



Western NSW

Strengthening supports for Aboriginal children, young people, families and communities in Western NSW

April 2017



Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat (AbSec)

About AbSec

The Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat (AbSec) is the Aboriginal child and family peak organisation in NSW. AbSec is committed to advocating on behalf of Aboriginal children, families and communities, 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 holistic approach to Aboriginal child and family supports delivering universal, targeted and tertiary services within communities that cover the entire continuum of care 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, as well as ensuring that tailored and critical Aboriginal out-of-home care and after care services are provided to intervene in the cycle of disadvantage that continue to impact generations of Aboriginal families.

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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Introduction

The Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat (AbSec) works to identify service gaps for Aboriginal children, young people and families across NSW. As part of this work, AbSec seeks to provide proposals and concepts that aim to empower Aboriginal communities to have authority in strengthening families, keeping children safe, and building a strong supportive network at the community level. This paper seeks to present a proposal for Aboriginal service provision to Aboriginal children, families and communities in the Western NSW region. It builds on AbSec's work around conceptualising a holistic Aboriginal service system, and fulfils commitments within the *FACS/AbSec Plan on a Page for Aboriginal children and young people* by delivering an Aboriginal safety for this region of NSW.

The purpose of this paper is to propose a new way of working by identifying areas for investment to ensure that Aboriginal children, young people, families and communities are supported by an Aboriginal organisation in the Western NSW region. This means that Aboriginal communities will have access to earlier interventions, families will be strengthened by intensive services, and children supported while in alternate care by an Aboriginal controlled organisation that meets the required standards, and is able to engage effectively with the communities within the Western NSW region.

AbSec considers Western NSW as a key priority, as it is a location that has limited investment in Aboriginal controlled service delivery, and has invested very little in achieving the objective of Aboriginal self-determination or fulfilling the commitments made by the Department of Family and Community Services (FACS) to establish an Aboriginal safety-net in NSW. AbSec envisages that such a service operating in the Western NSW region would deliver Targeted Earlier Intervention, Intensive child protection services and Aboriginal Out of Home Care supports, encompassing the three tiers of AbSec's conceptual holistic Aboriginal service. Importantly, such a service would be guided, linked and accountable to each distinct Aboriginal community but have sufficient capacity to be viable and sustainable over time to deliver quality supports and outcomes for Aboriginal children, families and communities.

AbSec recognises the key to address the current overrepresentation of Aboriginal children entering statutory care in NSW is through supporting the establishment of quality Aboriginal controlled services, acknowledging that Aboriginal people are best placed to tackle the issues impacting their communities. For the purposes of this paper, the Western NSW region has been divided into two distinct areas, encompassing the following centres:

Area One:

- Bourke
- Lightning Ridge
- Collarenebri
- Coonabarabran
- Nyngan
- Gilgandra
- Dubbo
- Mudgee
- Brewarrina
- Walgett
- Coonamble
- Cobar
- Warren
- Narromine
- Wellington

AbSec anticipates that Area One will be serviced by a capable regional Aboriginal organisation, with the right service infrastructure and connection to engage with and be accountable to the distinct Aboriginal communities within each of those centres.

Area Two

- Orange
- Bathurst
- Forbes
- Condobolin
- Parkes
- Cowra
- Grenfell

Similar to the approach for Area One, AbSec proposes that Area Two is serviced by a capable regional Aboriginal organisation that is able to maintain connection to the distinct Aboriginal communities in each of the centres identified. Importantly, this organisation will also have the necessary service infrastructure to scale the organisation from a business modelling sense, without losing its connection to each distinct Aboriginal community.

The approach to building the Aboriginal service system in Western NSW is built following AbSec's engagement with communities and providers in the region, as well as AbSec's goals for establishing the Aboriginal safety-net of holistic Aboriginal child and family services. In progressing this, community engagement, organisational support and investment is required, acknowledging that for the most part, independence from FACS is required to ensure success. To inform AbSec's paper, engagement has occurred with potential Aboriginal organisation/s, FACS, communities and other providers covering the region.

