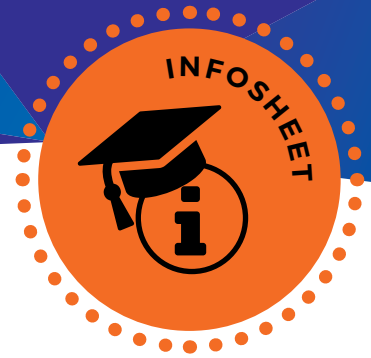


# ADDRESSING OVER-REPRESENTATION



**ACT**  
Government  
Community Services

## ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CHILDREN IN CARE IN THE ACT



The numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out of home care is a national problem. A new review looks to address the issue in the ACT.

### THE CHALLENGE

Twenty-six percent of children in out of home care in the ACT are of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent. This is despite Indigenous children making up only three per cent of the ACT's entire child population.

The number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in care is a national problem. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare report, *Child Protection Australia 2015-2016*, states that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children enter out of home care 10 times more often than non-indigenous children. In the ACT, this is 12 times more likely to happen.

The high numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait children in care requires attention and resolution.

### WHAT IS BEING DONE ABOUT IT?

On 15 June 2017, the ACT Minister for Disability, Children and Youth announced an independent review of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children involved with the ACT child protection system. This review will provide a deeper understanding of the over-representation issue we face and how we should best respond.

The review's primary focus will be to inform system-wide improvements that will fully realise the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle in the ACT. Secondly, case planning for each Indigenous child currently involved in the child protection system will be independently reviewed to ensure culturally appropriate placements are being provided and support children to maintain connections with the culture and traditions of their community.

### THE FRAMEWORK

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle will guide the review. This Principle recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have the knowledge and experience to make the best decisions concerning their children, and acknowledges the importance of each child in care staying connected to family, community, culture and country. The Principle involves the integration of five elements:

- > **Prevention:** Each Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child has the right to be brought up within their own family and community.
- > **Partnership:** The participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community representatives, external to the statutory agency, is required in all child protection decision-making.
- > **Placement:** Placement of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child in out of home care is prioritised in the following way:
  - a) with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander relatives or extended family members, or other relatives or extended family members
  - b) with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family based carers
  - c) with non-indigenous carers or a residential setting.

**26%** of all children in care in the ACT are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander...



...despite Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders making up only **3%** of the ACT's entire child population.



- > **Participation:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, parents and family members are entitled to participate in all child protection decisions affecting them regarding intervention, placement and care, including judicial decisions.
- > **Connection:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out of home care are supported to maintain connection to their family, community and culture, especially children placed with non-Indigenous carers.

## THE SCOPE

Over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in care is a serious matter. It is important the review fully explores all the issues and both the process and decision-making keeps children at the centre, with their needs and best interests paramount.

The review will be conducted by a team led by skilled Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with experience in child protection. The review will involve the following three phases (timeframes are indicative).

### > Phase 1 – Methodology design (Aug 2017 – Feb 2018)

The review's methodology will be co-designed with identified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and elected bodies to establish the process to assess current case management and planning processes against the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle.

### > Phase 2 – Interim report of early learnings and initial improvements (Feb – Aug 2018)

This phase will see the reviewers focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who are involved with Child and Youth Protection Services on interim / short-term orders. An interim report will be delivered at the end of this phase.

### > Phase 3 – Final report focused on major system-wide improvements (Aug 2018 – Sept 2019)

This phase will focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people who are on long-term orders with a view to determine if appropriate casework and services are in place to support their connection to culture and family. A final report will be delivered after the end of this phase.

The best interests of children are a priority for this review and it is not intended to disrupt stable long-term placements that are meeting the individual needs of children. Phase three will focus on ensuring children

in long-term placements are supported to maintain connection with their family, community and culture – particularly those children with non-Indigenous carers.

How carers are supported to achieve these outcomes is critical. The review will provide guidance about how the ACT can improve information and training to carers, improve case planning processes and develop a culturally competent workforce.

## HOW WILL A PROPER PROCESS BE ASSURED?

The review will involve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, key Indigenous organisations and Government.

Direct oversight of the Review will be provided by the Review Steering Committee, which will include representatives of identified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and elected bodies.

The Child and Youth Protection Quality Assurance and Improvement Committee (CYPQAI) provides advice to the Director General of the Community Services Directorate on the provision of quality services by the Child and Youth Protection Service. CYPQAI will oversee the progress of the Review of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People involved with the Child Protection System for its implications for quality service provision by Child and Youth Protection Services.

## A BIGGER PICTURE

The practice of the child protection system is often the focus when the issue of over-representation is canvassed. The child protection system operates within the context of universal and targeted support systems where the child protection system is the last step acting in the best interests of children. This review will address how all systems can work together better to keep children safe in their families and culture.

The Community Services Directorate is committed to reducing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the child protection system. The review will build on the early success achieved under the 'A Step Up for Our Kids' reform.

## WANT MORE INFORMATION?

Contact Child and Youth Protection Services at:

- > [OCYFS@act.gov.au](mailto:OCYFS@act.gov.au)

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