



# AbSec

## Annual Report

### 2021/2022



## Acknowledgment

AbSec would like to acknowledge that our work is conducted on the traditional lands of the Aboriginal Nations of New South Wales. Our head office is on the land of the Gadigal/Wangal people, who like other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia, never ceded sovereignty.

We pay our respects to Elders both past and present, and to those emerging leaders who will guide us into the future.

We also acknowledge members of the Stolen Generations whose connection to their Country was interrupted, and whose search for belonging and identity has been long and difficult. We stand by them in their struggle.

We acknowledge the carers of Aboriginal children and young people, who provide a vital role in caring for our kids, ensuring that they remain connected to their culture.

We acknowledge our children and young people – they are our future.

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## A Message from our Chairperson

In spite of all the external factors that have been thrown at us, the end of 2022 comes with a feeling of pride, optimism and joy. The fact that AbSec has continued to represent the best interests of our children, families and communities feels as if the transformative change we're fighting for is close.

I am constantly amazed at what we've achieved over the past 12 months. All our members, employees and supporters who played a part in helping advance AbSec's work should be incredibly proud. The ongoing work of AbSec is underscored in this annual report.

The end of 2022 represents the end of our current strategic plan. After immense consultation, we have completed our new strategic direction. We'll soon make the finer details known, but the 2022-2024 National Agreement on Closing the Gap will be our primary focus area. As we aim to reduce the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care by 45% by 2035, we continue to advocate for change to existing policies and new legislation, shaped by our principles of family, community and self-determination.

It has been a year of progress. We've seen the development of the Aboriginal-led Commissioning Framework and the implementation of the Aboriginal Case Management Policy. We've been a crucial part of the new Closing the Gap agreement, the reformation of the Permanency Support

Program and a vital part of the advocacy pushing for the implementation of the Family is Culture report.

While I note the positives, we need to understand that the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in the child protection system continues to increase. Despite making up just 5% of children in NSW, our children almost represent the majority. We know that the impact of removing our children from their culture, community and kin can last a lifetime, and it is a constant motivator in the push to secure better outcomes for Aboriginal children.

I would like to recognise the dedication of my fellow board members and thank the outgoing William Henry for his fine work as our Treasurer. I'm confident that the AbSec board will continue to expertly guide the important work that AbSec does.

I'd like to close with a thank you to the staff of AbSec. Their impressive work in the community and at the policy level is bringing us closer to a system shaped by our people and the values we hold. I'd like to particularly thank those who have spoken first-hand to communities and safeguarded their feedback through difficult consultations with external stakeholders and lawmakers. Through these actions and unwavering commitment will come historic change.



## A Message from our CEO

I come to you at the end of another turbulent year, another that we are seemingly living through history. Despite the evolving impact of COVID-19, unprecedented environmental factors and growing financial restraints, I would like to start by praising the resilience of the sector and our communities, and the limitless strength we have all shown in the past year. I am proud to say that notwithstanding all the challenges put before us, there has been significant progress in the sector, with AbSec leading the way on several key projects.

The National Child Safety Framework and the new National Agreement on Closing the Gap have provided a clear framework that progresses the principles of self-determination and culturally sound practice as we address the clear over-representation of our children in the child protection system.

As part of the NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations, AbSec saw a clear government commitment to Closing the Gap. Significant investment has been promised to meet the nineteen targets outlined in the new National Agreement on Closing the Gap. This funding will strengthen the ability of communities to participate in Aboriginal-led decision-making in Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), Aboriginal Community-Controlled Mechanisms working with the Aboriginal Case Management Policy and local Aboriginal Knowledge Circles.

Another significant piece of our work was the pilot of the Aboriginal Guardianship Support

Model. Informed by insights and feedback supplied by those who have been affected by the transition to guardianship care, this model has supplied the foundations for a new Aboriginal-led commissioning agency. Moving forward, this project will ensure culturally-responsive procurement practices that will enable Aboriginal outcomes, increasing Aboriginal applicants.

Family is Culture has been a key focus of ours in the past 12 months. In partnership with the Public Interest Advocacy Centre and the Aboriginal Legal Service, our strong advocacy efforts have provided the foundation for substantial legislative reform, as we push for the inclusion of the Family is Culture recommendations outlined in Prof. Megan Davis' historic 2019 *Family is Culture* Report.

With the third anniversary of the report and a bill set to be tabled, we might be finally seeing some light at the end of the tunnel. Despite this, we will continue to keep the government accountable, ensuring that all recommendations are part of this reform, and decisions are made with close collaboration with Aboriginal voices.

AbSec has continued supporting the incredibly important ACCOs in 2021/2022, as we welcomed new organisations in the out-of-home sector. This past year also saw the NSW government commit to building a strong ACCO sector, which resulted in substantial recommissioning of the Permanency Support Program and Family Preservation framework, as AbSec worked alongside the Department

of Communities and Justice and ACCOs to guarantee that this change is directed by (and for) Aboriginal communities and families.

In conjunction with the ACCO sector, the AbSec team pushed forward with a review of the Structured Decision-Making tools used by mandatory reporters, discovering that significant racial and cultural biases are inherent in the tool, highlighting a need for an Aboriginal-designed and evaluated tool.

I would like to take this opportunity to highlight the growing need for Aboriginal-led evaluation of both Indigenous Data Sovereignty and Indigenous Data Governance. I would like to call on state and federal governments to be bold and invest in community-led structures that can provide an authentic lens to the policy

framework and have the cultural knowledge needed to develop critical evidence cases. There also remain significant opportunities to shift investment to culturally-responsive early intervention. As we move into 2023, I will be asking the government at the state and federal levels to take the plunge and evolve their approach to funding, and examine the innovative community-led approaches open to them.

In closing, I would like to personally thank the team at AbSec. Without their tireless efforts, unshakeable work ethic and undimmed passion, the incredible work that this organisation does in supporting our children, families and communities would not be possible. I am proud to be working alongside them and am excited for what 2023 holds.



# Who we are

AbSec – NSW Child, Family and Community Peak Aboriginal Corporation is the peak body representing Aboriginal children, families, communities and organisations across NSW. We provide policy advice and strategic initiatives to influence change and deliver better outcomes for Aboriginal children, families and communities across the state.



AbSec was established in 1999 through a need to bring together Aboriginal child and family organisations to form a network of agencies. This group of agencies formed the Aboriginal Child, Family & Community Care State Secretariat committee.

In the years since, AbSec has become a not-for-profit, member-based organisation representing Aboriginal child and family support services across the state, with our constitution making us an Aboriginal Corporation.

