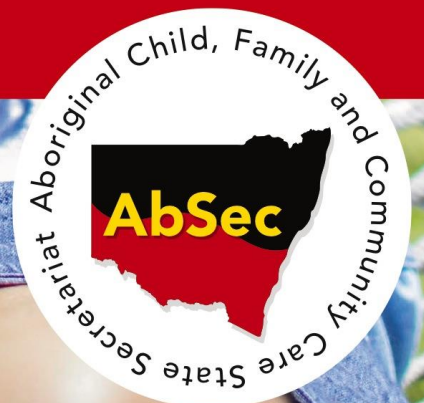




Our Expectations for the 2016 NSW Budget

MAY 2016



Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat (AbSec)

About AbSec

The Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat (AbSec) is the peak Aboriginal organisation within the child and family sector in NSW. AbSec is committed to advocating on behalf of Aboriginal children, families, carers and communities, and to ensure they have access to the services and supports they need to keep Aboriginal children safe and provide them the best possible opportunities to fulfil their potential through Aboriginal community controlled organisations.

Central to this vision is the need to develop a tailored approach to Aboriginal child and family supports delivering universal, targeted and tertiary services within communities that cover the entire continuum of care and reflect the broader familial and community context of clients. Such services and supports would operate to mitigate risk factors or vulnerabilities thereby reducing the need for more intensive or invasive interventions, as well as ensuring that tailored and critical Aboriginal out-of-home care and after care services are provided to intervene in the cycle of disadvantage that continue to impact generations of Aboriginal families.

Our vision is that Aboriginal children and young people are looked after in safe, thriving Aboriginal families and communities, and are raised strong in spirit and identity, with every opportunity for lifelong wellbeing and connection to culture surrounded by holistic supports.

In working towards this vision, we are guided by these principles:

- acknowledging and respecting the diversity and knowledge of Aboriginal communities;
- acting with professionalism and integrity in striving for quality, culturally responsive services and supports for Aboriginal families;
- underpinning the rights of Aboriginal people to develop our own processes and systems for our communities, particularly in meeting the needs of our children and families;
- being holistic, integrated and solutions-focused through Aboriginal control in delivering for Aboriginal children, families and communities; and
- committing to a future that empowers Aboriginal families and communities, representing our communities, and the agencies there to serve them, with transparency and drive

Published May 2016

© Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat (AbSec)

This publication is copyright. Reproduction of this material from this proposal should obtain permission from the publishers.

AbSec can be found at:

21 Carrington Road, MARRICKVILLE NSW 2204

Phone: (02) 9559 5299

E-mail: reception@absec.org.au

Website: www.absec.org.au

Facebook: on.fb.me/AbSec

Twitter: [@AbSecNSW](https://twitter.com/AbSecNSW)

Context

Since 2012, the NSW Government had committed to the transition of children and young people in statutory out of home care (OOHC) to the non-government sector. Within this, the Government committed to a 10-year timeframe for the transition of Aboriginal children and young people to the Aboriginal community controlled non-government sector, representing the value that Aboriginal community controlled organisations have in providing better outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people, within a culturally connected environment while also ensuring safety and wellbeing.

In 2015, three years into the transition process, the NSW Auditor General's Office audited the transition, identifying the clear need for a strategy to be developed and implemented with Aboriginal people and communities as a means of achieving greater outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people in the OOHC system. As of 30 June 2015, more than 50% of Aboriginal children and young people remain in the government-operated statutory care system, with no clear commitment by government since the 2015 NSW Election to ensure these Aboriginal children and young people will be supported by accredited, capable and robust Aboriginal community controlled organisations. Similarly, a strategy to transition Aboriginal children supported by non-Aboriginal non-Government organisations is required to meet the commitment of Aboriginal children in OOHC being supported by Aboriginal community controlled organisations.

In 2014, the NSW Government, through the NSW Department of Family and Community Services (FACS), commenced a state-wide co-design process with the Aboriginal community controlled sector over an 18-month period. This included representation from AbSec, the NSW Aboriginal peak body, along with local Aboriginal community controlled agencies delivering in the child protection and OOHC system, NSW Ombudsman's Office, NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet, FACS, and the NSW Office of the Children's Guardian. The objective of this process was to identify ways in which the Aboriginal sector could work to address the disproportionate rate of Aboriginal children and young people in OOHC, currently at a rate of 36% of the total OOHC population.

This co-design process resulted in the development of a roadmap for reform, *the Plan on a Page for Aboriginal children and young people*¹, to address the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children and young people involved in the child protection and OOHC system through community empowerment, holistic Aboriginal community controlled service provision, and ensuring existing gaps and system failures are addressed. Complementing this, the NSW Government committed to the *Guiding Principles for strengthening the participation of the local Aboriginal community in child protection decision making*², a significant set of guiding principles that aim to recognise Aboriginal family structures as characterised by collective parenting models, and require broad engagement in decision making for the best interests of Aboriginal children across NSW.

At the time of presenting this paper, no further investment in policy change or resourcing has made any of the previous effort and work a reality in NSW. Additionally, no investment in continuing good services such as the Aboriginal Child and Family Centres in NSW had been announced. It is AbSec's perspective that Aboriginal community control is the core foundation for achieving better outcomes for Aboriginal children, young people and families, within a culturally rich and localised environment, while also ensuring our own systems of accountability for the safety and wellbeing Aboriginal children and young people are upheld. This paper sets out our expectations for the 2016 NSW Budget, where it is our hope that the NSW Government will show leadership in changing the current landscape impacting the future of our Aboriginal communities in NSW.

