



Aboriginal Workforce Development Statewide Strategy 2020-2025

NSW Aboriginal Child & Family Sector

About AbSec

AbSec - NSW Child, Family and Community Peak Aboriginal Corporation is the peak Aboriginal child and family organisation 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 support 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.

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

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AbSec can be found on the land of the Gadigal people at:

21 Carrington Road, Marrickville NSW 2204

Phone: (02) 9559 5299

E-mail: reception@absec.org.au

Website: www.absec.org.au

Facebook: @AbSecNSW

Twitter: @AbSecNSW

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**ABORIGINAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
STATEWIDE STRATEGY 2020–2025
NSW ABORIGINAL CHILD & FAMILY SECTOR**

SUMMARY

The Aboriginal Workforce Development Statewide Strategy (Statewide Strategy) 2020–2025 has been developed as part of the initiatives of the NSW government's Aboriginal Child and Family Investment Strategy (ACFIS). It identifies ways to strengthen the Aboriginal workforce as part of the government's commitment to achieve better outcomes for Aboriginal children and families.

The state of the Aboriginal child and family sector

There are currently 10 accredited Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) in NSW. They provide for the care of 18% of the Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home-care (OOHC). The ACFIS aims to shift this to 100% of the Aboriginal children and young people in OOHC¹.

With the goal of having Aboriginal people servicing the Aboriginal child and family sector, there will need to be a statewide increase in ACCOs and an increase in the Aboriginal workforce with higher level specialisation.

Based on AbSec's projections², it is estimated the Aboriginal workforce needs to be at minimum **4525**. This includes:

1. **3837** FTE Aboriginal Caseworkers
2. **586** FTE Aboriginal Case Managers
3. **102** FTE Aboriginal Senior Managers

These figures are current and do not take into account the expected increase in Aboriginal children and young people in NSW coming in contact with child and family services.

As there is currently no available accurate figures on the Aboriginal workforce in the child and family sector, part of the strategy is to establish a benchmarking system that collects data to measure and track the progress of implementing the Statewide Strategy over the next 5 years.

The Statewide Strategy is based on consultations with Aboriginal workers and organisations throughout NSW. It acknowledges the importance of implementation to suit the localised needs for increasing the local workforce.

STRATEGIC ACTIONS

As NSW peak body for the Aboriginal child and family sector, AbSec identifies the following five strategic actions to increase the scale and capacity of the Aboriginal workforce.

STRATEGIC ACTION

1



ATTRACT

Motivate Aboriginal workers to apply to work in the sector

STRATEGIC ACTION

2



RECRUIT

Facilitate Aboriginal workers to join the sector

STRATEGIC ACTION

3



RETAIN

Help Aboriginal workers to stay in the sector

STRATEGIC ACTION

4



UPSKILL

Provide growth and opportunities for Aboriginal workers in the sector

STRATEGIC ACTION

5



PERFORMANCE

Keep the sector accountable to Aboriginal children and families, and meeting quality standards

STRATEGIC ENABLERS

Five key strategic enablers underpin this Statewide Strategy.

These principles are necessary to successfully implement the strategic actions and achieve the outcomes.

1. **Acknowledge the past** history of forced removals, driven by a colonial interpretation of what governments felt was in the 'best interests' of Aboriginal children and families. Aboriginal families and communities still bear the scars of the government's paternalism that pervades the child and family sector.
2. **Make it a government priority** to change the state of the sector, in a similar way to the commitments shown in national task forces
3. **Commit to long-term change** which recognises systemic, sector-wide changes aligned to the aspirations of Aboriginal communities, including policies, programs and commissioning
4. **Funding for now and the future** in line with a long term commitment for change in the sector. Reliable and consistent funding is crucial to enable the transformations needed.
5. **Establish mechanisms for Aboriginal oversight and coordination** that is embedded throughout the strategic efforts, recognising the importance of self-determination for Aboriginal communities and elders.

