 per cent) were Other placement types.

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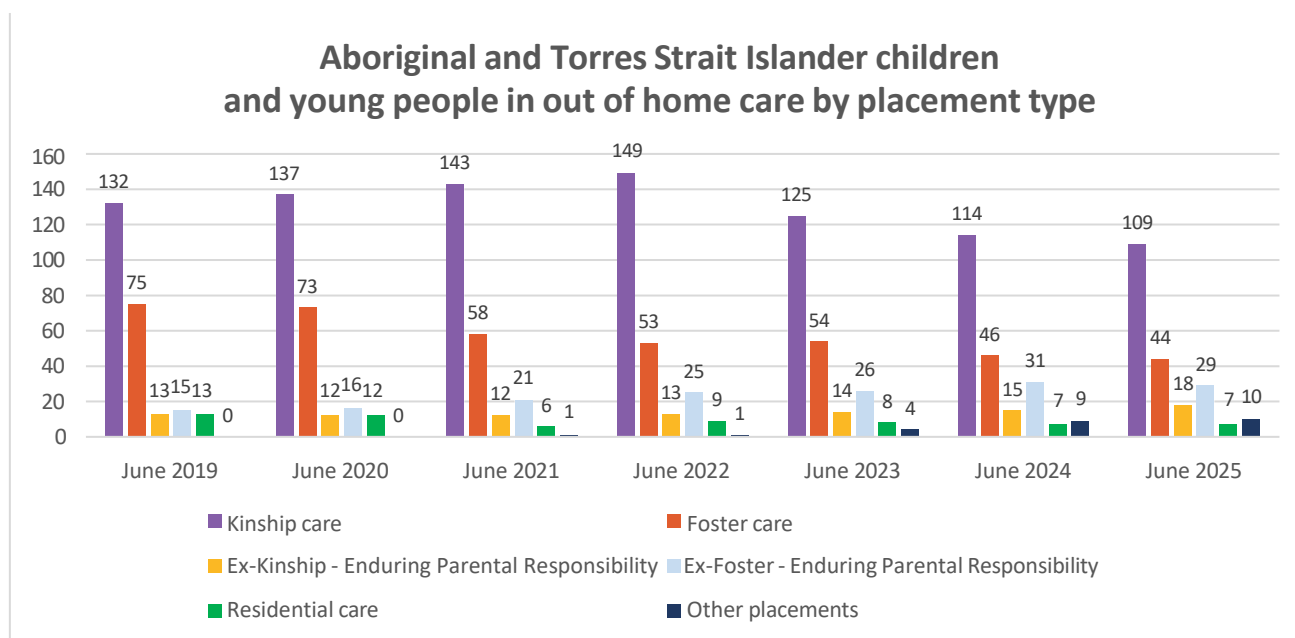
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Table 2 – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in out of home care, by placement type as of 30 June 2019 and 30 June 2025

	As at 30 June 2019		As at 30 June 2025	
Placement Type	248		217	
Kinship Care	132	53%	109	50 %
Foster care	75	30%	44	20 %
Ex-Kinship - Enduring Parental Responsibility	13	5%	18	8 %
Ex-Foster – Enduring Parental Responsibility	15	6%	29	13%
Residential care	13	5%	7	3 %
Other Placements	0	0%	10	5 %

Data Source: The Child and Youth Record Information System (CYRIS) - Quarterly Snapshots

Figure 2 – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in out of home care, by placement type as of 30 June 2019 and 30 June 2025



Data Source: Unpublished HCSD dataThe Child and Youth Record Information System (CYRIS) - Quarterly Snapshots

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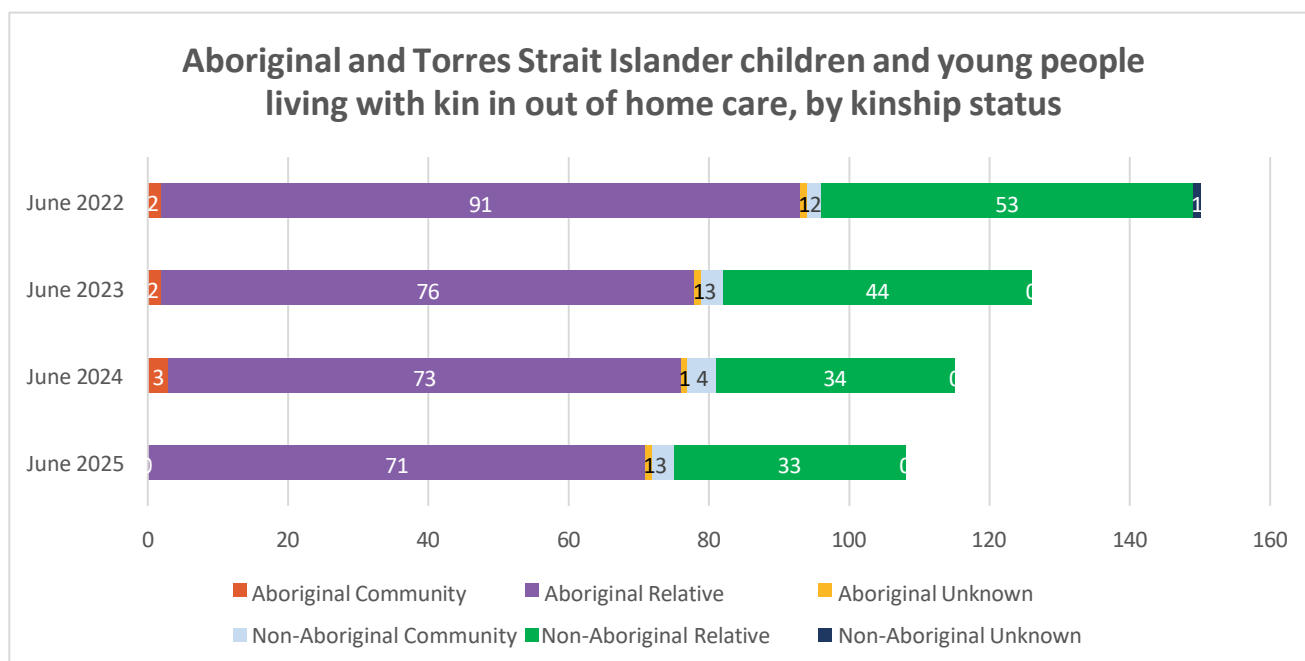
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Figure 3 – Carer Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status of children and young people in kinship care from June 2022 to June 2025

	As at June 2022		As at June 2025	
Carer Status	150		108	
Aboriginal Community	2	1%	0	0%
Aboriginal Relative	91	61%	71	66%
Aboriginal Unknown	1	1%	1	1%
Non-Aboriginal Community	2	1%	3	3%
Non-Aboriginal Relative	53	35%	33	31%
Non-Aboriginal Unknown	1	1%	0	0%

Data Source: The Child and Youth Record Information System (CYRIS) - Operational Data²

Figure 3 – Carer Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status of children and young people in kinship care from June 2022 to June 2025



Data Source: The Child and Youth Record Information System (CYRIS) - Operational Data²

² Content is based on data in CYRIS at particular points in time. Due to its operational nature, data within CYRIS is subject to change.