Background

This paper builds on the following two key documents:

- AbSec/FACS co-design process: 'Plan on a Page for Aboriginal Children and Young People 2015-2021'
- AbSec's paper 'Achieving a holistic Aboriginal Child and Family Service System for NSW'

The '*Plan on a Page for Aboriginal Children and Young People 2015-2021*' evolved following a co-design partnership approach between AbSec, FACS, Aboriginal non-government agencies and NSW government agencies. The *Plan* highlights high-level concepts for the future state of the Aboriginal sector and identifies the need for a new, integrated Aboriginal-led approach across the sector to improve outcomes for Aboriginal children and their families.

The overarching objective of the Plan is to promote child safe communities and reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal children in OOHC through a sustainable safety-net of Aboriginal agencies interconnected to local community governance, ensuring Aboriginal community ownership, accountability and control in meeting this challenge, with Government and other stakeholder support through partnerships.

The Plan also sets out AbSec's vision for a 'strong safety-net of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations that effectively meet the needs of Aboriginal children, families and communities through holistic and individually tailored Aboriginal child and family centres across NSW, working

towards child safe communities and reducing the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in out-of-home-care and providing for better outcomes over time'

AbSec's paper, '*Achieving a holistic Aboriginal Child and Family Service System for NSW*' presents a comprehensive model of Aboriginal child and family services aimed at creating an environment in which families can be supported to optimise the developmental environment for Aboriginal children and young people. A holistic Aboriginal service system, proposed for NSW, comprises **three** interconnected intervention levels of increasing intensity. Each level will provide individualised, targeted services to children and families, allowing flexibility in service delivery while adapting intensity levels to respond to the needs or circumstances of families that may change over time.

- **Aboriginal Community response (Primary)** – targets the whole community and commonly referred to as universal interventions (or targeted earlier interventions)

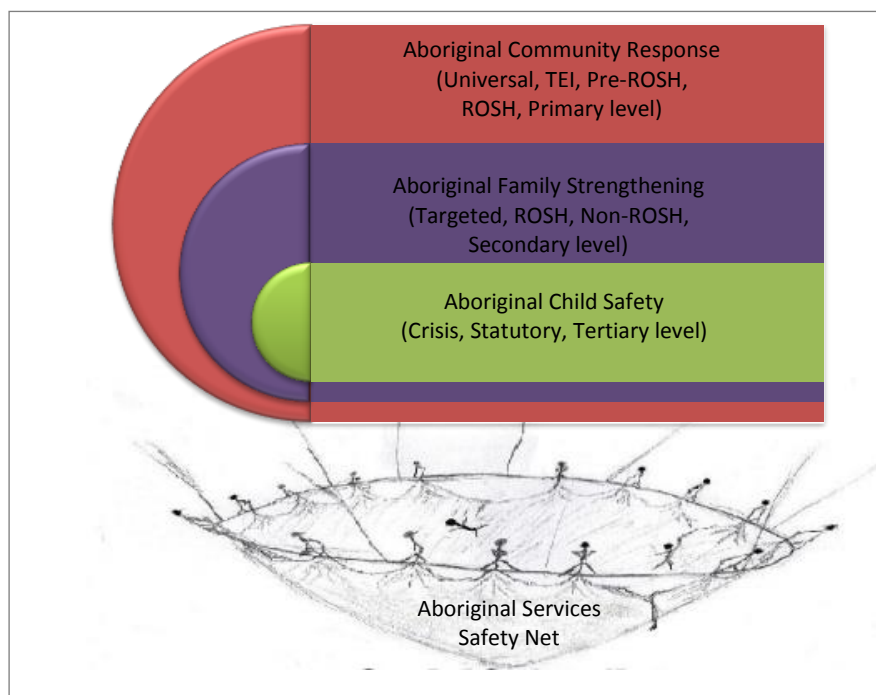
Programs or activities run at the Aboriginal Community Response interventions level will be aimed towards reducing risk factors of maltreatment and safety concerns at a whole of community level; enhancing the developmental context and environment of all Aboriginal children.

