

Far West NSW

Strengthening supports for Aboriginal children, young people, families and communities in Far West NSW

April 2017



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 and communities, 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 holistic 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:

- 1) acknowledging and respecting the diversity and knowledge of Aboriginal communities;
- 2) acting with professionalism and integrity in striving for quality, culturally responsive services and supports for Aboriginal families;
- 3) 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;
- 4) being holistic, integrated and solutions-focused through Aboriginal control in delivering for Aboriginal children, families and communities; and
- 5) 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 April 2017

© 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)

Contents

Introduction	4
Background.....	5
Far West NSW Overview.....	8
An effective Far West NSW Aboriginal service system.....	9
Addressing the service system gaps	10
Vision	10
Objectives	10
Outcomes.....	11
Success	11
Implementation and investment.....	12

Introduction

The Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat (AbSec) works to identify service gaps for Aboriginal children, young people and families across NSW. As part of this work, AbSec seeks to provide proposals and concepts that aim to empower Aboriginal communities to have authority in strengthening families, keeping children safe, and building a strong supportive network at the community level. This paper seeks to present a proposal for Aboriginal service provision to Aboriginal children, families and communities in the Far West NSW region, recognising the unique challenges that this region presents when striving to establish an Aboriginal service system that provides better outcomes to Aboriginal children, families and communities. It builds on AbSec's work around conceptualising a holistic Aboriginal service system, and fulfils commitments within the FACS/AbSec *Plan on a Page for Aboriginal children and young people* by delivering an Aboriginal safety for this region of NSW. It also aims to fulfil the commitment by the Department of Family and Community Services (FACS) to transition responsibility for statutory out of home care to Aboriginal controlled agencies, as it relates to Aboriginal children and young people.

The purpose of this paper is to propose a new way of working by identifying areas for investment to ensure that Aboriginal children, young people, families and communities are supported by an Aboriginal organisation in the Far West NSW region, particularly by trialling a uniquely different approach to establishing this service system capacity. This means that Aboriginal communities will have access to earlier interventions, families will be strengthened by intensive services, and children supported while in alternate care by an Aboriginal controlled organisation that meets the required standards, and is able to engage effectively with the communities within the Far West NSW region.

AbSec considers Far West NSW as a key priority that requires a unique approach to building Aboriginal service system capacity. It is a location that has limited investment in Aboriginal controlled service delivery, with the predominant two non-government providers for statutory care being non-Aboriginal providers. AbSec envisages that such a service operating in the Far West NSW region would deliver Targeted Earlier Intervention, Intensive child protection services and Aboriginal Out of Home Care supports, encompassing the three tiers of AbSec's conceptual holistic Aboriginal service model. Importantly, such a service would be guided, linked and accountable to each distinct Aboriginal community but have sufficient capacity to be viable and sustainable over time to deliver quality outcomes for Aboriginal children, families and communities.

AbSec recognises the key to address the current overrepresentation of Aboriginal children entering statutory care in NSW is through supporting the establishment of quality Aboriginal controlled services, acknowledging that Aboriginal people are best placed to tackle the issues impacting their communities. For the purposes of this paper, the Far West NSW region encompasses the following centres (based on FACS locations and coverage):

1. Broken Hill (including Menindee)
2. Wilcannia
3. Dareton
4. Balranald

AbSec anticipates that to reach the goal of Aboriginal community controlled service provision, FACS' dominant service infrastructure would be used to establish the Aboriginal child and family model, and transition this to a recognised and accredited Aboriginal community controlled organisation over time. This approach would be primarily for statutory care, with other effort being applied to eventual transition of service delivery for targeted earlier intervention and intensive family services to the Aboriginal controlled organisation, creating a holistic Aboriginal child and family service for Far West NSW.

The approach to building the Aboriginal service system in Far West NSW is built following AbSec's engagement with communities and providers in the region, as well as AbSec's goals for establishing the Aboriginal safety-net of holistic Aboriginal child and family services. In progressing this, community engagement, organisational support and investment is required, acknowledging that support from FACS to achieve capacity will be a key success driver. FACS' role will be to maintain and model their service provision arm for Aboriginal children in care, while also working to realign funded non-government capacity towards creating a single, viable and sustainable Aboriginal holistic child and family organisation. AbSec firmly believes that using the lessons learnt and precedence established by the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) in transitioning government service delivery to the non-government sector, a similar approach could be adopted for Far West NSW given the limited and staggered system capacity to deliver for Aboriginal children, families and communities.