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-JUNE 2025

In response to Recommendation One of the OBOW Report, "allocation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's cases to experienced and culturally intelligent workers", the First Nations Family Response and Engagement Team (First Nations Team) was designed and implemented by Senior First Nations staff in accordance with the CYF commitment to implement self-determination in the Child Protection setting and deliver best practice culturally safe support to families.

The team has grown significantly since its inception in 2023, which has led to the Family Group Conferencing Team, Family Finding Team, Family Connection and Restoration Team, and the Appraisal and Support Response team's all joining together in one unit under the newly appointed Acting Senior Director, First Nations. This unit combines various teams that implement different forms of culturally safe practice and specific points on a family's continuum when allocated for support at CYF. This was specifically done following consultation with community to address their feedback of needing First Nations oversight across the floor at CYF, and not just at the front end.

The unit staffing currently comprises of the acting Aboriginal Senior Director, 2 acting Aboriginal Operations Managers, 2 Aboriginal Team leaders, 7 Aboriginal Practitioners, and 10 non-indigenous Practitioners. The blend of non-Indigenous Practitioners ensures the community have a say in whether they receive Practitioner support from a First Nations person, due to the small geographical area of this community and to assist with navigating cultural shame.

The unit also continues to facilitate the various Cultural Panels internal to CYF, such as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Emergency Action Panel, Care Pathway Panel, Case Discussion and Direction Group, and the informal Yarn Time sessions. These 4 forums are chaired and convened by senior Aboriginal staff; and have direct oversight of endorsing entry into care, ongoing court related orders and direction, and culturally safe consultation. The 4 forums ensure the implementation and adherence to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (ATSICPP); by working with referring practitioners to ensure they align their practice with the 5 core elements of the Principle.

As a result of the considered work of the unit, the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children entering care is on a downward trend, as is the overall number of children in care. This trend is supported by a decline over the past 12 months in the number of First Nations children subject to Emergency Action. Importantly, the 4 forums have a core focus on ensuring safety in care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait

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Islander children and young people, by focusing on the 5 elements and ensuring Restoration/Reunification is the primary goal in all matters.

With respect to data, from January 2025 to June 2025, the First Nations Family Response and Engagement Team provided culturally safe support in the following:

- Support Response – 49 First Nations families with 101 children and young people.
- Appraisal – 43 families with 94 children and young people.
- Out of the total 195 children and young people, 8 entered care:
 - 5 children who entered care were placed with and remain with Kin.
 - 1 child was placed into foster care due to a change in the placement circumstances
 - 3 children who entered care were placed on Shared Care Orders and reside with their mother.
 - 1 child was restored back to their parents.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JULY-DECEMBER 2025

For the next 6 months, the focus of the teams that contribute to recommendation 1 will be to:

- Advertise vacant positions and obtain First Nations and non-Indigenous Practitioners.
- Continue to implement the Signs of Safety Framework into everyday practice.
- Continue weekly Group Supervision and monthly practice days for learning and development.
- Continue providing culturally safe services to the community.

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 Principles (ATSICPP) within their practice.

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

ACTIVITIES JANUARY-JUNE 2025

Previously, CYF has engaged SNAICC to deliver mandatory training to staff on all 5 elements of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Placement Principle (ATSICPP). CYF are now in the process of designing, and will facilitate, its own localised training to CYF staff on embedding the ATSICPP.

For this reason, there was no training provided by SNAICC to embed the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Placement Principle (ATSICPP) between January and June 2025.

The new training will reflect and complement that provided by SNAICC, though it will use local examples and content. The training will also be peer reviewed by First Nations staff within CYF and SNAICC has agreed in principle for review the CYF developed training and act as a critical friend in providing feedback.

The training will continue to include:

- 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;
- 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

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- Aboriginal child-rearing practices
- Promoting self-determination and empowerment
- Collaborative practice and partnerships
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reflection Flower

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JULY-DECEMBER 2025

The identified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander training officer role is currently being recruited to on a contract basis, whilst the substantive officer is on secondment.

The training will be developed in collaboration with CYF First Nations staff and SNAICC.

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-JUNE 2025

CYF has continued ongoing review of existing practice guidance to reflect embedding of ATSCIPP in the Act and that it must guide CYF decision making. CYF is also ensuring that any new guidance or supporting documents developed reflects these changes and upholds this principle from the outset.

CYF continues to offer training to staff that supports the embedding of the ATSCIPP.

The ATSCIPP and Family Led Decision making are featured throughout the below training, so these trainings will be reiterated again in recommendation 16. Below is the number of times these sessions ran.

- Cultural Development Program (2 sessions)
- Case Management (1 session)
- A Practical Guide to Emergency Action (1 session)
- Decision Making (1 session)
- The new decision review process – Internal Merits Review/External Merits Review (6 sessions)
- Advanced Care Team Workshop (4 sessions)

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JULY-DECEMBER 2025

The recruited Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander training officer will be tasked with reviewing the Cultural Development Program for required updates, as well as contributing to other training run by CYF to ensure it continues to incorporate the ATSCIPP.

CYF will continue to ensure that any new or reviewed practice guidance reflects 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 ATSCIPP's application in all of CYF's processes.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Universal access to Family Group Conferencing

That the Directorate provides (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-JUNE 2025

As per the stated intention in the last reporting period, an internal CYF roadshow was conducted with renewed messaging on the importance of Family Group Conferencing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families engaged with child protection.

This included communication to all internal teams at CYF, with new poster designs created and displayed across the floor, consultation sessions weekly on the CYF surfboards for staff to attend, less formal consultations, and the review of the team policy and procedures.

As part of the policy and procedure review, a new referral process was designed and implemented. This involves the Family Group Conference team receiving direct referral from the Cultural Planning team following any entry into care, to ensure all families have a quickened referral process for family yarning about their children's cultural and familial needs. It also involves the Family Group Conference Team directly emailing all staff internal to CYF at 6-month intervals to question whether Practitioners have considered a referral in-line with self-determination for the family.

This new process will ensure there are more referral pathways to an Family Group Conference than previously, and that practice to ensure family are part of the decision making journey are in accordance with the Placement Principle.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JULY-DECEMBER 2025

For the next 6 months, the focus of the team that contributes to Recommendation 4 will be to:

- Advertise vacant positions and obtain First Nations Practitioners.
- Continue to implement the Signs of Safety Framework into everyday practice.
- Fully implement the new referral process for safe family yarning.
- Continue monthly practice days for learning and development.
- Continue providing culturally safe services to the community.