Our work aims to shape the Aboriginal sector and deliver greater self-determination for our communities. AbSec is committed to advocating not just on behalf of communities, but also for carers of Aboriginal children and service providers that work in the sector, tying our work into an overall goal of building a holistic child protection system. The system must be one where Aboriginal children grow up safe, with a strong cultural identity and with every opportunity for lifelong well-being.

## Our Board of Governance

The AbSec Board determines our strategic direction, provides oversight across major objectives and ensures the good governance of the organisation. Our Board consists of representatives from Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations, many of whom are the Chief Executive Officers, with each organisation being a member of AbSec.

Each Board member has a wealth of knowledge and experience from the Aboriginal child and family sector and dedicates their time to assisting our staff and improving outcomes for Aboriginal children in NSW. The Board aims to convene on a bi-monthly basis, and numerous face-to-face meetings were held during the 2021/2022 financial year.

## Board members

**DANA CLARKE** is a proud Biripi and Worimi woman. Dana has been an active member of the Board since 2005 and holds the position of Chairperson of AbSec.

Dana has contributed to our communities through a range of roles in Aboriginal health, child protection, sexual assault and mental health for over 25 years. Currently, Dana is the Chief Executive Officer of Burrun Dalai Aboriginal Corporation. Burrun Dalai delivers early intervention, family preservation and out-of-home care services across the Nambucca, Macleay, Hastings and Manning Valleys as well as the Tamworth and Armidale Regions.

Dana's work reflects her belief that our kids and families are our future. Dana is committed to ensuring our communities are best supported to guarantee that our kids remain with their families, rich in their culture and belonging. As Dana puts it, "family is everything; it is our past and our future".

**PETRICE MANTON** is a proud Aboriginal woman from the Gamipingal clan of the Worimi Nation. Petrice is the Vice-Chairperson of AbSec and is the current Chief Executive Officer of Muloobinba Aboriginal Corporation in Newcastle.

Petrice is passionate about advocating for Aboriginal families and making sure our people get a fair go. Petrice is committed to establishing culturally embedded, holistic Aboriginal services to support Aboriginal children and families to flourish, delivered by Aboriginal organisations that are accountable to our communities.

**WENDY KNIGHT**, a proud Barkindgi woman, is a strong advocate for the rights of Aboriginal people and is committed to promoting an Indigenous perspective on various issues that affect Aboriginal children and families. Wendy is an accomplished senior community services executive, currently serving as the Chief Executive Officer of Ngunya Jarjum. She

has over 15 years of experience working on complex socio-economic issues such as child protection, out-of-home care and service sector contract management in both government and non-government roles.

**WILLIAM HENRY** is a Yuin man from the South Coast of NSW and the Chief Executive Officer of Illawarra Aboriginal Corporation. He has worked in the Aboriginal service sector for over 15 years in areas ranging from health and ageing to disability and governance.

William was previously employed as an Aboriginal Community Development Officer with the Dental Health Service of Victoria and Chief Executive Officer of Illaroo Cooperative Aboriginal Corporation. He was Chairman of the Board of the Illawarra Aboriginal Corporation for 10 years prior to his appointment as Chief Executive Officer and is the grandson of one of the founding members.

**TINA MCGHIE** is a proud Wiradjuri and Ngunnawal woman born and raised on Dharawal Country. Tina has been an active member of AbSec's Board since 2008 and is currently a Director Consultant at Curijo Pty Ltd. Tina is dedicated to supporting Aboriginal children to remain safely at home with their family, connected to community and culture.

**AUNTY DAWN BELL** – Dawn Bell (nee Campbell) is a proud Aboriginal Dunghutti and Yuin woman with family connections from Kempsey to the Victorian border. Dawn is on the board of directors at the Illawarra Aboriginal Corporation and has been an active member for over 35 years, including as the Illawarra Aboriginal Corporation's first president. Dawn has been involved in Aboriginal affairs for over 40 years. Dawn is a mother, grandmother, great-grandmother and foster carer. Dawn also acts as a mother to her nieces, nephews and their children.



## Our Chief Executive Officer

John Leha has been AbSec's Chief Executive Officer since March 2021. He is a proud Birri Gubba, Wakka Wakka and Tongan man born and raised on Gadigal land and reports to the AbSec Board.

He is also a member of the Board of SNAICC, the national peak body for Aboriginal children and families. John was previously the Director of Operations at the National Centre of Indigenous Excellence, the former Chairperson for Gadigal Information Service and a founding member and Chairperson of BlaQ Aboriginal Corporation.

As an active member of the Sydney Aboriginal community, John has worked extensively in Indigenous health, education and employment programs across state and federal government. He is also a Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council member and is deeply involved and connected to community through his work with the Kingsford Community Legal Centre, the AIDS Council of New South Wales' Aboriginal Project and the Indigenous Marathon Foundation.

## Our People

AbSec staff are a diverse group of people, coming from a range of professional and cultural backgrounds. They are all united by their commitment to the goals and values of the organisation. They hail from Bundjalung, Wiradjuri, Kamilaroi, Yuin, Bidjigal, Gunggari and other nations across Australia.

# Our Strategic Plan

This year represents the completion of the *Strategic Plan 2019–2022*. Our new strategic plan will continue to place Aboriginal children, families and communities at the centre of everything we do. Moreover, we will continue to provide the support that fosters Aboriginal-led solutions and work collaboratively with both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organisations in a way that allows us to best represent our stakeholders.



## Our Vision

Our vision is that all Aboriginal children and young people are looked after in safe, thriving Aboriginal families and communities, raised strong in spirit and identity, with every opportunity for lifelong wellbeing and connection to culture, surrounded by holistic supports.

## Goals and objectives

- ⦿ Work towards achieving self-determination for all Aboriginal people and communities, and build a safe, secure and caring environment for their children and young people, surrounded by culture
- ⦿ Support Aboriginal organisations to deliver quality, holistic supports for all Aboriginal children, young people, families and carers
- ⦿ Provide and support opportunities for continual learning, growth, improvement and change, for organisations delivering Aboriginal child and family supports
- ⦿ Represent the interests and inform government and key stakeholders of the issues facing Aboriginal children, young people, families, carers and communities
- ⦿ Advance Aboriginal workforce development to ensure a strong and capable workforce that is ready and equipped to meet the support needs of Aboriginal children, young people, families and communities

## Principles that guide us

- ⦿ **Acknowledgement and respect** – we will acknowledge the diversity of all Aboriginal nations and respect traditional owners of the land, with our actions being informed by the voices of Elders and the cultural knowledge of communities
- ⦿ **Professionalism and integrity** – we will act with the highest of professionalism for our communities, ensuring our integrity will not be compromised in striving for the provision of quality, culturally-responsive and culturally accessible supports
- ⦿ **Self-determination** – we will ensure that our focus is underpinned by the rights of Aboriginal people to make decisions that impact their lives; recognising the interests of Aboriginal children, young people, families and carers, and communities in all that we do
- ⦿ **Independence and solutions-focus** – we will serve the interests of Aboriginal children, young people, families, communities and the organisations that support them to deliver holistic approaches to issues affecting them
- ⦿ **Transparency and commitment** – we will remain committed to our Aboriginal children, families and organisations in everything we do, ensuring their interests are promoted at every opportunity, and that our actions towards achieving this is always clear and transparent