OUTCOME

Key figures

- A stable workforce of 4525 Aboriginal workers in appropriate positions in the Aboriginal child and family sector
- 24 ACCOs across the NSW state, with increased maturity and capacity
- Increase in specialist and senior Aboriginal workers

A changed landscape

- The Aboriginal Child and Family service sector is an employer of choice
- Aboriginal people feel safe and proud to work in the sector
- Aboriginal people are able to succeed and pursue their professional best in sector
- The sector provides holistic care through the continuum of care
- Aboriginal workers feel confident to influence and inject a cultural lens in service provision
- A shift from an under-resourced, reactive mode, to a strategic use of personnel to achieve better outcomes for Aboriginal children and families.

STRATEGY 1



ATTRACT

Motivating Aboriginal workers to apply to work in the sector

- 1.1 Positive change campaign
- 1.2 Market through partnerships
- 1.3 Clear entry pathways
- 1.4 Culturally prepared

1.1 Positive change campaign

To overcome the negative experiences and history of the sector, it is important that a change strategic campaign is run to influence and share positive stories on the work achieved by the Aboriginal child and family sector through storytelling.

1.2 Market through partnerships

For greater exposure in Aboriginal communities, an active marketing effort is needed to attract employees and volunteers in partnership with educational institutions such as TAFE, schools and universities. Running public campaigns at community events and engagement days is essential to build a positive image and attract workers in the Aboriginal child and family sector.

Cadetships and traineeships can engage a greater Aboriginal student population and harness their interests whilst they are attending school and assist in the transition into professional employment. Collaborations with government agencies such as NSW Department of Industry can identify the needs of the future workforce in regional areas and cater for these through targeted education and training programs.

TIMEFRAME: 0–1 YEAR

1.3 Clear entry pathways

For the sector to be appealing, it is necessary to include soft entry pathways for Aboriginal candidates to satisfy the selection criteria. Providing opportunities such as traineeships and longer probation periods for candidates to acquire necessary certification will make jobs more accessible for Aboriginal applicants.

TIMEFRAME: 1–2 YEARS

1.4 Culturally prepared

To present the workplace as culturally safe, it is necessary to show preparedness. For this, organisations should display clearly their culturally-informed policies and procedures. Word of mouth is powerful, if practices are culturally-informed then community members would be made aware, thus attracting more applicants to want to apply to join such workplaces.

TIMEFRAME: 1–2 YEARS

ACTIONS:

- ▶ Identify positive motivational stories from practitioners and families in areas such as preservation, restoration and leaving care.
- ▶ Use storytelling in video format to promote positive success stories
- ▶ Develop opportunities for secondments / exchanges, sharing between staff of Child and Family service ACCOs, NSW Department of Family and Community Services (DCJ) and related child protection agencies.
- ▶ Create clear alignment to similar child and family service sector organisations to create graduate program opportunities and potential resource sharing, knowledge sharing and collaborative arrangements.
- ▶ Develop a shared register of Aboriginal staff between ACCOs
- ▶ Partner with educational institutions such as universities, TAFEs and schools to embrace student placements in Child and Family service ACCOs
- ▶ Identify the ACCOs 'why', social standing in their communities and build this into attraction processes
- ▶ Develop culturally-informed policies, procedures and Cultural Safety Framework.

STRATEGY 2



RECRUIT

Enable Aboriginal workers to join the sector

- 2.1 Recognise barriers
- 2.2 Review recruitment practices
- 2.3 Acknowledge lived experience

2.1 Recognise barriers

Many systemic issues present as barriers to potential Aboriginal workers entering the sector. These barriers can vary depending on location, and are not limited to issues of regional isolation, access to transportation, access to affordable childcare, access to technology, personal documentation, and complexities around obtaining police clearances or working with children's checks. For the Aboriginal workforce to grow, it is important that local and statewide initiatives are undertaken to alleviate the barriers.

TIMEFRAME: 0–1 YEARS

2.2 Review recruitment practices

To make recruitment fair, equitable and accessible it is important to recognise and value recruitment processes aligned to the needs of Aboriginal workers and the sector. Changes need to include easy to access job advertisements, shorter recruitment processing times, and culturally appropriate interviewing and recruitment techniques. Networking within regional areas will enable the opportunities for shared recruitment registers or talent pools across organisations.