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-JUNE 2025

The ACT Government has explicitly enshrined the ATSICPP in legislation. It continues to monitor the effectiveness of the legislative reforms that have already been made, including through feedback from the community, to inform future amendments where required.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JULY-DECEMBER 2025

The ACT is currently considering this and other feedback in identifying its next steps to modernising the CYP Act within this term of Government. More consultation will be required to guide future changes.

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 in 2020.

ACTIVITIES JANUARY-JUNE 2025

Development of an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation Strategic Framework

The Aboriginal Service Development branch (ASD) worked with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body (ATSIEB) to develop the Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO) Strategic Framework. The progression of this work was undertaken with the ATSIEB member with portfolio responsibility for community services. Following the announcement of the Select Policy Subcommittee of Cabinet of Closing the Gap which has been established to focus on and coordinate major priorities under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap and the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement 2019-2028, the development of this Framework will now be considered as part of this Select Policy Subcommittee of Cabinet. This is due to the Framework having a broader remit than community services. This Subcommittee is chaired by the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs and all Ministers are standing members. Other attendees may be invited to attend by the Chair in consultation with the Chief Minister, including members of ATSIEB.

Support for organisations to gain Care and Protection Organisation registration

ASD has provided advice to the Human Services Regulator to support strengthening the Care and Protection Organisation (CAPO) Standards to embed cultural security throughout the Standards, rather than having cultural safety as a standalone requirement. This work is ongoing and informed by discussions with ACCOs and other CAPO registered service providers.

ASD has explored and continues to explore CAPO registration with other ACCOs to build a greater understanding of individual organisations aversions to becoming a CAPO registered organisation. These concerns have been fed back to the Regulator and are supporting the work to update the Standards and associated processes with the aim of engaging more ACCOs as CAPO registered organisations. For example, a concern being the amount of extra administration imposed on an organisation if they are CAPO registered, or the myth around an organisation must be prepared to be a crisis service if they are CAPO registered.

Update on the 2024/25 budget funded process to develop a Peak

ASD is progressing what a peak-like body looks like for the ACT community-controlled sector in genuine partnership with the ATSIEB and has had several discussions on how to progress this work. The ATSIEB have advised the progression of this work will take place following the outcome of the ATSIEB review. In the interim, ASD explored key learnings across other jurisdictions in standing up peak-like bodies and following advice from ATSIEB, this work will progress in the later part of 2025.

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IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JULY-DECEMBER 2025

ASD will continue to work in partnership to support the operation of the Children Young People and Families (CYPF) Preferred Providers Panel and has advocated for the streamlined ACCO pathway to remain open during panel refreshers. Further, ASD is canvassing with Procurement ACT the development of a best practice guide to support the intent of the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Procurement Policy across the broader ACT Government in line with Priority Reform 2 and 3 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

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-JUNE 2025

JACS has completed this recommendation to establish the role of an ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People Commissioner.

The Commissioner reports annually to community in the Commissioner's annual statement and attends meetings of the OBOWIOC to provide updates on the Commissioner's work.

From January to June 2025, JACS continued to provide support to the Commissioner's Office to assist with administration and to provide policy advice where required.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JULY-DECEMBER 2025

JACS has commenced work with the Commissioner's office and Digital Canberra on an ongoing project to develop a cost-effective case management database solution for the Commissioner's office which will continue through 2025.

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-JUNE 2025

CYF remains committed to ensuring that all new and updated practice guidance reflects families' right to have an advocate or support person involved at any stage of engagement with CYF. Key resources — including the [Advocacy and Support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Families practice guide](#) and the [Working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Families: Providing Culturally Responsive Practice guide](#) — support staff to explain this right to families and to facilitate advocacy when requested.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JULY-DECEMBER 2025

ASD will continue to work in partnership with ACCOs to support relationships across the human services system to enable strong and connected advocacy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families involved with child protection. This includes continuing to work in partnership to support the operation of the CYPF Preferred Providers Panel and continued support for ACCOs who may wish to join the panel through panel refreshers.

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-JUNE 2025

JACS and the Aboriginal Legal Service (ALS) have finalised a variation to the Agreement to incorporate specifics concerning additional funding secured via the 2024 budget process. The ALS continue to operate the Care and Protection Legal Advocacy Service (CPLAS).

CPLAS continues to employ 4 non-Indigenous staff (3 FTE), the team comprising 2 fulltime solicitors and 2 parttime paralegals (job sharing). Although CPLAS does not currently have Aboriginal staff, it operates within the ALS ACT team, where 50 percent of staff are Aboriginal. This environment supports culturally safe practice with all CPLAS team members having completed ALS Cultural Competency and trauma-informed training. The office includes culturally safe spaces for clients and has a full-time, co-located Aboriginal Family Violence team member who provides cultural guidance and community insights as needed.

There was a slight decrease in the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people using the service (70 as compared to 81 in the previous 6 months).

There has been an increase in the number of community legal and/or education activities and reform activities undertaken in this reporting period, although there remains no community legal/education resources developed.

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	Stage of referral	Total
Community Organisation	5	Early assistance	6
Internal	5	Final orders	0
Other Legal Service	4	Other	7
Self	5	Removal	6
		Variation	0
Total	19	Total	19

Referral numbers are lower this period, likely due to increased client awareness of ALS services. Many clients are returning for assistance as short-term care and protection orders expire, resulting in repeat engagements rather than new referrals.

How many referrals were not proceeded with, why the referral was not proceeded with and to where the referral was on-referred

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Reason referral wasn't proceeded with	Total	Referred-to	Total
Conflict	1	Legal Aid ACT	4
Outside scope of program	1	Legal Aid NSW	1
NSW Jurisdiction	1	Total	5
Other	2		
Total	5		

The total number of matters opened during the Second Review Period and the type of each matter

Service Category	Service Type	Matter Category	Total
Representation	Other Representation	Early assistance	1
Representation	Other Representation	Other	1
Representation	Other Representation	Removal	1
Representation	Court/Tribunal	Early assistance	3
Representation	Court/Tribunal	Final Orders	1
Representation	Court/Tribunal	Other	1
Representation	Court/Tribunal	Removal	5
Discrete Assistance	Legal Advice	Variation	1
Total			14

Note, 'Other' service type matters include assistance with family violence orders related to care and protection proceedings or related family dispute resolution services where care and protection authorities are involved.

Total matters by matter category

Matter Category	Total
Early assistance	4
Final Orders	1
Other	2
Removal	6
Variation	1
Total	14

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

Matter Category	Total
Early assistance	20
Final Orders	20
Other	24
Removal	39
Variation	19
Total	122

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Evaluation of the service continues to be through data and progress reporting from ALS to JACS.

Although client surveys are now digitised, no responses were recorded during this period. The CPLAS team has identified several barriers to collecting feedback from care and protection clients, including limited email access—particularly for clients in correctional facilities—and reluctance to engage with surveys following court proceedings.