- **Aboriginal Family Strengthening (Secondary)** – targets individuals or a population sub-group that have higher than average parenting difficulties and families whose children are at risk of maltreatment (or intensive child protection/ family intervention services)

Aboriginal Family Strengthening intervention at this secondary continuum level aims to work to support families in an intensive way to ensure child safety and wellbeing for the whole family unit.

- **Aboriginal Child Safety (Tertiary)** – targets families where child abuse has occurred and it is at this level that the child more than likely enters the statutory care system (or out of home care)

This level of intervention aims to reduce long-term damage to the child and to prevent recurrence of child abuse through delivery of programs and /or activities in OOHC – Aboriginal care.



Three foundational principles underpin this approach:

- Child development occurs within the context of their social and physical environment, with relationships playing a key role in optimal development and adaptive outcomes¹. Effective approaches to improving outcomes for vulnerable children must include supporting positive change for the child's social network, their parents, extended families and communities. A genuine integration of services that support children both directly and indirectly through strengthening the capabilities, stability (including economic) and resilience of families and communities is required. Interventions can become genuinely inter-generational, thereby optimising the developmental context and trajectory of the next and subsequent generations of Aboriginal children and young people.
- Aboriginal families and communities are stronger and better able to meet the needs when empowered to identify and address the issues that affect their lives. Aboriginal communities are in the best position to develop and deliver services aimed at supporting Aboriginal children and families.
- Culture is a significant positive factor in overcoming adversity and disadvantage for individuals, families and communities, strengthening our families and communities to raise strong children connected to their culture. Empowering communities to develop and deliver culturally sound universal and targeted interventions will contribute to the development of a comprehensive, state-wide safety-net of services that are embedded within communities they serve, leading a community-wide response that will support Aboriginal families to keep children safe and connected to their families, communities, culture and Country.

This paper further articulates this holistic model by providing a blueprint for establishing and building it within the Western NSW region through the two distinct areas identified earlier.

Western NSW Overview

Western NSW is a diverse geography covering many distinct Aboriginal communities, smaller in size with multiple community challenges that lead to higher rates of disadvantage and disproportionate representation within government systems. Establishing an Aboriginal service system either requires greater investment in smaller communities, or supporting Aboriginal design, development and delivery on a regionalised scale that assures accountability to each community. For the purposes of building an Aboriginal safety-net in NSW, AbSec has divided the Western NSW region into two areas that would be serviced by two qualified, accredited Aboriginal controlled organisations for their respective Aboriginal communities. As defined by AbSec's holistic model, these services would be across the continuum of support, leading to a transition of service provision from non-Aboriginal services to the established Aboriginal controlled agencies over time.

Western NSW has an Aboriginal population of more than 25,000 Aboriginal people, making it the second largest population of Aboriginal people in NSW dispersed over a diverse geography. Within this, the region has a population of over 11,000 Aboriginal children and young people under the age of 18 years, with approximately 2,000 Aboriginal children or young people at ROSH and more than

¹ Shonkoff, J. and Fisher, P. (2013) Rethinking evidence-based practice and two-generational programs to create the future of early childhood policy, *Development and Psychopathology*, pp. 1635-1653

500 Aboriginal children and young people in out of home care. A key challenge has been to identify a model that supports Aboriginal children in care remain safely connected to country, community and home (with the view of increasing chances of restoration), supporting families earlier when risks for their child are identified, and delivering this support based on Aboriginal community expectation, within a framework that is accountable to the community.

Attempts to establish community specific organisations in the past have been met with challenges, this is due to the investment in building and development, as well as the ability to achieve eventual scale for the organisation to be viable overtime. What is clear from previous lessons is that accountability is needed for each distinct Aboriginal community, and the knowledge that services to support Aboriginal families and children, will be delivered under an Aboriginal controlled framework. This works towards achieving the FACS/AbSec commitment to achieve the Aboriginal safety-net in NSW, and a regionalised Aboriginal approach for Western NSW ensures sustainable approaches may lead to greater success.