## Our strategic directions

AbSec is committed to the pursuit of the following four core strategic directions:



### Strategic Direction A:

Our Aboriginal children, families and communities are at the centre



### Strategic Direction B:

Our Aboriginal organisations deliver quality supports for our children, families and communities



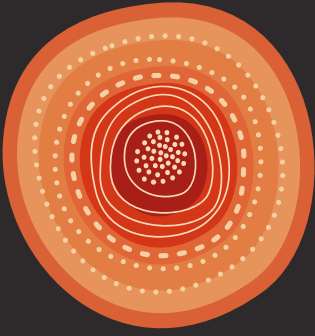
### Strategic Direction C:

Our partnerships will benefit Aboriginal children and families



### Strategic Direction D:

Our organisation is best placed to represent our stakeholders



## Strategic Direction A:

# Giving our children, families and communities a voice

*We must place the perspective of our Aboriginal children, families and communities at the centre of everything we do. This will create a culturally rich and grounded focus for the priorities we establish as an Aboriginal child and family peak organisation. AbSec will seek to harness these perspectives and embed them into the vital work we undertake, to promote positive changes in the lives of Aboriginal children and families.*



## Family is Culture

In 2021/2022, AbSec continued to advocate for the full implementation of 126 Family is Culture (FIC) recommendations in partnership with Aboriginal Communities and stakeholders.

As a direct result, the NSW Minister for Families and Communities agreed to bring forward a bill before Parliament in 2022 in place of a previous government commitment to commence a review in 2024. This bill is expected to be tabled before the third anniversary of the Family is Culture review.

In partnership with the Aboriginal Legal Service (ALS), 'Honouring Family is Culture', a monitoring and reporting framework, was erected to hold the NSW Government accountable for the implementation of FIC. This led to the NSW

Government reconsidering how it works with the Aboriginal community and stakeholders.

Additionally, a joint AbSec/ALS briefing paper was created in response to the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) discussion paper, particularly their concerning analysis of the initial FIC review.

AbSec/ALS called for the development of a joint submission in the paper, making 26 recommendations for legislative reform and redoubling the need for full implementation of FIC, all of which ultimately shaped the draft bill.

To support this work, AbSec engaged with the NSW Greens to draft the initial FIC bill, held community forums with external stakeholders,

created letters to MPs and voters to advocate for the bill, and supplied direct advice through the Aboriginal Knowledge Circle to shape legislative reform.

AbSec will continue to push for the full implementation of FIC in partnership with Aboriginal communities, developing a mutually agreed FIC implementation plan with clear targets, timeframes and roles and responsibilities. This plan should reflect the communities' priorities for implementation.

Additionally, we will develop an Aboriginal community and stakeholder strategic engagement plan for how the DCJ will partner with the community throughout the FIC implementation and update on progress.

In 2023, we will continue to progress the second phase of legislative review for implementation by the end of the year, including key recommendations around self-determination and the establishment of an independent Aboriginal Child Protection Commission.

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## Aboriginal Case Management Policy and Carer Support

AbSec's Aboriginal Carer Support Service continued to provide free support to carers in 2021/2022.

AbSec provided carers with knowledge of their rights and the rights of children and young people in their care. A survey of carers indicated that AbSec's Carer Support Service is a great way for them to discuss paperwork that they may have received but do not understand. The respondents also claimed that the service is much needed, as while they know child focus is a priority, they feel left behind.

A further study discovered that 80% of callers to the support service were Aboriginal carers with Aboriginal children and young people in their care. Conversely, 20% were non-Aboriginal carers but were directly related to the Aboriginal children and young people in their care. The study also identified that AbSec's Carer Support Groups with My Forever Family NSW ensured that any Aboriginal families who approached the organisation were automatically referred to AbSec, prior to further information being provided to carers.

AbSec's Carer Support team directly provided support to numerous communities, organising and chairing support groups in Newcastle (held at Muloobinba Aboriginal Corporation), South West Sydney and Aboriginal Children's Day at Warawarin Early Childhood and Family Centre, providing catering and partnering with Tharawal Aboriginal Corporation to deliver the event.

The Aboriginal Case Management Policy (ACMP) is designed to achieve safety and wellbeing for vulnerable Aboriginal children and young people by keeping them with or returning them to family and connected to their community and culture, it is holistic, culturally responsive and embeds the values and perspectives of Aboriginal people.

AbSec covered 6,500 kilometres to hold a series of community forums across New South Wales to discuss the greater implementation of the ACMP. In these yarns, community stakeholders supplied valuable feedback to further refine the policy developed by AbSec, the Department of Communities and Justice and key stakeholders.

During these forums, AbSec also provided relevant information to help communities administer and deliver their own Aboriginal Community-Controlled Mechanism (ACCM).

Communities across the state are currently in the process of planning what their ACCMs will feature, prior to the current iteration of the project coming to a close in December 2022.

AbSec is confident that these community stakeholders will be able to carry out the implementation of their own ACCM, enabling case management processes that are designed to protect Aboriginal children and young people.

## Flood Support

In February 2022, residents in Bundjalung were warned that flooding was a possibility. Two days later, the town experienced its worst flood on record. In that period, 670 millimetres of rain fell on the region, causing the Lismore waterways to rise by 11 metres.

Unlike the flood of a few years earlier, this event submerged houses and businesses that were previously viewed as safe. In a matter of days, the flood impacted 31,000 people in the local area.

First Nations communities, already impacted by COVID-19, were hit hardest. Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations, already over their limit, lost their offices to the floods but kept providing their crucial support to at-risk families.

To support the community in Bundjalung country, AbSec partnered with Good360 and their donors,

Big W, creating a package that contained Lego sets, coloured pencils and children's clothes to help ease the strain on Aboriginal families uprooted by the floods.

AbSec delivered these goods to the donation centre set up by the Koori Mail, ensuring that our goods were distributed to those who needed them most. As the need for goods continued, AbSec partnered with Woolworths, delivering a donation drive, and asking residents of the Inner West Sydney to donate essentials to be sent to affected areas.

In a conversation with Good360, AbSec CEO John Leha said, "To help our brothers and sisters dealing with unimaginable hardship, we are grateful to be able to help with these care packages. As they rebuild and get back on their feet, we'll continue to support Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations and the people they represent."