ALS will explore options to improve client feedback capture in the next reporting period to address this requirement, recognising that the current survey approaches have not been effective.

Work on the ALS proposal was finalised during this period. At the same time, a range of other initiatives under *Next Steps for Our Kids* have been developed, with a similar aim to ensure that families feel supported and have information at an early stage, with the goal to divert children, young people and families from the child protection system altogether. These initiatives now constitute a diverse suite of options, which focus on provision of non-adversarial support and information to build relationships of trust. Options have included working with ACCOs to provide this support and information in a culturally appropriate and safe way.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JULY-DECEMBER 2025

For the next 6 months, the focus of Recommendation 8(b) will be:

- Provision of Continuing Legal Education (CLE) resources - development of targeted early intervention CLE resources regarding “Family Law and Child Protection Intersections”.
- Exploring alternative methods for collecting client feedback – e.g. reviewing the survey design and timing of distribution; trialling alternative approaches such as phone follow-ups and in-person interviews to better capture client experiences.
- Further work on exploring appropriate options regarding early legal support will be undertaken, with a view to determining which is the best fit for the local ACT environment.
- Consideration regarding the early referral proposal by ALS will continue, noting careful balancing to ensure adequate

RECOMMENDATION 9 & 9(A)

Recommendation 9: Early support programs available

Community feedback has strongly advocated for the need for 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 in June 2020.

ACTIVITIES JANUARY-JUNE 2025

HEALTH AND COMMUNITY SERVICES DIRECTORATE – COMMUNITY SERVICES STREAM

HCSD is working in partnership with other ACT Government directorates to conduct a 3-year-old development check pilot in early childhood education and care settings and Koori preschools. The 3-year-old check will help identify Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children with developmental concerns and link them with appropriate services and supports earlier.

Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence responses

The 2025-26 ACT Budget, announced in June, allocated \$6.022 million over 3 years from 2026-27 for ACCOs and Aboriginal-led organisations to provide a range of community-led responses for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families experiencing family violence. The budget investment continues 4 domestic, family and sexual violence (DFS) programs delivered by Yhurwun Bullan, Sisters in Spirit Aboriginal Corporation, Yerrabi Yurwang and WhISPers Softball Corporation. This longer-term funding was announced for these organisations more than a year before existing contracts end on 30 June 2026 to support service continuity and sustainability. The budget also includes \$600,000 for a community and professional 'violence is not our way' education program to encourage victims and perpetrators to seek help, and emphasise positive role models for men, women and children.

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The budget initiatives deliver on the ACT Government's election commitment to implement recommendations from The Long Yarn report. The Long Yarn is a community-led report, authorised by the Domestic Violence Prevention Council Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Expert Reference Group (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ERG), updating the 2009 We Don't Shoot Our Wounded report. 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 DFSV supports. As of 30 June 2025, progress has been made against all 12 recommendations in The Long Yarn report. The ACT Government recognises significant further work is needed to fully deliver on the recommendations.

The ACT Government will release a formal Government Response to The Long Yarn report in the second half of 2025.

To support Aboriginal women and children impacted by family violence, Yerrabi Yurwang continued to deliver the NaraGanaWali Strengthening Families Program. Yerrabi Yurwang's contract was extended to June 2026 to bring it into line with the current funding period of the other ACCOs. An independent, Aboriginal-led evaluation is planned for 2025-26. This evaluation is intended to be a strengths-based, transparent and solution-oriented process identifying ways the ACT Government can further strengthen and support the growth of successful programs.

The ACT Government is also directing funds to support interventions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander fathers who have used or are at risk of using domestic and family violence. Yeddung Mura (Good Pathways) Aboriginal Corporation is receiving funding through the Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence Responses 2021-27 Federation Funding Agreement to work with Kids First Australia to adapt and deliver the Caring Dads program. Caring Dads is an evidence-based behaviour-change program run over 17 weeks through group-based interventions. The program helps fathers understand the impact of their behaviour by harnessing their motivation to be good dads. Yeddung Mura will be the first ACCO in Australia to design and deliver an adapted version of the Caring Dads program specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander fathers.

HEALTH AND COMMUNITY SERVICES DIRECTORATE – HEALTH STREAM

Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm (NBHF)

Strategic Project

While the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm (NBHF) has been operated by ACT Government since 2017, significant work has progressed in collaboration with Community and across ACT Government directorates to support the transition of the NBHF to a community-controlled organisation, and support later self-determined transition to a residential service. Acknowledging that services delivered by Community-controlled organisations achieve better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait peoples, families and Communities.

Sector experts, Ngaimpe Consulting, started working with NBHF staff and HCSD in early February 2025 to support NBHF readiness for community-control and later residential services.

Through listening to community, it was clear the transition to community-control must occur prior to residential services. HCSD is developing an open grant process to seek a community-controlled organisation to work in partnership with, to ensure the effective and sustainable transition.

Our Booris, Our Way Review

Implementation Update January-June 2025

Operations

Operational Project

From January to June 2025, 2 programs were run at the NBHF where approximately 40 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. As of June 2025, the NBHF has delivered 21 programs.

NBHF Funding

The allocated operational budget for 2024-25 was \$1.75 million.

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

- Construction has continued on the facility.
- The former ACT Health Directorate had fortnightly coordination meetings with Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health and Community Services.
- Work continued on the subdivision of the site, to create two blocks, one of which will be transferred to Winnunga Nimmityjah.

Kindergarten Health Check

The Kindergarten Health Check (KHC) physical health check and data collection program for 2025 is underway and will continue until the end of 2025.

Representatives from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Partnerships team are key members of the KHC Governance Committee and are a part of the team considering planned evaluation projects for the program.

An initial discussion has occurred between the Office of General Practice and Primary Care team and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Partnerships team in consideration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's data, specifically regarding appropriate community engagement with data sovereignty - the interpretation of data and provision of the accompanying narrative.

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

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Youth Mental Health Service Model

A project officer commenced in late January 2025.

Project planning and initial conversations with key stakeholders were undertaken during this period.

Clybucca Dreaming Intensive First Nations Perinatal Case Management Support

Clybucca Dreaming's first performance report for the Try-Test-Learn initiative for Intensive First Nations Perinatal Case Management Support demonstrated the service has delivered some clear benefits for First Nations women through its comprehensive, culturally sensitive care, which addresses not only immediate health concerns, but also the broader social, cultural and emotional needs of participants.

Funding for a further year of this project was allocated in June 2025.

Our Booris, Our Way Review

Implementation Update January-June 2025

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

Thirrili continue to provide the ACT culturally appropriate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suicide prevention, aftercare, and postvention service.

The service continues to advocate for individuals and strengthen partnerships with ACT organisations, with a key activity being the monthly community gatherings, and through their co-hosting of the biannual Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suicide prevention and mental health community forums.