Holistic, culturally embedded, responsive and innovative services to Aboriginal families by Aboriginal controlled organisations aim to strengthen the family and extended family unit. This is true for Aboriginal families and communities in Western NSW, just as much as the East Coast of NSW. The service system within Western NSW is limited in Aboriginal controlled service provision, with the predominant organisations being Aboriginal health. This has led to Aboriginal health taking a broader approach to meeting the needs of the communities they serve, by attempting to offer a mix of services to meet need, outside of the typical health service offerings. The service system that is available to Aboriginal children, families and communities is limited in their capacity to meet the needs of Aboriginal children, families and communities – this can be due to the capabilities of those organisations to engage and remain connected to each Aboriginal community, or understand the dynamics that require a tailored approach to service provision. The current reforms to the child and family system provide an opportunity to advance FACS' commitment to an Aboriginal safety-net that is available for Aboriginal children and families across the continuum of support.

An effective Western NSW Aboriginal service system

This proposal paper presents a framework for developing and building the Western NSW Aboriginal service system, ensuring that Aboriginal controlled organisations have the right capacity to deliver across the continuum of support, and working towards the ability for that organisation to reinvest in earlier family support and interventions to keep children safe at home and in their community.

An effective Western NSW Aboriginal service system would see two regional Aboriginal organisations invested in to deliver holistic Aboriginal child and family services: targeted earlier intervention, intensive family services, and out of home care – Aboriginal care. There are Aboriginal service systems established within other human services, such as Aboriginal health, and there is opportunity to leverage the service infrastructure in those systems to work towards an Aboriginal child and family system in Western NSW. Out of home care being the only program within the continuum that has established benchmarks or standards is a key performance indicator for success in addressing the Western NSW Aboriginal child and family service system, therefore, a major milestone will be to obtain accreditation following genuine effort and investment in working toward achieving the overall model.

Embedding an effective Western NSW Aboriginal service system also requires that service system, through Aboriginal controlled organisations, to be accountable to the communities they serve. This

means that a regional Aboriginal organisation, although their corporate governance is centralised, will be required to maintain connection to each distinct Aboriginal community it serves, to ensure outcomes are being met based on expectations. This recognises that to cover a region such as Western NSW, there will be viability concerns if the organisation does not have enough scale, and at the same time, there will be sustainability concerns if the organisation is not connected and accountability to the distinct communities. This progresses a genuine commissioning approach to services, ensuring that communities have an active say in the supports they require to address the issues they have within a child and family context. Aboriginal agencies are best placed in doing this.

AbSec envisages that two regional Aboriginal organisations will be approached and supported to establish within the two areas identified above. This will require support from FACS, but must be achieved independently from FACS to ensure success in the model and genuine accountability to each distinct community. Ultimately, Aboriginal targeted service provision will transition to the regional Aboriginal organisations, once their services models are established and they meet necessary standards to deliver child and family services.

To establish a market, the market must be stimulated to get the result needed. Upfront investment in this model will lead towards two successful, holistic Aboriginal child and family services providing quality service delivery to Aboriginal children, families and communities in the Western NSW region. Importantly, this will be delivered across the continuum of support, and accountable to each distinct Aboriginal community they serve. Underpinning all this, to ensure a self-determined approach, success must be realised by Aboriginal people, through the effort put in by independent Aboriginal organisations in partnership with FACS and other government agencies.

Addressing the system gaps

To address the gaps in Western NSW, AbSec recognises that a clear result logic must be established, building on the vision from the *FACS/AbSec Plan on a Page for Aboriginal children and young people*. Many attempts have been tried, and the lessons learnt have necessitated a need for a coordinated, agreed approach for addressing the system gaps. The goal is to ensure better outcomes for Aboriginal children and families in the region, and to do this, it must be through Aboriginal controlled approaches and effective coordination of effort.

