



# **FAMILY MATTERS NSW**

Strong communities. Strong culture.  
Stronger children.

## **Sector-led change priorities for NSW**





## Sector-led change priorities for NSW

### Acknowledgements

The Family Matters campaign is Australia's national campaign to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people grow up safe and cared for in family, community and culture. Led by SNAICC, Family Matters is supported by a Strategic Alliance of over 150 organisations, academics and prominent educational institutions.

Sector-led change priorities for NSW is a collaborative effort of the Family Matters NSW Collective.

As Chair of the Family Matters NSW Collective, AbSec acknowledges the contribution and commitment of our partners in NSW.



# Foreword

The Family Matters campaign represents the national response of Aboriginal communities, community organisations and their state and national peak bodies to the continuing over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in out-of-home care. This is not a new challenge, however responses to this persistent and growing over-representation seldom extend beyond reactive or short term reforms. It is clear, and indeed acknowledged by the NSW government and broader sector, that a radically new approach to supporting Aboriginal families and communities is needed to achieve the best possible outcomes for our children and young people.

The Family Matters campaign knows that this change can only be achieved through recognising the strength of Aboriginal communities and culture, and building on these strong foundations to create a brighter future for all Aboriginal children. Strong communities. Strong culture. Stronger children.

New South Wales is fortunate to have a foundation of Aboriginal community controlled organisations serving their communities and empowering Aboriginal people to drive solutions at the local level, although further concerted effort is needed to build a state-wide Aboriginal community controlled service system. NSW also has a strong peak representative body, AbSec, supporting sector capacity and sustainability, and articulating a distinct approach to Aboriginal child and family welfare that is determined by Aboriginal people, recognising the cultural perspectives and diversity of Aboriginal communities in NSW. This campaign also brings together our non-Aboriginal allies and civil society to uphold the rights of Aboriginal children, families and communities.

Together, we can address the over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care in a generation. Indeed, we will only achieve it together.

**Tim Ireland, CEO, AbSec**  
Family Matters NSW Collective Chair

# The Family Matters Campaign

The Family Matters campaign aims to ensure that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people grow up safe and cared for in family, community and culture, seeking to eliminate the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care by 2040.

The Family Matters Campaign is built on six core principles that underpin all elements of the campaign.



In addition to the core principles, the Family Matters campaign has identified four key Building Blocks of an effective, culturally safe Aboriginal child and family system to secure the future wellbeing of Aboriginal children and young people

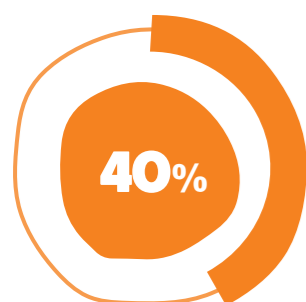


# The Family Matters NSW Collective


The over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care in NSW remains a significant and growing concern.

On the most recent national figures, Aboriginal children in NSW were more than 10 times more likely than their non-Aboriginal peers to be in OOHC, marginally above the national average of 9.5. With 40% of all Aboriginal children in OOHC nationally being in care in NSW, it is particularly important that NSW lead the way with respect to addressing this issue: supporting more Aboriginal children to remain safely at home, or to return home.

The NSW Family Matters Collective represents a group of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organisations that recognise the need to do more to protect the rights of Aboriginal children and families, empowering communities and driving more effective approaches to achieve better outcomes for Aboriginal children, their families and communities.



**40% of all Aboriginal children in OOHC nationally being in care in NSW**



The NSW Family Matters Collective are committed to the principles of the National campaign (stated on page 5). To further support these broad principles, and to adapt them to the language used within in the NSW sector (including the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998), the NSW Family Matters Collective developed the following guiding statements

**Advocating a rights-based child centred approach**

**Developing a holistic Aboriginal family and community strengthening approach tailored to the needs of Aboriginal people**

**Promoting the participation of Aboriginal families and communities with as much self-determination as possible**

**Safeguarding the cultural rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children**

**Empowering Aboriginal communities to develop, implement and evaluate approaches, building evidence-based responses for Aboriginal families and communities**

The NSW sector also continues to move through an extended period of significant reform, generating significant uncertainty in the sector. This uncertainty also presents an opportunity to affect genuine change for Aboriginal children, families and communities. In particular, they present an opportunity for Aboriginal people, our communities, to participate in the design and implementation of a child protection system built by Aboriginal people, for Aboriginal children and their families. This is in line with the major principle identified in every major review of Aboriginal child welfare, including *Bringing Them Home*: that achieving better outcomes for Aboriginal children and families must rest on a foundation of human rights, in particular the self-determination of Aboriginal people.

In this view, there have been some steps forward. There has been the Department of Family and Community Services (FACS) commitment to the *Guiding principles for strengthening the participation of local Aboriginal community in child protection decision making*, and the *Plan on a Page for Aboriginal Children and Young People 2015-2021*, which lays a strong foundation for future engagement and the development of an Aboriginal-led service system to meet the needs of Aboriginal children and families. In addition, the Ministerial Roundtable on the Overrepresentation of Aboriginal Children and Young People in Out-Of-Home Care in NSW gave the opportunity to a number of Aboriginal young people, parents, carers and practitioners to raise concerns with the current system, informing efforts to improve the system.

**They present an opportunity for Aboriginal people to participate in the design and implementation of a child protection system built by Aboriginal people, for Aboriginal children and their families.**

Participants at this forum emphasised the need for a strong, Aboriginal-led approach to Aboriginal child and family services – one that respects our culture and builds on the strengths of our communities. Arising from this discussion, a commitment was secured from the Minister to conduct a review of the cases of all Aboriginal children and young people entering care over the previous 12 months, identifying specific actions to promote reunification and better outcomes for Aboriginal children as well as informing ongoing policy and practice reform. Specific issues regarding policy and practice across the system were also raised at the Roundtable.