The previously reported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Perinatal Mental Health Research Try-Test-Learn is currently paused. Potential further work in this space will be informed by other initiatives as needed.

ACT EDUCATION DIRECTORATE

The ACT Government continues its focus on increasing equity and access to early childhood education for 3 and 4-year-old children, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

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 2 days a week, 48 weeks per year, of free quality early childhood education for priority three-year-olds – those experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage. As of Quarter 3 2025, over 1400 children had been referred with 138 children being Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.

EDU continues to support Wreck Bay's Gudjahgahmiamia Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services Early Learning Centre to provide free places for 3-year-old children. Pedagogical and transitional support is provided by EDU's Early Childhood Community Coordinators.

In March 2025, EDU launched 3 key early childhood initiatives under *Set up for Success* that support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural inclusion and responsiveness:

- The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Culturally Inclusive and Responsive Early Childhood Educational Practice free professional learning program embeds an ACT early childhood sector-wide approach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culturally responsive practices that leverages the Koori Pre Cultural Safety Framework and Curriculum. Since it was launched, over 210 educators have enrolled in the program.
- The Aunty Agnes Shea Early Childhood Scholarship Program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators is being delivered in partnership with Yerrabi Yurwang Child and Family Aboriginal Corporation. It aims to increase the qualifications of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators, to elevate the delivery of a quality preschool program grounded in cultural safety. The program offers financial and wrap-around support for up to 40 individuals to undertake a Certificate III, Diploma or Degree qualification in early childhood education. Since the launch of the program, 1 scholarship has been awarded.
- Connection to Country excursions at Birrigai Outdoor School which are free, have continued to be offered to four-year old preschool groups from long day care services. The excursions offer children and educators the opportunity to connect with and explore Ngunnawal Country and Ngunnawal perspectives through storytelling, natural art, campfire cooking, guided bush walks and self-directed exploration.

Our Booris, Our Way Review

Implementation Update January-June 2025

EDU continues to be a co-representative for the ACT on the national Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership (ECCDPP) alongside the HCSD. ECCDPP was established in 2022 as a key National Agreement on Closing the Gap commitment to develop joined-up advice on early childhood care and development. During the reporting period, 1 meeting was held (19-20 March) with the key actions being:

- Supporting a shift towards proportionate and coordinated funding of early, targeted, holistic and culturally safe support as well as increased funding to ACCOs for service delivery to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ACT children and families.
- Establishment of the CYPF Preferred Provider Panel. The Panel is made up of appropriately qualified and experienced non-government organisations, including ACCOs, to deliver statutory and non-statutory services to children, young people, families and carers. The Panel will be implemented through a phased Approach and is anticipated to be fully operational by January 2026.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JULY-DECEMBER 2025

HEALTH AND COMMUNITY SERVICES DIRECTORATE – COMMUNITY SERVICES STREAM

The 3-year-old development check pilot will be delivered in 2 Koori preschools in Term 3, 2025. An evaluation report will be completed by December 2025. This will help to shape service delivery in the future as changes commence for NDIS funding and operations.

Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence responses

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.

Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm (NBHF)

Strategic Project

It is anticipated the transition to community-control and residential services will progress in multiple stages.

Stage 1 involves releasing an open grant process in the second half of 2025 to identify an ACCO the HCSD can partner with to deliver community control of the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm.

Subsequent stages are subject to the outcomes of Stage 1, as well as government funding decisions, and community-led self-determined decision making about the pathway to community-control and later residential services.

Operations

It is anticipated, from July to December 2025, the NBHF will continue to deliver programs. While it is currently operated by the ACT Government, work is progressing to support the transition of the NBHF to a community-controlled organisation, and support later self-determined transition to a residential service.

Our Booris, Our Way Review

Implementation Update January-June 2025

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

- Construction will continue on the facility.
- Subdivision of the site.
- Provision of a lease to Winnunga Nimmityjah for the site.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Youth Mental Health Service Model

A procurement process will commence soon for a specialist consultancy to work with community and ACCO's to co-design a new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Youth Mental Health Service Model.

Clybucca Dreaming Intensive First Nations Perinatal Case Management Support

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.

It is anticipated the outcomes of this evaluation and ongoing monitoring and performance review will guide any further work and/ or investment.

The previously reported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Perinatal Mental Health Research Try-Test-Learn is currently paused. Potential further work in this space will be informed by other initiatives as needed.

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

- Thirrili will continue to provide advocacy and ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have access to culturally safe services across suicide prevention, postvention, and aftercare.
- The organisation is also focused on expanding its workforce to better support vulnerable community members. Recruitment efforts are underway to fully staff the service, including the appointment of an ACT Coordinator and two advocate roles.

ACT EDUCATION DIRECTORATE

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.

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-JUNE 2025

No additional recruitment occurred during this reporting period, however, there has been significant positive feedback from community and carers about the vital role of the First Nations Kinship Liaison Officer and an identified resource will be redirected to add an additional First Nations position within the CYF Kinship Team.

The trial of the carer support plans for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kinship carers continues. The plan template was updated and simplified during this period based on carer feedback and aligning with Signs of Safety implementation. The Kinship Team continues to embed carer support plans into practice.

Concurrently, the new Preliminary Kinship Decision process has continued to be embedded, and moving forward, systems will be aligned to enable data to be captured as to the frequency it is enacted.

Our Booris, Our Way Review

Implementation Update January-June 2025

During this period, the CYF Kinship Team has continued to offer carers a range of training and events as part of an annual schedule of activities. A key component was the delivery of the Connect Training for kinship carers. The program was facilitated weekly throughout Term 1 2025. This training was for all kinship carers and not specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, however the First Nations Kinship Liaison officer contributed feedback to the working group who are adapting this specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carer families.

To further support carers, the online training platform developed by Carers ACT was launched in July 2025.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JULY-DECEMBER 2025

The following activities are scheduled for the next 6 months (July to December 2025):

- National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Day event
- Carer Connect Training facilitated in Term 4 2025.
- Annual Carer Appreciation event, 9 September 2025.
- A Blokes Barbecue, to support male kinship carers and hosted by the First Nations Kinship Support Practitioner.
- Children's Christmas event in December 2025.
- First Aid training via St Johns Ambulance.
- Carers ACT carer collective focus group to explore how carer wellbeing can be enhanced.

Milestones expected to be reached in the next 6 months include:

- A Training Calander for 2026, which includes an additional training focused on supporting kinship carers through the journey of a child(ren) returning home to parents.
- Working with out of home care providers to enhance the training offered for 2026.
- Development of a Carer Support Drop-in Service at the Child and Family Centres to be led by the First Nations Kinship Support Practitioner.
- Adaptation of the kinship assessment templates and process to align with Signs of Safety.
- Continue to implement carer support plans into practice with a goal that by 2026 all new kinship carers with a child in placement will have a support plan.
- Work closely with Carers ACT and feedback additional training and information that can be added to the online carer portal.
- Review feedback from the community action meeting to implement next steps in supporting informal kinship carers through ACCOs.