Vision

To establish a strong safety-net of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations that effectively meet the needs of Aboriginal children, families and communities through holistic and individually tailored Aboriginal child and family centres across NSW, working towards child safe communities and reducing the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in out-of-home-care and providing for better outcomes over time. This is the vision for the *FACS/AbSec Plan on a Page for Aboriginal children and young people*.

To localise the vision, AbSec recognises that a regionalised approach is required to ensure viability and sustainability over time, with an interconnected accountability framework to distinct Aboriginal communities. This framework requires open dialogue with Aboriginal communities at the start and in an ongoing way.

Objectives

Three objectives are established for addressing the service system gaps for Western NSW. These objectives are underpinned by the principles established in this paper, and the frameworks established by AbSec.

- To establish a holistic Aboriginal child and family service for Aboriginal children and families in the Western NSW region, delivering across the continuum of support
- To create an Aboriginal child and family service system that is accountable to Aboriginal communities to deliver outcomes for child safety and wellbeing, family strengthening, and community independence
- To keep Aboriginal children safe at home in their community, supported by an Aboriginal controlled organisation with the capacity to meet their needs

Outcomes

The above objectives are established with the intent of achieving the following five outcomes for Aboriginal children, families and communities in the Western NSW region:

- Aboriginal children and young people show improved wellbeing outcomes across domains, including health, justice, transition to employment/ education etc
- Aboriginal children in the child protection and out of home care systems are connected to family, community, culture and country, and are safely supported in culturally rich environments that are suited to their best interests
- Tailored child and family centred, holistic supports are delivered as needed, not just at crisis, as a package of supports across the continuum, through Aboriginal controlled services
- A robust network of community governance mechanisms guide Aboriginal controlled service delivery to achieve better outcomes for Aboriginal children and families under a framework of Aboriginal self-determination
- Aboriginal children and families in need of support receive this support from resourced Aboriginal controlled organisations in the Western NSW region

Success

Recognising the objectives and outcomes, and the overall vision for a Western NSW Aboriginal child and family system, the following success measures are identified as what should be expected once the approach is fully established and serving the communities they cover.

- Aboriginal children and families in need of support receive it in a timely way that is tailored to their needs from an Aboriginal controlled organisation
- Aboriginal children in need of statutory care are supported to remain connected to community, culture and home by an Aboriginal controlled organisation, with every opportunity continually explored to safely return to family

- Aboriginal families in contact with child protection receive the support they need to address the concerns that are there, with limited to no re-reporting to child protection services over time
- Aboriginal communities have authority over the services they need to address community issues to prevent families becoming at risk
- Reports of Aboriginal children at risk reduce over time due to effective tailored supports offered by Aboriginal controlled services with strong corporate governance to communities in Western NSW based on the service system working to address needs rather than deliver a program
- Greater Aboriginal self-determination is achieved by enabling an Aboriginal service system delivering for Aboriginal children, families and communities based on expectations established by those communities

Implementation and investment

AbSec firmly believes that a robust implementation framework must be followed, with clear timeframes and milestones and a defined end date. For the purposes of this proposal, a maximum of two years is established to achieve successful establishment of two regional Aboriginal child and family organisations for the Western NSW region. This will include:

- Achieving accreditation against standards
- Establishing community engagement and accountability mechanisms
- Establishing the business and operating model for delivering across the child and family continuum of support
- Engaging communities to increase buy-in and support for the approach
- Identifying and implementing workforce development strategies specific to the region
- Supporting transition of service deliver from non-Aboriginal agencies and government to the two formed regional Aboriginal organisations
- Establishing reporting and monitoring systems, including data collection to measure success and outcomes
- Establishing plans for the two areas identified above within the Western NSW region, capturing supply, demand, issues, ROSH v non-ROSH reporting and reason, and community expectations to inform business and operating models

AbSec acknowledges that this work must be achieved independent from government, but with the support of government. Many aspects of community engagement and managing expectations must be implemented to ensure success in the approach to address the Western NSW service system gap. As such, a tripartite arrangement would be established between FACS, AbSec and the regional Aboriginal organisation delivering in each Western NSW area.