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## COVID Support

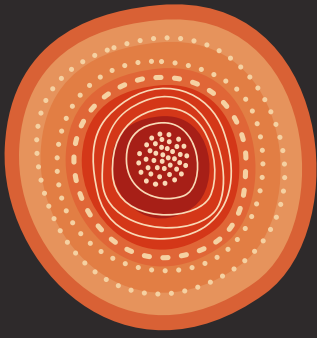
2022 represented another year of COVID, and facing the resultant strain it continues to place on Aboriginal children, families and communities.

To support Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations, AbSec received donations of thousands of face masks and rapid antigen tests, distributing them to the community during our forums in Dubbo and Brewarrina.

Despite the lockdown orders being slowly walked back in 2022, AbSec's Aboriginal Carer Support Service continued to provide free telephone advice in a way that ensured carers remained connected to community and necessary services. Additionally, AbSec completed an awareness campaign that highlighted the need for vaccines and social distancing for carers and children in out-of-home care, in an effort to decrease the percentage of unvaccinated children in care.

This campaign was completed thanks to a partnership with the NSW Office of the Children's Guardian, NSW Health, Aboriginal Medical Services Redfern and the University of Melbourne.





## Strategic Direction B:

# Supporting the Aboriginal sector

*Aboriginal organisations are critical to the success of Aboriginal-led, designed and delivered approaches which support Aboriginal children, families and communities. Our aim is to build and strengthen an Aboriginal-controlled child and family sector, providing tools to foster genuine Aboriginal-led solutions that are creative and forward-thinking, and that deliver better outcomes for our children and their families.*



### Keeping Families Together

One of AbSec's broad goals is to establish an Aboriginal child and family sector that is focused on prevention and early intervention. A sector that is designed and led by Aboriginal people and aligned with the aspirations and priorities of Aboriginal communities.

Over the last year, AbSec partnered with the Department of Communities and Justice to develop an Aboriginal Family Preservation Framework, one that aims to support locally-led models while placing Aboriginal families and communities at the centre of the conversation.

This partnership will contribute to a stronger, culturally embedded, family preservation system that will reduce the number of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care. Additionally, it will shift the child protection

system towards early support measures that acknowledge the strength of Aboriginal families and communities.

The extensive community engagement that AbSec completed during this period with the community and key stakeholders will shape the framework's core components. During these consultations, AbSec began to build a network of family preservation providers, who will ultimately implement the framework.

A culturally-led framework supports the National Close the Gap initiative and the Closing the Gap Implementation Plan. To support this work, the Family Preservation Team has developed a Closing the Gap Leadership Group, one that will fund bids to grow Aboriginal Family Preservation output in the sector.

In 2023, a paper will be developed that will feature the findings from the community engagements, which will inform the core components of this project and be used as an advocacy tool for wider systemic change.



## Maintaining Cultural Connections

Maintaining Aboriginal children and young people's connection to culture and identity is a critical part of their development. It is a requirement in NSW that all Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care have a Cultural Care Plan and a Cultural Support Plan.

To ensure these Culture Care Plans and Cultural Support Plans are safe and effective, AbSec curates Cultural Connections Workshops to build the competencies of practitioners and agencies who set these plans, delivered by the AbSec Learning and Development Centre (LDC).

Throughout 2021/22, AbSec continued to deliver workshops in-person and remotely. In January, the LDC launched a new registration system to speed registrations and meet the challenges of remote learning.

During the course of the year, despite the challenge of COVID restrictions and adopting new learning modes, AbSec trained hundreds of people, mostly carers of Aboriginal children and young people. All of these participants are actively involved in the out-of-home care sector in NSW in roles ranging from caseworkers to counsellors and behavioural specialists.



## Aboriginal-led commissioning

In July 2021, AbSec commenced as a Commissioner of Aboriginal community-led and co-designed services. This followed the launch of the *Commissioning Framework for Aboriginal Commissioning for better Child and family Outcomes* and the model that AbSec developed through partnership the previous year.

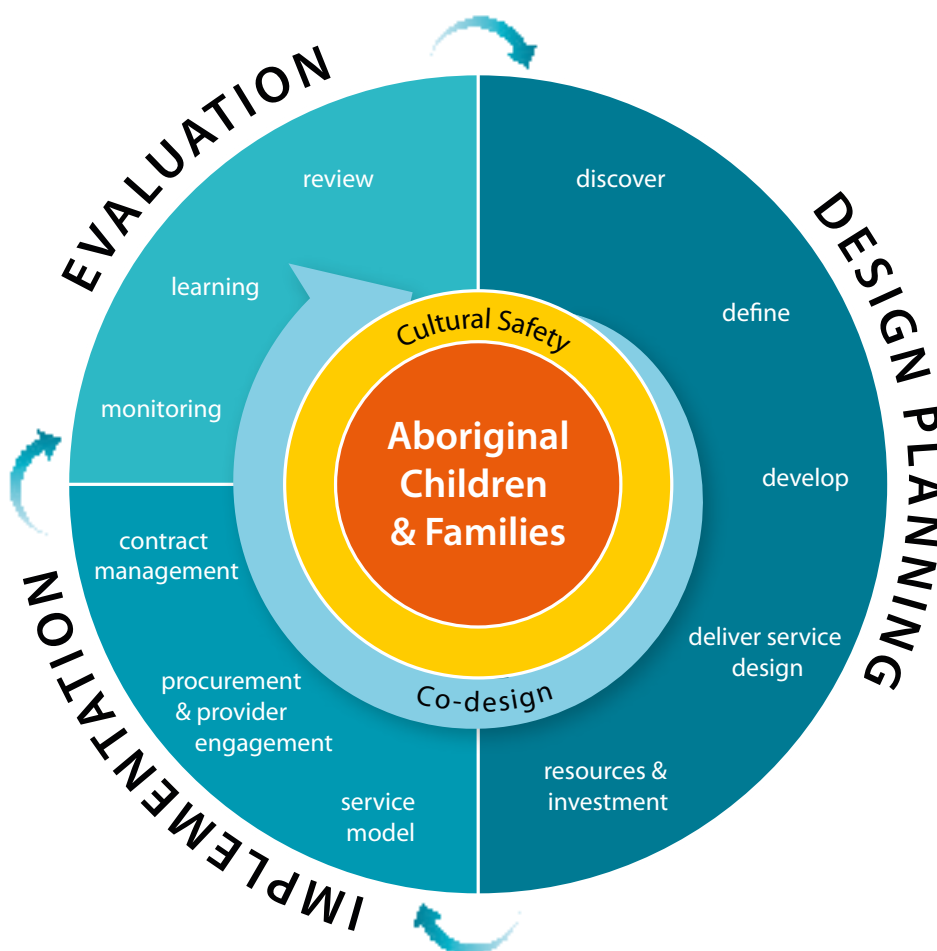
Aboriginal-led commissioning is innovative and unique. AbSec is trialling the Commissioning Framework over the next two and a half years through to December 2023, as a new way forward to address community concerns around the over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people in the statutory care system.