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-JUNE 2025

The Cultural Plans monitoring and quality review process, established in 2023, continues to be efficient. As of 30 June 2025, of 181 Aboriginal children eligible for a Cultural Plan, 164 have a valid Cultural Plan (90.60 percent).

Cultural Plan training continues to be a significant part of the CYF Cultural Development Training Program, which is mandatory for all CYF staff members, and is delivered alongside the Foundational Learning Program with the view that new workers have access to this training from the early stages of their working at CYF. The first cohort for the CSD Cultural Development Program was in April 2025.

From 1 Jan 2025, CYF commenced introduction of the external providers, following cessation of the ACT Together consortium. Therefore, collaborative work commenced between CYF and Barnardos, OzChild, Key Assets and Australian Childhood Foundation with a view to maintaining both, compliance and quality of Cultural Plans.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JULY-DECEMBER 2025

CYF will continue to monitor quality and compliance and compliance of cultural plans across teams and will continue to support external providers in understanding the significance of effective and quality cultural plans.

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 2025

As per the stated intention in the last reporting period, recruitment occurred and successfully appointed an acting Aboriginal Operations Manager to lead the team. The team also joined the First Nations unit and currently reports to the acting Aboriginal Senior Director.

During this reporting period, the Family Connection and Restoration Team held a workshop with internal CYF staff, OBOW panel members, and the Aboriginal Authority for Restoration Children (AARC) movement from New South Wales. Associate Professor BJ Newton and Kimberly Chiswell provided an in-depth overview of their restorative practice work in New South Wales; and this knowledge has been incorporated into an internal CYF follow-up workshop.

The internal workshop included the current Family Connection and Restoration Team and senior CYF executives to yarn about the information provided by AARC in relation to recommendation 28 – Family connection practices.

All outcomes from this meeting will be taken for consultation with internal and external First Nations colleagues and stakeholders, as well as the OBOW panel.

Concurrently, the previously enacted work has continued with the following occurring:

- 7 desktop reviews (deep dives) were conducted to review the current circumstances of the children, family, and kin, as well as the quality of the support services provided by their primary case management team.
- These reviews focused on analysing the primary case management practice, to determine how the children and family are being supported in adherence to the ATSICPP.
- Of the 7 desktop reviews conducted, 1 has proceeded to a Restoration Viability Review, which is currently underway.
- Of the 6 desktop reviews that did not proceed to a Restoration Viability Review, an extensive list of recommendations was provided to the agency who holds primary case management, which relate to a safer experience in care for the children in adherence to the 5 core elements.

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- 3 Restoration Viability Reviews occurred, which has led to 1 outcome of Restoration with extensive work being undertaken in partnership with the birth mother and kin, as well as the out of home care agency and the carer household.
- 2 outcomes of non-suitable for Restoration, with one family withdrawing from the process as per their wishes, and the other family being deemed not suitable due to their specific circumstances. Both result in comprehensive outcomes being provided to the out of home care agency in accordance with the 5 core elements.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JULY-DECEMBER 2025

HCSD executive provided the team a task of reviewing all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people that are subject to long-term orders who have self-placed in various arrangements. This review is to help determine whether there were any possible matters where revocation may be viable, and to outline what supports or financial commitments would be required.

This work is still ongoing, and it is envisioned that comprehensive details can be provided in the next reporting period.

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-JUNE 2025

A specific Father Inclusive Practice training was developed by CYF in July 2023. Since that time the course has been run 8 times including twice in the first 6 months of 2025 with plans to hold the day long course at least once more in 2025.

During the preparation for this course, it was recognised that further training was needed for practitioners to be more inclusive of all family members including fathers, grandfathers, grandmothers, uncles, aunts and others. A new piece of training was added to the 'Culturally Responsive Training' to include Family Inclusive Practice for working with Aboriginal families. This has resulted in further awareness amongst practitioners about the importance of working with the wider family in keeping with section 10(d) of the CYP Act regarding participation as well as the section 10A (a) providing self-determination to Aboriginal families as much as possible when considering child protection matters.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JULY-DECEMBER 2025

Abridged course for existing workers

More work is being done to ensure practitioners who were with CYF before the initial roll out of the Father Inclusive Practice attend the training. From July – December 2025 an abridged version of the 'Father Inclusive Practice' and the 'Culturally Responsive' trainings will be available face to face and online for existing staff.

Building partnerships

CSPA is looking to join with ACCO services to build a partnership in the presentation of this training. Some initial conversations have been had with the Winnunga Justice Reinvestment Program for their men's worker to co-lead this training. It is hoped that building a partnership with ACCOs will give CYF practitioners more balanced insight into the importance of engaging with Aboriginal fathers, as well as other essential members of a child's wider family.

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-JUNE 2025

Over the last 6 months the primary focus has been progressing the outcomes of the deep dive to ensure systems and processes support the effective implementation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health assessments.

This has included:

- CYF Health Liaison Officer finalising processes and procedures. Working with the CYF Capability and Development Team to embed training on 715 assessments in the Foundational Learning Program. Updating the CYF practice guides and policies for staff on the internal knowledge portal, alongside client management data mapping to ensure information management systems align.
- Consultation with Canberra Health Service to explore a coordinated approach to combine the initial out of home care check with the MBS 715 assessment. The federal and territory processes are not compatible, as a result, an alternative approach has been proposed with the provision of a new health management plan for all children that will be used to inform the health assessment.
- The CYF Health Liaison Officer will co-ordinate with the carer and practitioner to ensure the health assessment is completed. An information pack is in place for carers, including phone support from the CYF Health Liaison officer.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JULY-DECEMBER 2025

A new process for CYF case managed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children will launch in September 2025. A communication plan will be developed and implemented by the end of October 2025.

Implementation includes:

- CYF staff training, presentations to:
 - Intake and Assessment team
 - First Nations Team
 - Child Safety Teams
 - Intensive Long Term Case Management Team.

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- e-connect updates.
- completion of procedure and policy documents.
- Update CYF Knowledge portal.
- Joint consultations with CYF Clinical Services branch for CYF staff.
- Training to FLP group will commence early 2026 in line with the current scheduling.
- Kinship carer training in liaison with the First Nations Kinship Liaison Officer.

Stage 1 focuses on children and families supported by CYF, with stage 2 focusing on how health assessments are embedded across community providers and aligns with the work already undertaken as part of the Monitoring and Review Framework.

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-JUNE 2025

The the OBOWIOC has continued to operate in partnership with the ACT Government to work towards the full implementation of the recommendations of the OBOW Report.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JULY-DECEMBER 2025

Since the June 2025 OBOWIOC meeting, HCSD has worked closely with the Chair, the SNAICC secretariat team and the HCSD OBOW Implementation team to develop a new implementation process. This process contains a new meeting structure that details quarterly meetings between the OBOWIOC and HCSD.