NSW delegates at the Family Matters Conference in 2016 identified similar issues, including the application of the Aboriginal Child and Young Persons Placement Principle (ACPP), the identification (and de-identification) of Aboriginal children by FACS, the threat of permanency orders in undermining the rights and lifelong wellbeing, and the need for greater investment in family supports and restoration services to children, delivering tailored and culturally responsive services to Aboriginal families as early as possible.

# NSW Priorities



## 01 Better practice to support and strengthen Aboriginal children and families

Embed Aboriginal family strengthening models focused on family preservation, and early intervention, tailored to Aboriginal families and communities, to prevent Aboriginal children entering the child protection system, and effective supports for restoration and reunification to get children home safely.

Support Aboriginal family-led decision making, facilitated by Aboriginal people, to deliver better outcomes for Aboriginal children.

Develop and implement reliable, culturally valid tools in partnership with Aboriginal families and communities (including carer assessment, risk assessment, restoration etc) for use across the continuum of care.

Review decision making processes regarding Aboriginal children, including placement decisions, with particular focus on the participation of Aboriginal families and communities and the standards of evidence used to support decisions.

Establish Aboriginal Practice Standards, defining minimum benchmarks for effective practice with Aboriginal families and communities

Support effective family finding to keep children connected

Improve the cultural competency of the sector through more Aboriginal staff, appropriately supported to work in their communities, with particular focus on building the capacity of Aboriginal leadership across the sector, as well as improved training and ongoing supervision to support culturally informed practice of all practitioners

## 02 Empower Aboriginal communities to have self-determination over child protection and safety matters

Implementation of the *Guiding principles for strengthening the participation of local Aboriginal community in child protection decision making* and the *Plan on a Page for Aboriginal Children and Young People 2015-2021*

Develop local Aboriginal child safety governance groups to participate in local decision making at both the child/family and system levels

## 03 A child protection system that is accountable to and has the confidence of Aboriginal families and communities, including structural and legislative reform

Development of a framework for the legislative powers required to be invested within an appropriate Aboriginal body to drive accountability and oversight on behalf of Aboriginal communities, including compliance with the true intent of the legislation. This must include the full application of the ACPP and processes developed to identify Aboriginal children and families and safeguard their cultural rights

## 04 Aboriginal community-controlled approaches are best for serving Aboriginal children and families, working in partnership with non-Aboriginal agencies where required

Building an Aboriginal state-wide safety net of community controlled organisations that is adequately resourced to meet the needs of Aboriginal children, families and communities

A collaborative, sector-wide approach to building the capacity of Aboriginal organisations to meet the needs of Aboriginal children and families, including the transition of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care to accredited Aboriginal community controlled agencies.

Achieving the transition of services for Aboriginal children and families to Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, in partnership with non-Aboriginal agencies, building community capacity

## 05 Aboriginal people designing the policies that might impact on their lives, with support models that drive better outcomes developed by Aboriginal people and families

## 06 Each Aboriginal child in care has an individualised plan for their future, and is provided with support based on their needs, including support for their cultural rights and connection to family and community

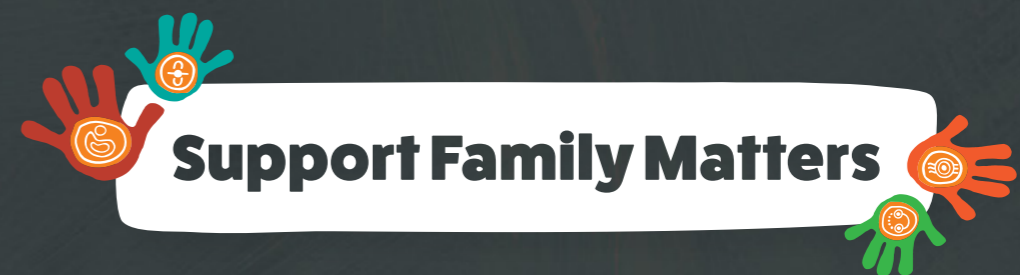




The Family Matters NSW Collective is committed to achieving meaningful change for Aboriginal children, families and communities, with the goal of addressing the over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care. In doing so, it is important that we monitor our progress with respect to the above priorities, and are transparent and accountable, both collectively and as individual member organisations. We will monitor our progress through the regular reporting of progress towards the Family Matters NSW Priorities and projects, supported by the effective use of localised data, as well as through the inclusion

of Family Matters principles and messaging in sector/ system initiatives and directions.

In achieving these NSW Priorities, it is important that momentum is generated across the sector and across the state, engaging broadly with Aboriginal communities and other stakeholders including services and policy makers. Ongoing communication with Aboriginal communities and other stakeholders, in line with our stated principles, is central to the effort and accountability of the Family Matters NSW Working Group.



## Contact Information

**The Family Matters NSW Collective is committed to empowering Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal community controlled organisations, offering practical support and expertise to our communities across NSW.**

We also recognise the range of non-Aboriginal services and other stakeholders that share this commitment to the Family Matters core principles. If you would like to know how you can join us to ensure that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in NSW grow up safe and cared for in family, community and culture, please contact the Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat (AbSec)

### You can reach us via



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# Acknowledgements





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

Sector-led change priorities for NSW

[www.absec.org.au](http://www.absec.org.au)