As Commissioner, AbSec opened a tender portal for Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations in NSW to bid for advertised community investment opportunities.

The first Commissioning opportunity, the trial of the Aboriginal Guardianship Support Model opened in July 2021.

Aboriginal-led Commissioning is being trialled in partnership with a cross-sector governance steering committee comprising of AbSec (Chair and business lead), the NSW Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ), NSW Treasury, Department of Premier and Cabinet Aboriginal Affairs NSW. This committee will oversee evidence-based targeted investment with the community to support local decision-making about services, supports and outcomes required.

More details about the Framework are on the AbSec website at <https://absec.org.au/commissioning>





## Guardianship Support and the Aboriginal Guardianship Support Model

Guardianship represents one of three permanent care orders in NSW. Despite AbSec's advocacy for family restoration, the number of Aboriginal children and young people on Guardianship orders in NSW continues to increase yearly.

According to the 2021/2022 FACSIAR report (Request No. FAC0011855), the number of Aboriginal children and young people on Guardianship orders is 1,210. This figure is up from 1,144 (2019/2020) and 1,036 (2018/2019).

Furthermore, data supplied by the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) estimates that 60% of Aboriginal children and young people were placed with Aboriginal guardians, and 40% with non-Aboriginal guardians.

In 2021/2022, AbSec secured funding to trial the community co-design Aboriginal Guardianship Support Model (AGSM). This model provides Aboriginal children and young people on guardianship orders with additional supports that are not routinely made available to them.

The Model of Supports was designed in 2020 in partnership with end-service users, Aboriginal community members and sector practitioners, and government project partners in two locations – the Hunter and South West Sydney. The model addresses the identified concerns and aspirations of children and young people on guardianship, their guardians, and the safety net provisions required.

The NSW Government approved a funding package of \$3.75 million in July 2021 for commissioned activities and new supports in the Hunter and South West Sydney regions, which commenced in 2022. The trial will continue until the end of 2023.

Two Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations were selected to assist Aboriginal children and young people on guardianship orders to access the necessary support needed to live safely in their culture, community and mob. Mindaribba Local Aboriginal Land Council – *Witjimaliny Parray ngaatany Kuutjita* project (Wonnarua language for 'bringing together Country and kin') – in the Hunter covering Awabakal, Geawegal, Worimi, Wonnarua and Darkinung lands, and Tharawal Aboriginal Corporation – Waranwarin Child and Family Centre – in South West Sydney covering Dharawal, Gundungurra, and some areas of Dharug and Eora lands.

Approximately 90 children in each district are eligible to access this new guardianship support service. The trial, including its approach and process, will be reviewed and evaluated in 2023. The learnings will be made available after this evaluation process.

A further stage of this project would see other communities in NSW expressing interest in partnered supports.

Over the last 12 months, the major projects carried out by the Guardianship team at AbSec included:

- ⦿ Aboriginal-led commissioning in accordance with our Framework, policies and procedures
- ⦿ The delivery of an independent probity report that covered our conduct of Aboriginal-led commissioning, the contractual process of Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), as well as the processes concerning tendering; procurement and selection of ACCOs
- ⦿ Progress of project with Mindaribba Local Aboriginal Land Council and Tharawal Aboriginal Corporation to deliver Guardianship project in 2022–23
- ⦿ Initiation of end-to-end AGSM project delivery, including a sector support program and contract management within the commissioning projects
- ⦿ Ongoing evaluation of tender specification, outcomes and parameters of Aboriginal-led commissioning and the trial of the AGSM with the DCJ
- ⦿ Presentation of Aboriginal-led Commissioning by AbSec at the 2021 SNAICC Conference

- ⦿ Representation by AbSec on the DCJ Commissioning Governance Committee and Working Parties, as well as the DCJ South Western Sydney District Commissioning forum for investment in Aboriginal initiatives
- ⦿ Sector briefings in regions specific to Aboriginal-led commissioning and the DCJ Youth Frontiers Program were carried out, alongside an evaluator briefing with DCJ

In 2023, AbSec will continue to oversee the delivery and quality development of the two ongoing AGSM projects, as well as participate in the DCJ-managed evaluation of Aboriginal-led commissioning and the AGSM, ensuring that the rights of Aboriginal children and young people, as well as their connection to their culture, kin, country and mob, is protected and represented.

**SNAICC NATIONAL CONFERENCE  
2021 – Innovation in Action Aboriginal-Led Commissioning for better Aboriginal child and family outcomes**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BliwhnmbkuU>





## Strengthening Aboriginal Organisations

As part of our continuing commitment to developing a strong Aboriginal-led sector, AbSec supports Aboriginal organisations throughout the state to improve and develop the way they work. This is vital for improving the outcomes for Aboriginal communities and the children and families that reside in them.

In 2021/2022, our work in this area increased with the implementation of the Social Sector Transformation Fund (SSTF). SSTF provided critical resources and direction around governance and legal structures and training and advice tailored for an emerging and much-needed regional Aboriginal Community-Controlled sector.

SSTF hosted two community organisation forums in key remote locations in the Far West and Western NSW regions. These events, held in Brewarrina and Dubbo respectively, aimed to encourage knowledge sharing and support the interconnection between the various organisations in those targeted locations and the surrounding areas. The long-term aim of this undertaking is for organisations to expand and improve their service delivery to the Aboriginal community.

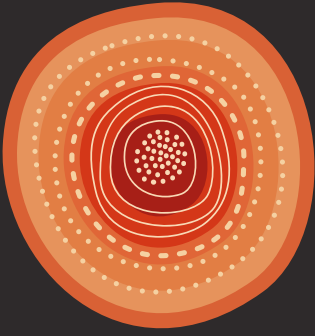
SSTF provided over 150 instances of support to Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) and other organisations that provide services to the Aboriginal community.

Of the organisations supported 78% were considered small to medium with an annual budget of under \$1 million, 61% were ACCOs and 52% were in rural or remote locations. Overall, 14 culturally appropriate referrals were made to external providers for targeted and relevant support around coaching and mentoring, information technology, strategic development, financial modelling and legal services. SSTF also assisted and supported 11 Aboriginal organisations in applying for targeted sector funding, 8 of which equated to a total of \$835,000 in additional funding.

SSTF spent the last few months of 2021/2022 planning, organising and promoting the community organisation forums that took place in August 2022 in Brewarrina and Dubbo. Apart from in-office research and planning, preparations for these events were advanced by on-country visits with local organisations in the target areas.

