



MEDIA RELEASE

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AbSec and ACWA joint statement: NSW Government tender award shows misplaced priorities for our children

The NSW Department of Family and Community Services (FACS) has today named Adopt Change, in partnership with Prosper (Project Australia) and the Early Start Discovery Space, as the recipient of the NSW Carer Tender. The \$2.3 million contract gives these organisations responsibility for the newly named My Forever Family NSW program, supporting and recruiting carers of young people in the child protection system over the next three years.

AbSec (Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat) and ACWA (the Association of Children's Welfare Agencies) are deeply concerned this indicates a move towards adoption as a preferred solution for all children and young people in the out-of-home care system.

By placing Adopt Change in charge of recruitment, development and support of carers and guardians, the Government is sending a very clear signal that all carers will be considered prospective adoptive parents.

ACWA CEO Andrew McCallum says it is also of major concern that neither Adopt Change, nor Prosper or the Early Start Discovery Space have specific experience working in out-of-home care.

"It is bitterly disappointing to see a Minister, who has usually been so measured and understanding of the complexities and sensitivities of this portfolio, reach such a low point," Mr McCallum said.

"While permanency for children can take many forms, restoring a child to their birth family whenever possible is always going to be the ultimate goal.

"Adoption from care is just one small part of the solution, and is appropriate for only a limited number of children. To give it false prominence, as the My Forever Family program reflects, sends the wrong message to the community that out-of-home care is an easy pipeline to adoption.

"Even worse, it disregards the rights and needs of vulnerable children and their families."

AbSec CEO Tim Ireland fears this latest move by the NSW Government shows they are not listening to Aboriginal people or respecting the widespread concerns of the sector for Aboriginal children.

"AbSec, ACWA and the organisations we represent as peak bodies have been vocal in our opposition to government-imposed adoptions of Aboriginal children," Mr Ireland said.

“Adoption through the statutory child protection system will never be an acceptable or appropriate solution for Aboriginal children.

“Prioritising adoption over family reunification is contrary to the best interests of all vulnerable children and young people.”

Adoption is particularly harmful to Aboriginal kids for two key reasons. Firstly, Aboriginal young people are safer and happier when they have strong connections to their birth family, community and culture. There is absolutely nothing in the adoption framework to ensure ongoing connection to any of these.

Second, adoption removes safeguards to protect our most vulnerable children and ensure they’re getting the support they need – check-ups to ensure kids are going to school, living safely at home, receiving medical attention and more.

“With Aboriginal children already comprising 37% of young people in the NSW out-of-home care system, it is astonishing that FACS continues to make decisions that harm Aboriginal families,” Mr Ireland said.

AbSec and ACWA maintain that when the system removes a child from their home, it has a responsibility to protect them. By attempting to pass responsibility for vulnerable children onto adoptive parents, the NSW Government is not only cheating our kids, but setting their carers up to fail.

AbSec is the NSW peak body for Aboriginal child and family services.

ACWA is the NSW peak body for community organisations working with vulnerable children, young people and their families.

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