TIMEFRAME: 1–2 YEARS

2.3 Acknowledge lived experience

Most job advertisements focus on qualifications rather than personal attributes and experience. Reframing job advertisements to allow for community based experiences and recognised prior learning would provide better balance of tertiary experience and grassroots community exposure. With the assistance of community based elders, it is possible to employ culturally informed staff equipped with the practical job requirements. Attention to inductions and on-board training could provide opportunities for workers to obtain necessary professional qualifications during probation.

TIMEFRAME: 1–2 YEARS

ACTIONS:

- ▶ Develop online tools to assist Aboriginal people. Providing tools and support for gaining types of documentation (e.g. personal documentation), skills and requirements for entry into the sector.
- ▶ Advocate for and promote opportunities for skills recognition to acknowledge lived experience.
- ▶ Develop culturally appropriate interviewing toolkit, culturally safe inductions, onboarding and professional development opportunities during probation.

STRATEGY 3



RETAIN

Help Aboriginal workers to stay in the sector

- 3.1 Demonstrate cultural awareness
- 3.2 Provide incentives
- 3.3 Develop client care and staff mix ratio
- 3.4 Supervision

3.1 Demonstrate cultural awareness

In recognition of the challenges associated to working in the Aboriginal child and family sector, managers must be flexible, responsive, and culturally appropriate, in order to better support the Aboriginal workforce. There is a need to develop and embed an Aboriginal cultural safety framework throughout the sector. Acknowledging cultural days of significance including “sorry business” is one aspect within framework. A general awareness of cultural knowledge is essential to ensure Aboriginal workers are not expected to be cultural experts. Workplaces must maintain support mechanisms for Aboriginal workers to overcome lateral violence, risk of cultural isolation and marginalisation.

TIMEFRAME: 0–1 YEARS

3.2 Provide incentives

In recognition of the pay disparities within the sector, it is important to incorporate financial and non-financial incentives for Aboriginal workers to remain in the sector. These incentives could include higher remuneration, flexible work arrangements, a healthy work-life balance, staff based benefits, secondments and other professional development opportunities.

TIMEFRAME: 0–1 YEARS

3.3 Develop client care and staff mix ratio

In line with AbSec’s Our Families, Our Way report, a better workforce must include a mix of workers across all levels of support services for children and families. There is a need to redesign and review caseloads, client ratios and work intensity. Using evaluation tools, organisations and the sector should identify and monitor individual performance and client service satisfaction.

TIMEFRAME: 1–2 YEARS

3.4 Supervision

In recognition of the vicarious trauma experienced for workers in the sector, it is essential that Aboriginal workers are provided with adequate supervision including clinical, cultural and peer to peer supervision. Workplaces must mitigate risks of burn out and community isolation that an Aboriginal worker may face due to their work and connection to community. Organisational policy must support self-care, conflict or dispute resolution processes and provide mechanisms for workers to juggle between work and home life.

TIMEFRAME: 0-1 YEARS

ACTIONS:

- ▶ Develop a NSW Statewide Aboriginal Cultural Safety Framework. Advocate for and propose increased remuneration, financial and non-financial incentives.
- ▶ Review and propose redesign of caseloads, client ratios and work intensity.
- ▶ Propose client service satisfaction tools that can be used across the sector.
- ▶ Review a professional supervision framework, which provides instruction, guidance, support and oversight.
- ▶ Review the effectiveness, including cost, and utilisation of the internal and external support mechanisms and well-being programs in place for Aboriginal staff including physical, social, emotional and cultural.



STRATEGY 4



UPSKILL

Give opportunities for Aboriginal workers to grow in the sector

- 4.1 Provide career pathways
- 4.2 Train and engage
- 4.3 Mentor

4.1 Provide career pathways

Training and leadership opportunities are crucial to career development. Visible and encouraged pathways must exist to provide for professional growth of Aboriginal workers into senior or specialist roles. Mechanisms for performance review must be culturally appropriate. External staff, particularly in management roles, must be aware of the localised issues and be culturally respectful to clients and workers. Workplaces need to undertake succession planning to enable workforce sustainability.