These visits were instrumental in gaining support and increasing attendance for the forums while continuing to build AbSec's profile within the wider Aboriginal community.

Despite SSTF's activities coming to an end in 2022, a statewide community forum will be hosted in Coffs Harbour and two case studies are being prepared for the NSW Council of Social Service (NCOSS) Symposium in October 2022.



## Strategic Direction C:

# Safeguarding our partners and resources

*Strategic and targeted partnerships are critical to ensuring our message as a peak body is widely communicated, shared and readily understood. As we work to improve the support provided to Aboriginal children and families by Aboriginal organisations, we must look at engaging new and innovative partners including service providers, philanthropists, the corporate sector as well as different government agencies.*



### Research and advocacy

Building a service system that effectively supports the needs of Aboriginal children and families who come into contact with the child protection system is the focus of our work under the review of the child protection assessment tools in collaboration with the Department of Communities and Justice Office of the Senior Practitioner.

Our in-depth review of the Structured Decision Making Tools and safety in care assessment designs already in place, which is also an action under the Family is Culture Review and Closing the Gap 2022-2024 Implementation Plan, is to ensure delivery of culturally equitable and safe assessment tools, processes and systems

that address the needs of Aboriginal and other vulnerable communities.

AbSec's holistic approach to community engagement resulted in forums attended by AbSec members and key peak Aboriginal organisations who could contribute their expertise. Throughout the forums, AbSec was responsible for engaging with Aboriginal agencies and communities to consult on and inform about policy issues affecting Aboriginal children, families and communities as it relates to the assessment review work.

In our consultations, we have heard community ask for no further consultations, rather for the development of a suite of new child protection

assessment tools exclusively for Aboriginal children and their families, achieved through partnership with Aboriginal agencies and communities to serve the best interests of Aboriginal children, families and their communities.

During this period, AbSec partnered with the Association of Children's Welfare Agencies (ACWA) and the Department of Communities and Justice to convene a Disability Community of Practice (CoP) to support ACWA's research project, 'Falling through the gaps? Delivering the best possible outcomes for vulnerable children and young people with disability'.

The primary objective of the CoP is to bring together practitioners who are committed to

enhancing culturally informed outcomes for vulnerable children and young people who may have a disability. The CoP aims to build capacity, knowledge, networks and responsiveness across our sector within a human rights framework.

AbSec's involvement circled directly around the tenet that Aboriginal-led, culturally safe and supported models of care are critical to ensure better outcomes for children and young people in out of home care. The first meeting of the CoP focused on unpacking the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) approach to early childhood, and how the sector can better support young children with a developmental concern or disability. AbSec's work on the CoP is ongoing.



## Assessment Review Project

Building a service system that effectively supports the needs of Aboriginal children and families who come into contact with the child protection system is the focus of our work under the review of the child protection assessment tools in collaboration with the Department of Communities and Justice Office of the Senior Practitioner, which commenced in February 2022.

Our in-depth review of the Structured Decision Making Tools and safety in care assessment designs already in place, which is also an action under the Family is Culture Review and Closing the Gap 2022-2024 Implementation Plan, is to ensure delivery of culturally equitable and safe assessment tools, processes and systems that address the needs of Aboriginal and other vulnerable communities.

AbSec's holistic approach to community engagement resulted in forums attended by AbSec members and key peak Aboriginal organisations who could contribute their expertise. Throughout the forums, AbSec was responsible for engaging with Aboriginal agencies and communities to consult on and inform about policy issues affecting Aboriginal children, families and communities as it relates to the assessment review work.

In our consultations, we have heard community ask for no further consultations, rather for the development of a suite of new child protection assessment tools exclusively for Aboriginal children and their families, achieved through partnership with Aboriginal agencies and communities to serve the best interests of Aboriginal children, families and their communities.

## Partnerships

AbSec works with Aboriginal children, families and communities to ensure care is delivered where it is needed most. As a peak body, we define best practices and develop policies that pave the way to a better future for the next generation. The life-changing work we do would not be possible without the valued support of our partners.

AbSec partnerships take many forms. From our valued philanthropic partners, to the organisations we work side-by-side with and our one-off donors, we could not do it alone. The contributions our partners make and the work this allows us to do is as important as ever.

We would like to particularly thank Aboriginal Affairs NSW for supporting AbSec LDC through the Closing the Gap Strengthening Community Capability Grants program, allowing us to evolve our unique learning platform, and deliver it to more carers across New South Wales.



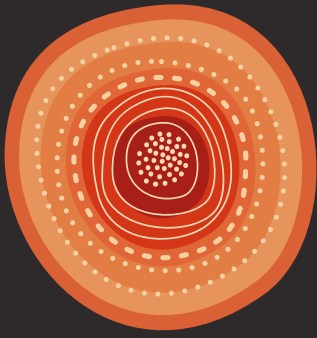


## Events

Due to ongoing environmental factors and COVID-19, this financial year was another exceptionally difficult year to host events and bring our community together. Despite the external factors, AbSec delivered our twice postponed 2022 NAIDOC Family Fun Day, hosted by the Marrickville PCYC and supported by the Inner West Council. Featuring musical performers, cultural activities, stallholders and rides, the day

was a great success, and a wonderful opportunity to reconnect with the community, and introduce AbSec to those we were meeting for the first time.

AbSec also partnered with Marrickville West Primary School for their NAIDOC event, with AbSec and its corporate partners supplying food, advertising and cultural events in line with the 2022 theme: "Get Up, Stand Up, Show Up".



## Strategic Direction D:

# Securing our organisational strength and sustainability

*The success of the first three Strategic Directions and their associated priorities stand on the strength of AbSec as an organisation. Our organisational systems, processes and governance, must be sound and robust; our values, beliefs, behaviours and reputation must be above reproach; and our people well-equipped and mobilised. This will ensure we are well positioned and ready to truly represent, and deliver better outcomes for, Aboriginal children, families and communities.*



## Closing the Gap

2021–22 was a significant year in the implementation of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (CTG). This year saw the establishment of the CTG partnership in NSW with structures and processes put in place to implement the National Agreement in NSW. AbSec and other NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations (CAPO) hired dedicated CTG staff to support this work and advocate for change to be led by Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) and Aboriginal communities, in line with the National Agreement.

Structures and processes were put in place to enshrine partnership between CAPO and the NSW Government in CTG decision-making, including accountability mechanisms to bring

the government to the table to work in partnership to enable change.

This was a major step toward achieving the changes that the National Agreement calls for, including the reduction of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care.

Over a five-week period, AbSec and CAPO held community engagements on CTG in over 30 communities throughout NSW. AbSec and CAPO overcame COVID-19 and serious flooding in a number of communities and were able to honour communities' calls to have their voices at the centre of CTG.