These quarterly meetings are complemented by six-weekly OBOWIOC-only check-ins and monthly subgroup meetings. The subgroup meetings involve 2 OBOWIOC members alongside 2 HCSD Executive leads discussing high focus recommendations. A total of 6 recommendations are currently being progressed through this subgroup meeting structure, with feedback from the OBOWIOC members and HCSD executive indicating this approach is working well.

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-JUNE 2025

Family Led Decision making is featured throughout the training listed below and includes the number of sessions run during this reporting period.

- Cultural Development Program (2 specific sessions run)
- Case Management (1 session)
- A Practical Guide to Emergency Action (1 session)
- Decision Making (1 session)
- Internal Merits Review/External Merits Review (6 sessions)
- Advanced Care Team Workshop (4 sessions)

Signs of Safety

In June 2024, CYF formally adopted Signs of Safety as the primary practice framework for working with children, young people and families. Oversight and leadership for this work sits with the Chief Practitioner, CSPA ensuring alignment with broader organisational practice priorities.

Developed in Australia, Signs of Safety is now an internationally recognised leading framework for child protection practice. It strengthens child and family participation, supports reflective supervision and promotes transparency in decision-making. Its principles naturally support family led decision making, particularly through a focus on safety networks and naturally connected support and collaborative safety planning.

Implementation of Signs of Safety in family-led decision making is at an early stage, with limited formal activity. Current work reflects a broader cultural and practice shift rather than short-term deliverables. This is part of a five-year implementation plan designed to build sustainable change across the workforce.

In the first year of implementation, core training has been provided to over 250 staff, introducing the fundamental elements of the framework, with a strong focus on how child and family participation underpins safety planning and decision making. Advance training has also been recently delivered to over 45 Learning Leads, equipping them to champion best practice, strengthen reflective supervision and support consistency in embedding the Signs of Safety approach to the wider workforce.

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IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JULY-DECEMBER 2025

The next steps to be undertaken between July and December 2025 include:

- Identifying opportunities to connect existing practices (e.g. Family Group Conferencing, safety planning) with the Signs of Safety framework.
- Supporting staff through the Learning Lead Network to explore how Signs of Safety integrates with family-led approaches.
- Strengthening reflective supervision to build awareness of safety networks and naturally connected supports, and how these reinforce best practice in family-led decision making.

The recruited Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander training officer will be tasked with reviewing the Cultural Development Program for required updates, as well as contributing to other training run by CYF to ensure it continues to incorporate Family Led Decision Making into training.

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-JUNE 2025

CYF is currently piloting a paraprofessional pathway. This means that a student, in their final 2 years of study, can apply to the scheme and undertake some functions within CYF operations, as well as continue their study. This scheme is open to all, including First Nations students.

Additionally, an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pathway has been developed and is waiting approval. Eligibility for this pathway required enrolment in a relevant TAFE or tertiary qualification and experience or a desire to work in a community services environment. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Paraprofessional will be part of the Operations Team and will rotate through the Aboriginal Services Development, Business Services Team, Kinship Support Team, First Nations Team, Family Group Conferencing Team to provide support to case managers.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JULY-DECEMBER 2025

The next steps to be undertaken between July and December 2025 include:

- Finalise approval for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Pathway.
- CYF have liaised with the Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT) – Yurauna Centre regarding opportunities for a CYF (First Nations staff) facilitated session with students undertaking the Certificate IV and Diploma in Community Services to discuss the pathway. The Yurauna Centre has agreed to this approach and CYF will facilitate this session alongside the next Child and Youth Protection Practitioner recruitment process.
- CYF are liaising with EDU regarding attendance at an ACT Year 12 Career Day.
- Ongoing discussions with Charles Sturt University (CSU), who have over 70 First Nations people enrolled in their Social Work degree. CSU also offer a Human Services degree that may attract interest from First Nations students. CYF is in discussions with CSU regarding the development of an ongoing partnership that seeks to attract First Nations Social Worker and Human Services graduates to CYF.

CYF will continue to progress with work and will endeavor to continue to think flexibly and creatively to engage First Nations people in careers with CYF.

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-JUNE 2025

From discussions with Senior Aboriginal and Torres Strait staff in CYF, and following feedback provided by OBOW, that they would like Aboriginal expertise within all areas across CYF, members of the Cultural Services Team (CST) were redistributed to allow Identified seats to be embedded across Child Safety, Youth Justice, Practice and Development, Kinship Support, and to the Appraisal and Support Response stream as determined by Senior Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff. Several meetings were held to agree the final position and to develop implementation plans for change.

Of the 10 positions that were funded as part of the CST, 7 positions were vacant. Discussions were held with the remaining members to confirm their roles and proposed permanent moves to other teams best aligned with their functions. This was also discussed with OBOWIOC to consider how best to progress other OBOW recommendations.

The work to redefine the First Nations service model across CYF needed to occur post the broader CYF Reform program in order to understand the need in line with other significant changes. These included establishing the First Nation Team, building a family service model and increasing a focus on restoration as the primary responses to support children to be with family.

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The primary goal for this recommendation was to enable the following *“The Steering Committee have received feedback that the Cultural Services Team is best suited to support navigation of the system and facilitate access to cultural information”*.

A specific role has been established that sits in the FNT to support liaison directly with ACCOs and community including Wreck Bay.

With the establishment of ACCO’s supporting the broader service delivery then greater opportunity to address for community issues and objective advocacy is also extended.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JULY-DECEMBER 2025

Ongoing recruitment and establishment of new positions will continue.

Discussions will be held with Senior Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leaders in CYF to bring all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff together, establish group supervision, continue to guide and inform other required improvements and showcase better practice.

Discussion with OBOWIOC about the proposed model and how it aligns with their recommendation to support families to navigate the system and facilitate access to cultural information.

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-JUNE 2025

The monitoring mechanism to reconcile the number of children and young people in the HCSD, Director's General care continues to be efficient. On situations whereby the Aboriginality of a child or young person is inconclusive, the CYF practitioner is supported by a designated First Nations Family Findings staff member and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Case Discussion and Direction Group to assist in identifying the Indigenous status of a child or young person.

All children and young people with an open involvement with CYF and who have an "unknown/not stated" cultural status relating to the Indigenous status are monitored and followed up with CYF Practitioners on a weekly basis.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JULY-DECEMBER 2025

CYF will continue to monitor the records in relation to children's and young people cultural status and action as soon as practicable, instances of inconclusive Aboriginality or "unknown/not stated" Cultural Status.

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-JUNE 2025

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 CYP Act. 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.

HCSD provides similar data to several 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, and includes 2022-23 financial year data. The next version (containing 2023-24 data) is due to be published at the end of September 2025. This data also includes tracking against the ATSICPP. 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, released on 30 January 2025, includes 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.