Background

This paper builds on the following two key documents:

- AbSec/FACS co-design process: 'Plan on a Page for Aboriginal Children and Young People 2015-2021'
- AbSec's paper 'Achieving a holistic Aboriginal Child and Family Service System for NSW'

The 'Plan on a Page for Aboriginal Children and Young People 2015-2021' evolved following a co-design partnership approach between AbSec, FACS, Aboriginal non-government organisations and NSW government agencies. The *Plan* highlights high-level concepts for the future state of the Aboriginal sector and identifies the need for a new, integrated Aboriginal-led approach across the sector to improve outcomes for Aboriginal children and their families.

The overarching objective of the Plan is to promote child safe communities and reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal children in OOHC through a sustainable safety-net of Aboriginal agencies interconnected to local community governance, ensuring Aboriginal community ownership, accountability and control in meeting this challenge, with Government and other stakeholder support through partnerships.

The Plan also sets out AbSec's vision for a 'strong safety-net of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations that effectively meet the needs of Aboriginal children, families and communities through holistic and individually tailored Aboriginal child and family centres

across NSW, working towards child safe communities and reducing the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in out-of-home-care and providing for better outcomes over time'

AbSec's paper, *'Achieving a holistic Aboriginal Child and Family Service System for NSW'* presents a comprehensive model of Aboriginal child and family services aimed at creating an environment in which families can be supported to optimise the developmental environment for Aboriginal children and young people. A holistic Aboriginal service system, proposed for NSW, comprises **three** interconnected intervention levels of increasing intensity. Each level will provide individualised, targeted services to children and families, allowing flexibility in service delivery while adapting intensity levels to respond to the needs or circumstances of families that may change over time.

- **Aboriginal Community response (Primary)** – targets the whole community and commonly referred to as universal interventions (or targeted earlier interventions)

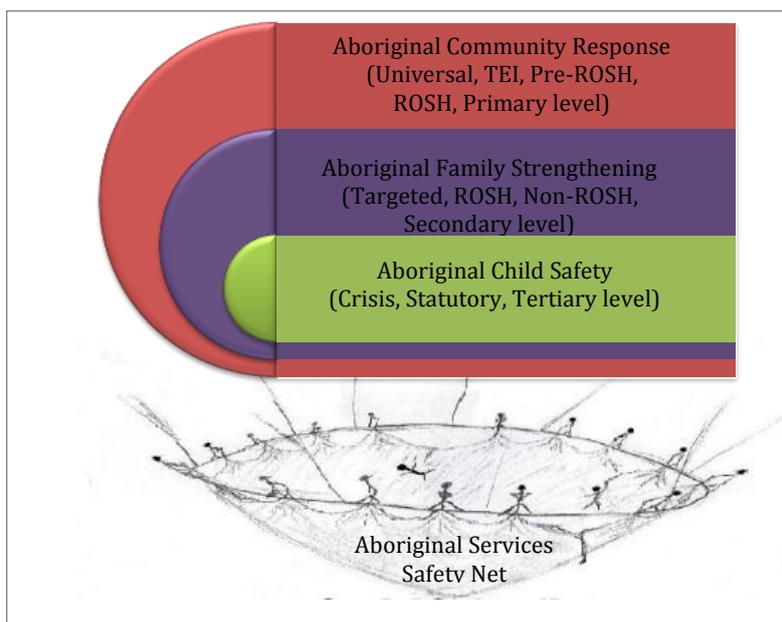
Programs or activities run at the Aboriginal Community Response interventions level will be aimed towards reducing risk factors of maltreatment and safety concerns at a whole of community level; enhancing the developmental context and environment of all Aboriginal children.

- **Aboriginal Family Strengthening (Secondary)** – targets individuals or a population sub-group that have higher than average parenting difficulties and families whose children are at risk of maltreatment (or intensive child protection/ family intervention services)

Aboriginal Family Strengthening intervention at this secondary continuum level aims to work to support families in an intensive way to ensure child safety and wellbeing for the whole family unit, and prevent placement in out of home care.