¹ Accessed via: www.absec.org.au

² Accessed via: www.absec.org.au

Policy Commitments

Based on the significant goodwill and effort applied by Aboriginal community controlled agencies and communities over the past 24-months, AbSec is expecting to see effort applied towards the following policy commitments to be made in the 2016 NSW Budget as a means of recognition and support for Aboriginal communities being best placed to deliver in the best interests of Aboriginal children and families. This, in AbSec and the Aboriginal child and family welfare sector's view, will show leadership in government for Aboriginal communities.

Aboriginal Non-Government Service Provision

- Plans and directions following the 2015 NSW Budget announcement to transition the six government-operated Aboriginal Intensive Family Based Services to the Aboriginal non-government sector. No discussion or meaningful engagement has occurred since this announcement, leaving an empty announcement made at budget time in 2015.
- Open government commitment to Aboriginal non-government community controlled service delivery as the best mechanism to achieve quality outcomes for Aboriginal children, young people, families and communities involved with child welfare in NSW, recognising the poor results delivered to date through non-Aboriginal approaches.
- Reaffirm commitment for Aboriginal children and young people requiring OOHC to be supported and transitioned to Aboriginal community controlled accredited agencies. Recognising Aboriginal community controlled agencies as providing for the best interests of Aboriginal children and young people, ensuring their safety and their cultural connections.

Aboriginal community involvement and autonomy

- Recognition and acknowledgement that independent (non-government) Aboriginal involvement enables greater achievement of self-determination and accountability to Aboriginal communities for the care and protection of Aboriginal children and young people.
- Plans and directions for establishing the *Guiding Principles for strengthening the participation of the local Aboriginal community in child protection decision making*, which was announced and launched by the Minister for Family and Community Services with no record obtained on the FACS website.

Plan on a Page for Aboriginal children and young people

- Open government commitment to the *Plan on a Page for Aboriginal children and young people*, jointly developed by AbSec and FACS, as a means of setting reform to ensure better outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people impacted by the child protection and OOHC sector in NSW – with activities to be led in partnership between AbSec and FACS.
- Direction by the NSW Government through the NSW 2016 Budget process to enable Aboriginal designed and led holistic, whole-of-government approaches to addressing the alarming and disproportionate rate of Aboriginal children and young people in the child protection and OOHC system in NSW.

Independent Aboriginal non-government oversight and advice

- Open government commitment and support to AbSec as the NSW peak body established to represent the interests and provide independent (non-government) advice on behalf of Aboriginal children, young people and families and the sector there to support them in the child protection and OOHC system in NSW.
- Open commitment to AbSec that empowers us as the NSW Aboriginal peak body to fulfil an independent oversight and advice function to government on behalf of the Aboriginal sector, and Aboriginal children, young people and families to enable genuine information sharing, access to information and reporting on genuine compliance with legislation and delivering quality outcomes.

New Investment

Based on the significant goodwill and effort applied by Aboriginal community controlled agencies and communities over the past 24-months, AbSec is expecting the following new investment commitments to be made in the 2016 NSW Budget as a sign of genuinely working to address the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children and young people involved with the child protection and OOHC system. This, in AbSec's perspective, will show leadership by government and recognition of a true reform agenda focused on better outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people. AbSec has not applied figures for new investment; however, funding should be proportionate with the rate of representation of Aboriginal children and families across all levels of the NSW system (at least 36%).

Aboriginal community controlled service delivery

- Investment in capacity and capability building to address Aboriginal community controlled service delivery gaps across NSW, specifically within Western NSW, and Metro Sydney.
- Investment in supporting the Aboriginal community controlled sector and workforce development to enhance and build quality practice to deliver better outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people, with a focus on existing organisational capacity to support growth and delivering outcomes.
- Investment in quality cultural support and practice to support Aboriginal children and young people in OOHC with cultural connections through local Aboriginal community controlled services.

Aboriginal community involvement and authority

- Investment through AbSec for the establishment of the *Guiding Principles for strengthening the participation of the local Aboriginal community in child protection decision making*.
- Ongoing investment in initiatives, such as AbSec's Youth Ambassador Program, to ensure a voice for Aboriginal children and young people in NSW to inform and advise on the system.
- Investment in carer engagement activities for carers of Aboriginal children and young people through peer support and other activities that provide a support network for carers, as well as inform systemic review and advice for ongoing carer support needs and development

Aboriginal holistic service design and delivery

- Full investment for the operation and service delivery of the nine Aboriginal Child and Family Centres in NSW, recognising these centres as positive contributions to early intervention.
- Investment in establishment of a further five Aboriginal Child and Family Centres over the next two years as a means of earlier intervention for Aboriginal children in the early years.
- Targeted investment in Aboriginal OOHC to meet current demands through Aboriginal community controlled agencies, including transitioning Aboriginal children still involved with the government run statutory OOHC system and non-Aboriginal NGOs (currently more than 70% of the population).
- Investment in Aboriginal community empowerment/ impact, family strengthening and intensive family supports designed by local Aboriginal communities and delivered through Aboriginal community controlled agencies to address localised disadvantage. Aligned with the principles of AbSec's paper describing our NSW Aboriginal child and family system³.

Independent (non-government) Aboriginal oversight, advice and development

- Resourcing AbSec, as the NSW Aboriginal peak body, for the implementation of the five year *Plan of a Page for Aboriginal children and young people* as a means of working to address the current rate of Aboriginal children and families represented in the NSW system.
- Resourcing practice improvement and sector capacity building through AbSec to ensure quality Aboriginal service delivery across the continuum of child protection and OOHC.

³ Accessed via: www.absec.org.au