TIMEFRAME: 1–2 YEARS

4.2 Train and engage

Field and management staff must be adequately trained to maintain best practice and provide child and family services using a holistic model. Funding packages to ACCOs must provide for the necessary training budget. Partnerships with educational institutions can deliver management training for senior Aboriginal workers and address skills gaps across the sector.

TIMEFRAME: 2–3 YEARS

4.3 Mentor

Aboriginal workers should feel equipped to become leaders to guide junior workers through development programs, and have opportunities that increase professional integration and avoid isolation. These initiatives can be supported by accessing the resources of volunteers such as retirees or temporary personnel who can provide support and assistance within the workforce.

TIMEFRAME: 2–3 YEARS

ACTIONS:

- ▶ Propose a performance monitoring process based on Cultural Safety Framework principles.
- ▶ Develop and establish an Aboriginal mentoring program, including toolkit and mentor and mentoree training across the sector

STRATEGY 5



PERFORMANCE

Keep the sector accountable to Aboriginal children and families

- 5.1 Participate in benchmarking
- 5.2 Provide cultural respect
- 5.3 Collaborate for best practice

5.1 Participate in benchmarking

In the effort to build reliable and measurable data, it is critical that a benchmarking framework is established and rolled out across the sector. This would gather the needed information to monitor the trends in the sector and the needed changes to meet the outcomes of the Statewide Strategy.

5.2 Provide cultural respect

Access to Aboriginal cultural education is crucial for all workers, to establish a culturally informed and inclusive workforce.

5.3 Collaborate for best practice

Strong partnerships must exist between peak organisations, ACCOs and relevant bodies to coordinate, innovate and establish best practice for the Aboriginal workforce in the sector.

ACTIONS:

- ▶ Develop a Best Practice, evidence-based Aboriginal Child and Family Services sector cultural framework
- ▶ Develop partnerships with other agencies and facilitate information exchange and job-exchange opportunities.

Endnotes

1. Aboriginal Child and Family Investment Strategy, NSW Dept of Family and Community Services, Feb 2019 page 56
2. The calculations are based on staff client ratio informed by the AbSec's Strengthening Aboriginal Families Model Framework. ACFIS estimated ~70000 Aboriginal children and young people in NSW as vulnerable. Based on this, and a ratio of 1 caseworker to every 50 of these children and young people needing targeted early intervention, 1400 caseworkers are needed. These caseworkers will need to be supported by 140 case managers, and 18 senior managers (staffing ratio of 10 caseworkers to one case manager; and 8 case managers to one senior manager).

The Report on Government Services 2020 (Productivity Commission) data reports 21,268 notifications regarding child protection were made about Aboriginal children and young people in NSW. Based on this, and a ratio of 1 caseworker to every 20 of these children and young people needing intensive intervention to prevent escalation, 1064 caseworkers are needed. These caseworkers will need to be supported by 213 case managers, and 43 senior managers (staffing ratio of 5 caseworkers to one case manager; and 5 case managers to one senior manager).

The Report on Government Services 2020 (Productivity Commission) data reports 4,047 substantiations regarding child protection were made about Aboriginal children and young people in NSW. Based on this, and a ratio of 1 caseworker to every 5 of these children and young people needing crisis intervention, 810 caseworkers are needed. These caseworkers will need to be supported by 162 case managers, and 33 senior managers (staffing ratio of 5 caseworkers to one case manager; and 5 case managers to one senior manager).

The Department of Communities and Justice Dashboard data reports 6,766 Aboriginal children in out-of-home-care in NSW. Based on this, and a ratio of 1 caseworker to every 12 of these children needing care and protection, 564 caseworkers are needed. These caseworkers will need to be supported by 71 case managers, and 9 senior managers (staffing ratio of 8 caseworkers to one case manager; and 8 case managers to one senior manager).



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21 Carrington Road, Marrickville NSW 2204

Phone: (02) 9559 5299

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Facebook: @AbSecNSW

Twitter: @AbSecNSW