



# What You Told Us - Aboriginal case management policy consultations

August 2017



## About AbSec

The Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat (AbSec) is the peak Aboriginal child and family 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 commitment 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:

1. acknowledging and respecting the diversity and knowledge of Aboriginal communities;
2. acting with professionalism and integrity in striving for quality, culturally responsive services and supports for Aboriginal families;
3. 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;
4. being holistic, integrated and solutions-focused through Aboriginal control in delivering for Aboriginal children, families and communities; and
5. 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:** [admin@absec.org.au](mailto:admin@absec.org.au)

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

**Facebook:** [on.fb.me/AbSec](https://on.fb.me/AbSec)

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



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## Introduction

### Purpose of this report

This report presents an overview of the key themes arising from stakeholder consultations regarding the development of an Aboriginal Case Management Policy and Guidelines.

This report acknowledges the collective experience and expertise of participants who case manage Aboriginal children, young people, their families and communities, and acknowledges the valuable input provided by participants who have been impacted by child protection and out of home care in NSW.

### Background and context

The NSW Department of Family and Community Services (FACS) is creating a new operational policy framework to support implementation of reforms under the Permanency Support Program (PSP). Part of this new operational policy framework is the development of an Aboriginal Case Management Policy and Guidelines. FACS has engaged AbSec, as the NSW Aboriginal child and family peak organisation, to lead the development of an Aboriginal Case Management Policy and Guidelines, through a comprehensive stakeholder and community engagement process.

This consultation approach builds on the original intent of the co-design *AbSec/FACS Plan on a Page for Aboriginal Children and Young People 2015-2021* for differentiated policy developed by and for Aboriginal people. It also reflects the principles of the *Children and Young Persons (Care Protection) Act 1998* in promoting the self-determination of Aboriginal communities with respect to the care and protection of Aboriginal children and young people.

AbSec acknowledges the commitment by FACS to the development of an Aboriginal Case Management Policy and Guidelines that are holistic, culturally responsive and embed the values and perspectives of Aboriginal people. Specifically, the Aboriginal Case Management Policy and Guidelines are intended to:

- Respond to the specific needs of Aboriginal families and children across the continuum of care from early intervention and prevention, child protection, out of home care through to after care
- Apply to all stages of case management (cultural and case planning, implementation, monitoring and review) used in the support of Aboriginal families and children within Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal service environments
- Inform specific service responses and holistic support that meets the needs and expectations of Aboriginal children, families and communities as identified by Aboriginal people
- Identify any significant organisation or resourcing changes arising from this project for NSW Government endorsement

## Methodology

### What we did

Following an initial workshop with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, a comprehensive stakeholder consultation and community engagement process was conducted between June 2017 and August 2017. The objectives were to:

- Validate the core principles and test definitions for an Aboriginal Case Management Policy
- Understand the diverse range of roles and responsibilities, experiences, ideas, needs and priorities across an Aboriginal Case Management continuum with particular emphasis on
  - a. Entry points, pathways and gaps
  - b. Linkages and connections of a holistic Aboriginal service system
  - c. Decision making points and involvement
  - d. Roles and Responsibilities
  - e. Accountability mechanisms
- Discuss the case management continuum across three segments to identify the key themes to inform the development of an Aboriginal Case Management Policy and Guidelines
  - a. Segment 1: Early intervention and prevention, including entry points
  - b. Segment 2: Point of Risk of Significant Harm and pre Care Orders across the child protection continuum; and
  - c. Segment 3: Point of Care Orders across child protection, out of home care and after care continuum.

Eleven consultation sessions were held across NSW. These included Coffs Harbour, Newcastle, Nowra, Wagga Wagga, Dubbo, Moree, Bourke, Broken Hill, Liverpool and Rooty Hill. Alongside these face-to-face consultations, an online survey was developed to provide an additional channel for feedback. This survey was advertised through email networks, AbSec's website and social media channels. Key themes are provided in the appendices to this report.

### Who we heard from

A total of 279 people participated in the consultation process, including 208 through face-to-face consultations and 49 through the online survey. Throughout the consultation and engagement process, participants provided honest, constructive and considered feedback about their experiences, aspirations and solutions for change and improvement. Participants included:

- Aboriginal community members, including parents and families, kin and foster carers and community groups
- AbSec Youth Ambassadors
- Practitioners from Targeted Early Intervention and Child Protection Service Providers (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) including Family Support, Neighbourhood Centres,

Intensive Family Based Services, Intensive Family Preservation Services, Protecting Aboriginal Children Together, Brighter Futures and Aboriginal Medical Services.

- Practitioners from Out of Home Care Accredited Agencies (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal)
- FACS staff representing Districts and internal programs
- AbSec networks and member agencies
- Peak body representatives
- Government agencies including NSW Police, NSW Justice, NSW Health, NSW Education and Communities

## Key Themes

### What you told us

This section provides a summary of the key themes and issues raised by participants during the stakeholder consultation and community engagement period. The individual summary reports of each consultation can be viewed at [www.AbSec.org.au](http://www.AbSec.org.au). It should be noted many of the themes are interdependent when considering best practice and may sit across multiple themes.