- **Aboriginal Child Safety (Tertiary)** – targets families where child abuse has occurred and it is at this level that the child more than likely enters the statutory care system

This level of intervention aims to reduce long-term damage to the child and to prevent recurrence of child abuse through delivery of programs and /or activities in OOHC – Aboriginal care (as depicted in the below image).



Three foundational principles underpin this approach:

- Child development occurs within the context of their social and physical environment, with relationships playing a key role in optimal development and adaptive outcomes¹. Effective approaches to improving outcomes for vulnerable children must include supporting positive change for the child's social network, their parents, extended families and communities. A genuine integration of services that support children both directly and indirectly through strengthening the capabilities, stability (including economic) and resilience of families and communities is required. Interventions can become genuinely inter-generational, thereby optimising the developmental context and trajectory of the next and subsequent generations of Aboriginal children and young people.
- Aboriginal families and communities are stronger and better able to meet needs when empowered to identify and address the issues that affect their lives. Aboriginal communities are in the best position to develop and deliver services aimed at supporting Aboriginal children and families.
- Culture is a significant positive factor in overcoming adversity and disadvantage for individuals, families and communities, strengthening our families and communities to raise strong children connected to their culture. Empowering communities to develop and deliver culturally sound universal and targeted interventions will contribute to the development of a comprehensive, state-wide safety-net of services that are embedded within communities they serve, leading a community-wide response that will support Aboriginal families to keep children safe and connected to their families, communities, culture and Country.

¹ Shonkoff, J. and Fisher, P. (2013) Rethinking evidence-based practice and two-generational programs to create the future of early childhood policy, *Development and Psychopathology*, pp. 1635-1653

This paper further articulates this holistic model by providing a blueprint for establishing and building it within the Far West NSW region through one viable, sustainable and focused Aboriginal child and family organisation working to address the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in care and strengthening families to reduce risk.

Far West NSW Overview

Far West NSW is a diverse geography covering many distinct Aboriginal communities, including rural and remote with limited access to an established service system that caters to their needs or is able to address their concerns. Establishing an Aboriginal service system either requires greater investment in smaller communities, or supporting Aboriginal design, development and delivery on a regionalised scale that assures accountability to each community. For the purposes of building an Aboriginal safety-net in NSW, AbSec identified the Far West NSW region as needing to be serviced by a qualified, accredited Aboriginal organisation for the respective Aboriginal communities in the region. As defined by AbSec's holistic model, these services would be across the continuum of support, leading to a transition of service provision from non-Aboriginal services and FACS to the established Aboriginal controlled agency over time. The limited service system capacity requires a different way of working, and that being that the FACS infrastructure is modelled as an Aboriginal Care unit in readiness for an eventual transition to the regional Aboriginal community controlled organisation once capacity and accreditation is established.

Far West NSW has a population of more than 3,000 Aboriginal people according to the 2011 Census, making it the smallest population of Aboriginal people in NSW dispersed over a diverse geography, including rural and remote communities. Within this, the region has a population of over 1,100 Aboriginal children and young people under the age of 18 years, with approximately 300 Aboriginal children or young people at ROSH and around 80 Aboriginal children and young people in out of home care. In comparison to the rest of the state, the Far West NSW region is smaller in population, but this provides an opportunity for greater success to establish an Aboriginal service system focused on better outcomes for Aboriginal children and families.

Limited attempts have been made to establish community specific organisations in the past and those that have tried have been met by resistance either from community acceptance or the capability of the non-Aboriginal organisation to remain genuine to the original objective. The smaller size of the population, with higher rates of demand necessitates a different approach, a holistic approach that would invest in a regional Aboriginal child and family organisation and FACS to work closely together to enable a model of support across the continuum.

Holistic, culturally embedded, responsive and innovative services to Aboriginal families by an Aboriginal controlled organisation aims to strengthen the family and extended family unit. This is true for Aboriginal families and communities in Far West NSW, with pre-existing challenges around capacity of the existing service system to respond to demand and need. The service system within Far West NSW is limited in Aboriginal controlled service provision to tackle the social issues prevalent, including drug and alcohol, mental health and the like that impact on family strength and child safety. The service system that

is available to Aboriginal children, families and communities is limited in their capacity to meet the needs of Aboriginal children, families and communities – this can be due to the capabilities of those organisations to engage and remain connected to each Aboriginal community, or the level of resourcing available to have enough scale to deliver more. The current reforms to the child and family system provide an opportunity to advance FACS' commitment to an Aboriginal safety-net that is available for Aboriginal children and families across the continuum of support in Far West NSW.