Despite the local challenges, AbSec and CAPO made it to a large number of communities to make sure that things will be done differently

under the new CTG framework, with communities shaping all work carried out under CTG to the greatest extent. In involving more than 30 communities, these engagements were some of the most extensive community engagements that have been held with communities in NSW and nationally.

AbSec also worked with the Department of Communities and Justice to advocate for a 2022–2024 Implementation Plan for Socio-economic Outcome 12, (Aboriginal children are not overrepresented in the child protection system) which reflects the aspirations and priorities of Aboriginal communities.

The Implementation Plan outlines over 20 initiatives that will be progressed between 2022 to 2024 to reduce the number of Aboriginal children and young people in the child protection system. This includes two initiatives that AbSec received funding for: a state-wide network of Aboriginal Community-Controlled Mechanisms that will support local

community-led change, and a team to more widely roll out the Aboriginal-led Commissioning model. The Aboriginal Legal Service (ALS) received funding for a third initiative: a pilot of a state-wide advocacy service focused on early intervention at the earliest point that Aboriginal families have contact with the child protection system.

There is a long way to go to genuinely transform the system so that it honours the strengths of Aboriginal children, families and communities and meets their needs. AbSec will continue to advocate for communities to be at the heart of all CTG initiatives, leading change through genuine partnership and shared decision-making with the government at the state and federal levels.

Our goal will be for all initiatives in the NSW Implementation Plan to be genuinely shaped by transparent, meaningful partnerships that put communities back in the driver's seat when it comes to decision-making about their children and families.





## AbSec Learning and Development Centre

The AbSec Learning and Development Centre (LDC) is AbSec's in-house registered training organisation. The first of its kind in NSW, the LDC provides specialist training designed and delivered by Aboriginal experts.

AbSec's greatest strength is the knowledge that its people carry. Our facilitators combine lived experience, trauma-informed practice and interactive workshops to deliver courses that allow students to learn skills in their cultural context.

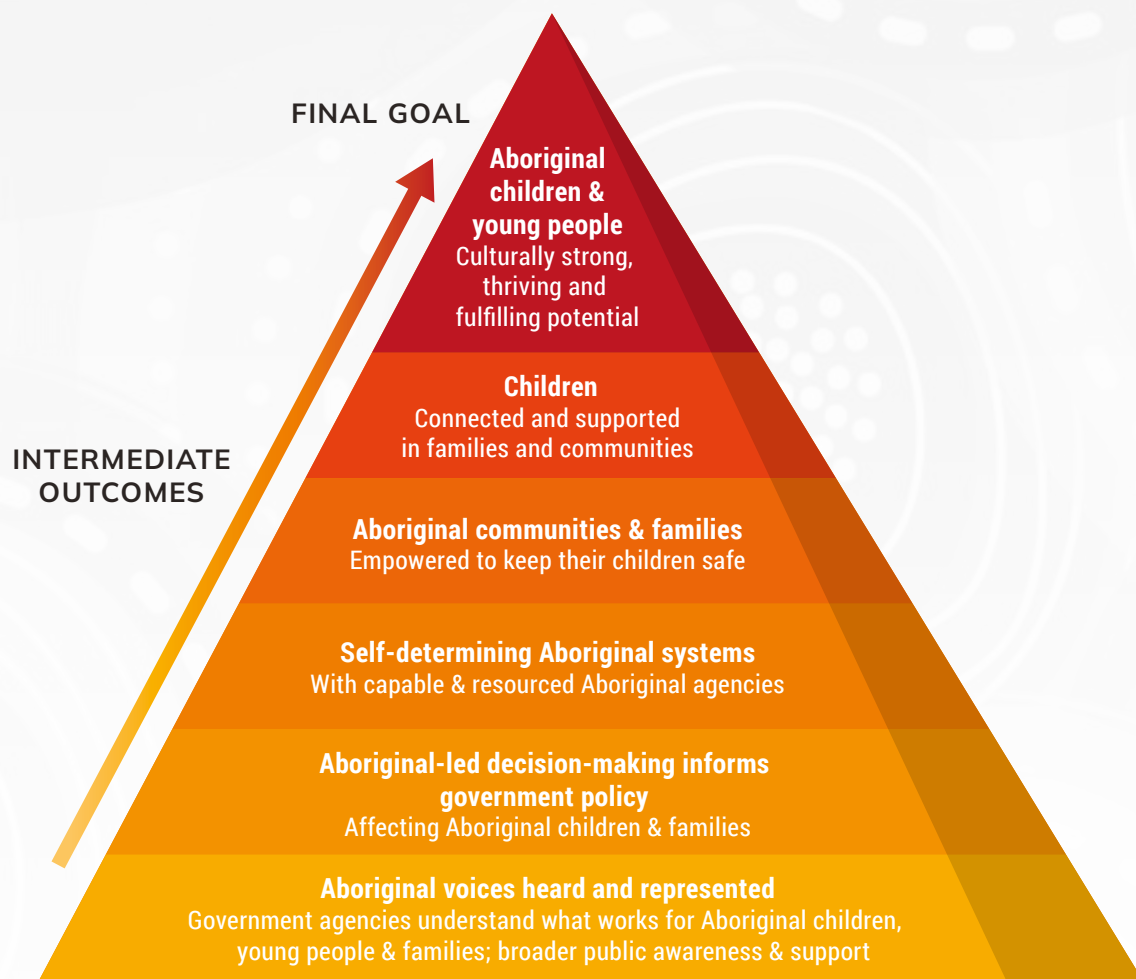
There is a large gap in the market for culturally-appropriate training for carers who work with Aboriginal children and families, and the team at the LDC are dedicated to improving the education of people working in community services and the quality of the care they provide.

The AbSec LDC learning experience is guided by the student. With accredited and non-accredited programs delivered by their online learning platform, the LDC fosters the evolution of skills in a learning environment that is both flexible and totally unique.



# AbSec's Theory of Change

AbSec's Theory of Change has been established to present key focus areas and their outcomes, as we work towards the ultimate goal of seeing Aboriginal children and young people culturally strong, thriving and fulfilling their potential.



To reach the final goal, AbSec embodies a holistic approach to ensure Aboriginal children are raised strong in spirit and identity, with every opportunity for lifelong wellbeing and connection to culture. For this to occur, evidence shows that Aboriginal children must be connected and supported in their families, kinship groups and communities and that families and communities must be empowered to keep their children safe.

Self-determination is at the base of fostering sustainable change. AbSec advocates for

Aboriginal-led services and social systems, with Aboriginal agencies that are capable and appropriately resourced. To reach this, Aboriginal voices must be heard and represented in society, leading to a broader community understanding of the need for Aboriginal-led decision-making to ensure genuine improvements in the lives of our kids and families. Similarly, government policies must be informed by Aboriginal voices outlining what works best for Aboriginal children, young people and families.