HCSD also provides the following data which is also publicly available:

- The Next Steps Snapshot Report presents data on children and young people in out of home care in the ACT. The most recent report presents data up to the middle of 2023-24 financial year (up to December 2023). Refer to Measure 4 (pg 13).

The Next Steps report and the OBOW data provided in the front section of this report include the number of children in out of home care and those on Third Party Parental Responsibility orders, which is different to the standard definition of out of home care in the national publications.

This provides HCSD the opportunity to report on the numbers of children and young people in kinship care in a way that aligns more closely with the Family Matters definition of kinship care, for those children and young people who are unable to live at home.

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IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JULY-DECEMBER 2025

HCSD will continue to improve and expand on the use of this data in reports, including those listed above and utilise other opportunities that become available.

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 ATSI CPP 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-JUNE 2025

In 2024-25, the ACT Government convened a committee to undertake a comprehensive review of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Procurement Policy. The committee has now finalised the review, including its final report. The ACT Government is progressing work to give effect to the recommendations of the review, including through updating the policy itself and an action plan to implement the recommendations of the review.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JULY-DECEMBER 2025

Further opportunities for supplier engagement and updated guidance will be progressed under this action plan to support greater use of the policy across ACT Government.

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-JUNE 2025

During this reporting period, CYF established the ACT Aboriginal Children's Forum (AACF) in partnership with Yerrabi Yurwang.

AACF brings together ACCOs, service providers and the ACT Government that work with Aboriginal children, young people and families. Its purpose is to help improve outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people in the Territory. This aligns to the establishment of cultural clauses that have been included in all provider contracts and which were endorsed by the OBOWIOC in 2024.

The AACF aims to do this at a system-wide level to improve changes to systems, policies, and practices so that Aboriginal children and young people grow up strong, safe, and connected to their culture, families, and communities through consistent interpretation and application of policy and practices across the service system.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JULY-DECEMBER 2025

In the period July to December 2025, the work of the AACF will include a review of tools used by the different organisations to monitor and ensure the cultural needs of children and young people in out of home care are met with a consistent approach.

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-JUNE 2025

The ACT Government, led by CMTEDD, has continued discussions with the Commonwealth around agreement to a new Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to provide an updated framework to support delivery of ACT services in the Jervis Bay Territory.

In the meantime, the ACT Government continues to regularly engage with the Commonwealth to maintain the delivery of agreed services under existing arrangements.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JULY-DECEMBER 2025

The ACT Government will continue to progress efforts to reach agreement with the Commonwealth on a new MoU. Timeframes for progress on the new MoU is dependent on agreement between both governments. Agreement to an updated MoU will provide a framework to renew arrangements for the delivery of services in the Jervis Bay Territory and promote better outcomes for the Wreck Bay community by identifying the provision of appropriate family and early support services.

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-JUNE 2025

In March 2025 the [Partnership Agreement](#) was signed between HCSD and the OBOWIOC.

The Partnership Agreement details how HCSD and the OBOWIOC will be driven by ongoing collaboration, the principles of shared decision making and Aboriginal self-determination to bring about tangible change for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families by fully implementing the OBOW recommendations to improve cultural, physical and socioemotional health and wellbeing outcomes of families within the child protection system.

The partnership between HCSD and the OBOWIOC aims to work towards the following strategic priorities:

- Reducing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children entering the care system;
- Improving the experiences of being involved with the out of home care system through focusing on physical, socioemotional and cultural health, wellbeing and education;
- Increasing restoration and connection with family, kin, community and culture;
- Driving active efforts to achieve the full implementation of all 5 elements of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (ATSICPP); and
- Informing the community on progress towards the full implementation of the Our Booris Our Way recommendations.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JULY-DECEMBER 2025

The OBOW Implementation team will continue to provide support to Directorates, the OBOWIOC and the OBOW Secretariat team in relation to the implementation and oversight of recommendations.

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-JUNE 2025

Reports continue to have been produced and shared regularly with the OBOWIOC between January and June 2025, with delays in some months.

Following the review of the Queensland Child and Family Commission Principle Focus, work is nearing completion 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. This high-level data seeks to demonstrate, using HCSD operational data, the relationship between the changed approach, through the CYF reform process, in service provision and out of home care outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JULY-DECEMBER 2025

This iteration of the reporting dashboard has now received internal endorsement and is scheduled to be published in the coming months. The dashboard is planned to be publicly released.

Several additional dashboards will be identified and designed within this next period, with restoration of children to families being a key focus.

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-JUNE 2025

As per the agreement with the OBOWIC no new EPR matters have progressed in relation to non-Aboriginal carers until further policy work is undertaken.

During this period several EPRs have been granted for children in Aboriginal and Torres Strait family care arrangements. As per agreed process, all permanency decisions pertaining to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children need to be endorsed by the Aboriginal led Care Pathways Panel prior to any change in legal status being enacted.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JULY-DECEMBER 2025

HCSD is considering next steps to progress amendments to the CYP Act that better protect and promote the agreed safeguards to culture and connection when a child or young person has been placed in out of home care. It is also continuing to review and analyze legal advice on the options available regarding possible amending the Adoption Act as outlined in the SNAICC report.

The ACT is currently reviewing this and other feedback in considering its next steps to modernising the CYP Act within this term of Government. More consultation will be required to guide future changes.

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-JUNE 2025

During this period, work has been undertaken to establish a referrals team to align with the new service system, specifically targeting early intervention for children and families and preservation supports. The initial focus has been on recruitment and establishing referral pathways with new sustaining family providers as they come onboard. Currently there are 3 providers, with a further 2 expected to commence in the latter half of the year.

The team went live in March 2025 and currently consists of a Director, Team Leader, a CYPP Practitioner and an Administrative Support Officer, with further recruitment on foot.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JULY-DECEMBER 2025

The team will continue to provide a single point of access for CYF practitioners to refer to Sustaining Families Providers and assistance to access community support for children and families referred to CYF and who are in need of family support.

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-JUNE 2025

The vacant Operations Manager role within the Family Connection and Restoration team has been temporarily filled through an internal Expression Of Interest process, with a view to advertising the position and recruiting a suitable applicant as soon as possible.

The Family Connection and Restoration team have worked to identify systemic issues impacting on the rate of children on long term orders being restored to their birth families.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JULY-DECEMBER 2025

In the next 12 months there will be increased focus on ensuring that all Care Plans and Cultural Plans for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have adequate contact with their birth families.

Families will be encouraged to lead the development of the Cultural Plans through Family Group Conferencing, to ensure the plans promote contact with the birth family as a core part of Cultural Identity, even when full restoration is not possible.

The Family Connection and Restoration team will work to build strong and strategic partnership with ACCOs, to ensure that family connection and restoration is family and community led, particularly in the areas of intensive case management and advocacy. The Family Connection and Restoration team will undertake to identify, collect, and review key data regarding the delivery of family support in the restoration space.

