



MEDIA RELEASE

AbSec releases election asks, calls for transformative change

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The 2023 NSW State election comes at a critical time for Aboriginal families and communities, as the overrepresentation of our children in out-of-home care continues to worsen.

AbSec is calling on the victor of the March 25 election to put Aboriginal issues at the forefront of their policy efforts and first major budget by committing to a more collaborative approach with Aboriginal community leaders and experts to enact transformative change.

The current out-of-home care system is failing Aboriginal children, resulting in generations that have ultimately been stolen. The NSW child protection system is taking Aboriginal children from their homes and families at far greater rates than their non-Indigenous counterparts, which is impeding their right to self-determination and their right to overcome the legacy of colonisation and dispossession.

AbSec CEO John Leha said the government must be bold in the coming months, engage meaningfully with the sector, and work in genuine partnership with their organisations and communities, noting the consultation process to date has fallen short of what is needed.

“The election is a golden opportunity to support us in our fight to ensure all Aboriginal children and young people are looked after in safe and thriving Aboriginal communities; raised strong in spirit and identity, connected to culture, supported by holistic care,” Mr Leha said.

AbSec is calling for legislative change that:

- **Builds greater government accountability:** Commit to the formation of an Independent Child Protection Commissioner. An Aboriginal-identified role, this position needs to have the power to revise key aspects of the child protection system where immediate expert advice and reform are needed in close consultation with Aboriginal stakeholders and community leaders; existing outside of current government structures.

- **Honours the findings of the 2019 Family Is Culture report:** The 2019 Family is Culture Report found that systems, policies and practices in out-of-home care and Child Protection in NSW contribute to the disproportionate number of Aboriginal children and young people in care. In the four years since the report, AbSec has charted the growing number of Aboriginal children and young people in the out-of-home care system. In 2022, AbSec welcomed the passing of The Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Amendment (Family is Culture) Bill, which implemented 15 of 25 legislative reform recommendations made in the 2019 Family is Culture Report. AbSec is calling for the complete implementation of the report recommendations that will begin to address the overrepresentation of our children in out-of-home care. AbSec and the Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT) have published a framework for assessing the NSW Government's progress in reforming the child protection system.
- **Reinvests sector funding:** Our communities are deeply disappointed by the NSW Government's lack of progress regarding equitable financial distribution. Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations and Aboriginal-run programs receive a fraction of government funding spent to address Aboriginal issues. In future, programs that focus on the restoration of Aboriginal families and communities should receive the majority of the funding, and the flow of funding to programs and organisations that support the removal of Aboriginal children and young people should be greatly reduced. The 2022-23 State Budget allocated \$3.1 billion in recurrent expenses to the child protection system, including \$1.6 billion to support out-of-home care and permanency outcomes, significantly less is allocated to the early intervention and prevention space.
- **Redefines authority through shared decision-making:** Pledge the formation of an Aboriginal child protection system that is shaped by the needs of Aboriginal communities. This starts with reform that utilises a culturally safe lens, leading to an understanding of how the definition of 'harm' is currently being weaponised against Aboriginal children and their families. This change will ultimately result in an Aboriginal-designed and run child protection system that is entirely separate and built on the foundations of Aboriginal self-determination.

AbSec CEO John Leha said the government must start making bold decisions to responsibly tackle our community's biggest challenges.

"For too long, too many vulnerable children in NSW have slipped through the cracks, when earlier interventions could have prevented them from ending up in the out-of-home care system or worse. We need the NSW Government and the voting public to understand that the 'stolen generation' is not a shameful chapter of our distant past, it is ongoing, and without rapid change, we'll witness another generation of removals far worse than what has been documented in history books."

“AbSec has been lobbying for recognition of these failures from the NSW Government (which has been agreed by state and federal governments) that by 2032 there will be a reduction in the rate of over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care by 45%. 2021 data shows this target is greatly failing, with the national average of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care at 57.6 per 1000. Two years earlier, that figure was 54.2 per 1000, illustrating the immediate need for profound change.”

“AbSec is hopeful with a recommitment to the series of recommendations provided by the Family is Culture Report, the state of NSW will see a dramatic increase in regard to the outcomes encapsulated in the Closing the Gap National Framework, and importantly combat the ever-increasing number of Aboriginal children being placed in out of home care.”

“AbSec is excited to work with the NSW Parliament, if we’re trusted to utilise our unique positioning and expertise to generate better outcomes for Aboriginal children and their families. Developing a strong working relationship between AbSec and the NSW Parliament, developing and implementing a strategic approach that is informed and dedicated to improving the outcomes outlined above.”



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