# AbSec's Pillars of Success

The following five pillars of success, which are informed by AbSec's Theory of Change, will indicate whether, and how well, we are achieving results.

1

**Aboriginal Children and Families** – feedback and continual engagement with Aboriginal children and families will tell us how successful we are in progressing and realising change.

.....

2

**Aboriginal Organisations** – with such a significant task of influencing the growth and expansion of the Aboriginal-controlled sector in NSW, it is critical that we remain engaged and deliver upon the expectations of our Aboriginal organisations who support children and families. The level, number and quality of engagement with Aboriginal organisations will tell us how well we are meeting our goals.

.....

3

**Other Non-Government Organisations** – our partners are critical to the success of our plans and strategies, helping us to achieve a genuine sense of self-determination and supporting our work to encourage Aboriginal-led approaches. How well these partnerships align with our strategic vision, and how many effective partnerships we have, will indicate the success of these partnerships.

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4

**Philanthropic and Corporate Sector** – genuinely innovative approaches will require us to take risks as an organisation. For this to occur, AbSec must attract, engage with, and create opportunities for philanthropists to support our work. Our level of engagement and diversified income will indicate our success.

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5

**Government Bodies** – change must be effectively embedded within government policy frameworks to realise genuine and sustainable outcomes for Aboriginal children and families. Our active engagement and influence, and the quality and impact of our policy advice, will demonstrate our success in this regard, as well as the number of times where this has led to a positive result.

# Financials

## CONSOLIDATED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 30 JUNE 2022

	ECONOMIC ENTITY		CHIEF ENTITY	
	2022 \$	2021 \$	2022 \$	2021 \$
<b>ASSETS</b>				
<b>CURRENT ASSETS</b>				
Cash and Cash Equivalents	5,377,891	4,215,014	5,195,502	4,145,729
Trade and Other Receivables	131,894	91,039	366,429	128,556
Other Current Assets	44,917	11,000	41,874	11,000
<b>TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS</b>	<b>5,554,703</b>	<b>4,317,053</b>	<b>5,603,806</b>	<b>4,285,285</b>
<b>NON-CURRENT ASSETS</b>				
Investments	–	–	20,000	20,000
Property, Plant and Equipment	2,419,154	2,503,853	2,419,154	2,503,853
Intangibles	19,999	19,999	–	–
<b>TOTAL NON-CURRENT ASSETS</b>	<b>2,439,153</b>	<b>2,523,852</b>	<b>2,439,154</b>	<b>2,523,853</b>
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>	<b>7,993,856</b>	<b>6,840,905</b>	<b>8,042,960</b>	<b>6,809,138</b>
<b>LIABILITIES</b>				
<b>CURRENT LIABILITIES</b>				
Trade and Other Payables	353,549	415,803	374,091	412,482
Provisions	101,566	172,006	101,566	172,006
Other Current Liabilities	3,597,550	2,240,066	3,561,186	2,212,698
<b>TOTAL CURRENT LIABILITIES</b>	<b>4,052,664</b>	<b>2,827,875</b>	<b>4,036,843</b>	<b>2,797,186</b>
<b>NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES</b>				
Trade and Other Payables	7,640	–	7,640	–
Provisions	16,549	33,297	16,549	33,297
Other Current Liabilities	1,835	–	1,835	–
<b>Total Non Current Liabilities</b>	<b>26,024</b>	<b>33,297</b>	<b>26,024</b>	<b>33,297</b>
<b>Total Liabilities</b>	<b>4,078,689</b>	<b>2,861,172</b>	<b>4,062,867</b>	<b>2,830,482</b>
<b>Net Assets</b>	<b>3,915,168</b>	<b>3,979,734</b>	<b>3,980,093</b>	<b>3,978,656</b>
<b>MEMBERS' EQUITY</b>				
<b>Reserves</b>	<b>1,293,305</b>	<b>1,293,305</b>	<b>1,293,305</b>	<b>1,293,305</b>
<b>Retained Earnings</b>	<b>2,621,863</b>	<b>2,686,429</b>	<b>2,686,788</b>	<b>2,685,351</b>
<b>TOTAL MEMBERS' EQUITY</b>	<b>3,915,168</b>	<b>3,979,734</b>	<b>3,980,093</b>	<b>3,978,656</b>

Our Audited Financial Statements (Report) for the year ended 30 June 2022 is available upon request. The Report provides an account of the management of the organisation and its subsidiary company, AbSec Learning and Development Centre. It also provides details in respect of the Financial Performance and Financial Position, among other things. The Report demonstrates that AbSec is in good financial health with a strong cash position to meet any of its obligations in the future.

# Get Involved

There are many ways to support the important work being done by AbSec for Aboriginal children, families and communities. No matter who you are, or the size of your contribution, we appreciate all who bring us closer to achieving our goals.

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## Join our online community

Like and follow us on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn to stay up-to-date and share your thoughts.

 @AbSecNSW //  @AbSecNSW //  @AbSec

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## Join AbSec as a member

AbSec is a member-based organisation. We are grateful to all the people and organisations who support us as members and continue to represent you each and every day.

AbSec membership is for Aboriginal individuals, organisations and corporations that are supportive of our goals and dedicated to improving the lives of Aboriginal children, families and communities.

Find out more at [absec.org.au/membership](http://absec.org.au/membership) or contact us on (02) 9559 5299.

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## Partner with us

Partnering with AbSec is a rewarding way to fulfil your business' corporate social responsibility goals while boosting team morale and engagement. We can work with you to design a partnership model that meets your needs and provides mutual benefits, or you can join our monthly giving program for a simple but powerful way to make a difference. AbSec values each and every partner. Please get in touch by calling (02) 9559 5299 or emailing [partnerships@absec.org.au](mailto:partnerships@absec.org.au).

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## Support your local Aboriginal community organisations

As a peak body, AbSec advocates for local Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations across NSW, many of whom do impressive work for their communities with very little funding. Get in touch with Aboriginal organisations in your area to start a discussion about how you can provide meaningful support.



**AbSec – NSW Child, Family and Community  
Peak Aboriginal Corporation (ICN 8926)**

21 Carrington Road, Marrickville NSW 2204

Phone: (02) 9559 5299

E-mail: [admin@absec.org.au](mailto:admin@absec.org.au)

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

Facebook: [@AbSecNSW](https://www.facebook.com/AbSecNSW)

Twitter: [@AbSecNSW](https://twitter.com/AbSecNSW)

LinkedIn: [@AbSecNSW](https://www.linkedin.com/company/AbSecNSW)