An effective Far West NSW Aboriginal service system

This proposal paper presents a framework for developing and building the Far West NSW Aboriginal service system, ensuring that the Aboriginal controlled organisation has the right capacity to deliver across the continuum of support, and working towards the ability for that organisation to reinvest in earlier family support and interventions to keep children safe at home and in their community over time. In focusing on this, it is recognised that a different, innovative approach is required that utilises FACS' infrastructure to 'incubate' the service model, and eventually transition this to Aboriginal community control within a defined period.

An effective Far West NSW Aboriginal service system would see a strong and capable Aboriginal organisation delivering holistic Aboriginal child and family services: targeted earlier intervention, intensive family services, and out of home care – Aboriginal care. Due to the limited system capacity, diverse geography and smaller population, a unique approach is required that will realign funded service capacity to create scale in one Aboriginal controlled organisation, while at the same time modelling an approach utilising FACS infrastructure for Aboriginal children in care. Out of home care being the only program within the continuum that has established benchmarks or standards is a key performance indicator for success in addressing the Far West NSW Aboriginal child and family service system, therefore, a major milestone will be to obtain accreditation following enormous effort and investment in working toward achieving the overall model – that is, FACS work to establish a standalone Aboriginal Care unit within their structure in readiness for transition to an Aboriginal controlled organisation once capability and accreditation is achieved.

Embedding an effective Far West NSW Aboriginal service system also requires that service system, through an Aboriginal controlled organisation, to be accountable to the communities they serve. This means that a regional Aboriginal organisation, although their corporate governance is centralised, will be required to ensure and maintain connection to each distinct Aboriginal community it serves, to ensure outcomes are being met based on expectations. This recognises that to cover a region such as Far West NSW, there will be viability concerns if the organisation does not have enough scale, and at the same time, there will be sustainability concerns if the organisation is not connected and accountability to its distinct communities. This progresses a genuine commissioning approach to services, ensuring that communities have an active say in the supports they require to address the issues they have within a child and family context. Aboriginal people and organisations are best placed in doing this.

AbSec envisages that an Aboriginal community controlled agency will be approached to accept this model, and responsibility for being representative of the Far West NSW region. This will require support from FACS to structure statutory care and realign funding, but must be achieved independently from FACS to ensure success in the model and genuine accountability to each distinct community. Ultimately, Aboriginal targeted service provision will transition to the regional Aboriginal organisation, once their service models are established and they meet necessary standards to deliver child and family services.

To establish a market, the market must be stimulated to get the result needed. Upfront investment in this model will lead towards a successful, viable, sustainable holistic Aboriginal child and family services providing quality service delivery to Aboriginal children, families and communities in the Far West NSW region. Importantly, this will be delivered across the continuum of support, and accountable to each distinct Aboriginal community they serve. Underpinning all this, to ensure a self-determined approach, success must be realised by Aboriginal people, through the effort put in by independent Aboriginal organisations in partnership with FACS and other government agencies.

Addressing the service system gaps

To address the gaps in Far West NSW, AbSec recognises that a clear results logic must be established, building on the vision from the FACS/AbSec *Plan on a Page for Aboriginal children and young people*. A different approach must be tried for Far West NSW, and a strong decision must be made to realign funding. The goal is to ensure better outcomes for Aboriginal children and families in the region, and to do this, it must be through Aboriginal controlled approaches to address the challenges at the community level.

Vision

To establish a strong safety-net of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations that effectively meet the needs of Aboriginal children, families and communities through holistic and individually tailored Aboriginal child and family centres across NSW, working towards child safe communities and reducing the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in out-of-home-care and providing for better outcomes over time. This is the vision for the FACS/AbSec *Plan on a Page for Aboriginal children and young people*.

To localise the vision, AbSec recognises that a regionalised approach is required to ensure viability and sustainability over time, with an interconnected framework to distinct Aboriginal communities. This framework requires open dialogue with Aboriginal communities at the start and in an ongoing way. At a practical level, this paper presents Far West NSW with specific objectives, outcomes and success measures to recognise joint progress and focus coordinated effort.

Objectives

Four objectives are established for addressing the service system gaps for Far West NSW. These objectives are underpinned by the principles established in this paper, and the frameworks established by AbSec.

- To establish a holistic Aboriginal child and family service for Aboriginal children and families in the Far West NSW region, delivering across the continuum of support with the scale necessary to do more
- To create an Aboriginal child and family service system that is accountable to Aboriginal communities to deliver outcomes for child safety and wellbeing, family strengthening, and community independence and responsiveness
- To keep Aboriginal children safe at home in their community, supported by an Aboriginal controlled organisation with the capacity to meet their needs
- To model an effective Aboriginal Care service within FACS to eventually transition this to an accredited Aboriginal community controlled organisation

Outcomes

The above objectives are established with the intent of achieving the following five outcomes for Aboriginal children, families and communities in the Far West NSW region:

- Aboriginal children and young people show improved wellbeing outcomes across domains, including health, justice, transition to employment/ education etc
- Aboriginal children in the child protection and out of home care systems are connected to family, community, culture and country, and are safely supported in culturally rich environments that are suited to their best interests
- Tailored child and family centred, holistic supports are delivered as needed, not just at crisis, as a package of support across the continuum, through Aboriginal controlled services
- A robust network of community governance mechanisms guide Aboriginal controlled service delivery to achieve better outcomes for Aboriginal children and families under a framework of Aboriginal self-determination
- Aboriginal children and families in need of support receive this support from a resourced Aboriginal controlled organisation in the Far West NSW region

Success

Recognising the objectives and outcomes, and the overall vision for a Far West NSW Aboriginal child and family system, the following success measures are identified as what should be expected once the approach is fully established and serving the communities in the region.

- Aboriginal children and families in need of support receive it in a timely way that is tailored to their needs from an Aboriginal controlled organisation
- The service system for Aboriginal children and families is realigned under one regional Aboriginal controlled organisation to enable scale of that organisation to do more
- Aboriginal children in need of statutory care are supported to remain connected to community, culture and home by an Aboriginal controlled organisation, with every opportunity continually explored to safely return to family

- Aboriginal families in contact with child protection receive the support they need, to address the concerns that are there, with limited to no re-reporting to child protection services over time
- Aboriginal communities have authority over the services they need to address community issues to prevent families becoming at risk
- Reports of Aboriginal children at risk reduce over time due to effective tailored supports offered by the Aboriginal controlled service with strong corporate governance to communities in Far West NSW based on the service system working to address needs rather than deliver a program
- Greater Aboriginal self-determination is achieved by enabling an Aboriginal service system delivering for Aboriginal children, families and communities based on expectations established by those communities

Implementation and investment

AbSec firmly believes that a robust implementation framework must be followed, with clear timeframes and milestones and a defined end date. For the purposes of this proposal, a maximum of two years is established to achieve successful establishment of the regional Aboriginal child and family organisation for the Far West NSW region. This will include:

- Achieve accreditation against standards for the Aboriginal organisation
- Model FACS within the district to be a viable Aboriginal care service in readiness for transition
- Establish community engagement and accountability mechanisms
- Establish the business and operating model within the Aboriginal organisation for delivering across the child and family continuum of support
- Realign funding across all child and family programs to invest, via a select re-tender approach, in one Aboriginal controlled organisation under a holistic Aboriginal child and family service
- Identify and implement workforce development strategies specific to the region
- Support transition of service delivery from FACS, non-Aboriginal and government to the regional Aboriginal organisation – this will be for all child and family programs
- Establish reporting and monitoring systems, including data collection to measure success and outcomes
- Establish a regional plan for the Far West NSW region, capturing supply, demand, issues, ROSH v non-ROSH reporting and reason, and community expectations to inform business and operating models over time

AbSec acknowledges that this work must be achieved independent from government to ensure buy-in and confidence from Aboriginal communities in the region, but it also must be achieved with the support and acceptance of government. Many aspects of community engagement and managing expectations must be implemented to ensure success in the approach to address the Far West NSW service system gap.