1

Aboriginal Case Management Policy must empower Aboriginal children, young people, families and communities

- Strengthening and expanding the use of Aboriginal family-led and community-led decision making
- Elevating the voices of Aboriginal children and young people, their families and communities
- Engaging and involving Aboriginal families and communities early in decisions and actions that affect them
- Supporting the involvement of Aboriginal advocates to help build understanding and relationships

Participants emphasised the importance of acknowledging the strengths and capabilities of Aboriginal families and communities by placing them at the centre of decision making that enables them to identify and define solutions for themselves. Participants suggested that family-led decision making, including extended family, should be applied at different points of the case management continuum and must be facilitated and led by Aboriginal people, including:

- As an early intervention and prevention response for assessment, referral and case co-ordination. The outcome is to improve pathways for informal and formal support systems and the co-ordination of appropriate services for families who are at risk of statutory intervention.
- As a child protection response for identifying and addressing safety concerns with the family. The outcome is to work with the families' strengths and assist them in identifying strategies that will minimise the degree and length of intervention.

- As a case management response for identifying suitable relative and kinship carers, preparing and reviewing case plans including cultural support plans and step down supports to transition children from care.

Many participants raised the issue of Family Group Conferencing being used as a tool to engage families once statutory intervention has occurred and that it is not a genuine way to build community partnerships or strengthen family involvement in decision making. The use of family meetings and family-led decision making frameworks were seen by many participants as more promising frameworks to effectively engage with Aboriginal families.

Many references were made to the importance of listening to and valuing the voices of Aboriginal people as 'they know better than anyone what is best for them'. The rights and choices of Aboriginal people to be consulted and participate in decisions and actions that affect them were strongly supported with many noting that an empowering experience is one when decisions reflect the views of Aboriginal children, young people and their families and are incorporated into practice. The rights of Aboriginal people in 'having a say early and ongoing' in decision making was a common theme across the consultations, most importantly was the need to allow Aboriginal people time to tell their story through establishing trusting and respectful relationships so that they feel safe to tell their story. Participants cited the importance of creating communication platforms that are meaningful, culturally appropriate and accessible for Aboriginal people to have a strong voice in matters that affect their children, their lives and futures.

A case management policy must reinforce the need for participatory and inclusive practice, commencing at the earliest point and continuing throughout planning and service delivery. There was strong and broad support for families and communities to have stronger shared roles and shared power in decision making across multiple areas, such as, at the case level, family level, community level and systems level. Emphasis was placed on the need to build family and community capacity in decision making and involving them in Family Finding as this was seen as a fundamental pathway to connect Aboriginal children with their families. Many considered that practitioners need to:

- Acknowledge families as experts in their own lives and needs
- Acknowledge Aboriginal families as being a cohesive group
- Ensure active and genuine partnership roles for family and community members
- Provide diverse and culturally appropriate opportunities for family and community members to participate in shared decision making
- Recognise the importance of culture
- Acknowledge cultural differences and protocols

The involvement of Aboriginal Advocates was proposed as a solution to support Aboriginal children and families involved in care within the NSW child welfare system. The role of the advocate was seen as protecting the rights of Aboriginal children and families and ensuring that they are connected to relatives, kin, culture, community and country. The role of the advocate was also seen to assist Aboriginal people to achieve equity of access and participation in decision making.

## 2

An effective Aboriginal Case Management Policy supports service integration across the continuum of care

- Strengthening service partnerships to respond holistically
- Increasing knowledge and awareness of culturally appropriate services
- Improving information sharing
- Improving referral pathways
- Promoting collaboration and co-ordination across the service continuum

An integrated framework consisting of strong service partnerships and collaboration with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and other Aboriginal service providers was seen as fundamental in working together with parents, families and communities to promote the safety, well-being and cultural needs of Aboriginal children and young people. Participants highlighted the importance of services knowing the Aboriginal service networks that extend across a holistic Aboriginal child and family service system, specifically relating to Aboriginal community interventions, Aboriginal family strengthening and Aboriginal child safety. Through increasing knowledge and awareness of culturally appropriate services, participants advised that they will be better able to work effectively with Aboriginal children and families to connect them to the 'right services' they need and identify the 'right people' who can provide support. The following suggestions were provided to improve service integration and reduce the likelihood of service duplication and gaps:

- Comprehensive service mapping of Aboriginal services, programs and locations to help identify and connect to culturally appropriate solutions and supports; sharing of information assists collaboration.
- Enhancing early intervention and prevention practices by building co-ordinated community systems.
- Collaborative and multi-agency partnerships including joint practice approaches and comprehensive case co-ordination were seen as critical to building quality relationships and providing clarity of roles and responsibilities. Co-ordination was seen as a process to connect Aboriginal families with services and supports that are culturally responsive, inclusive, child/family centred and individualised.
- Ongoing community engagement processes.

The majority of respondents to the on-line survey (55%) and participants endorsed case management for Aboriginal children and families commencing early, 'at point of first' contact (pre-risk of significant harm) which was followed by 'at point of referral'. There was strong support for the need of a broad range of referral options across the continuum of care to enable access to services and supports. Many participants provided examples of effective services across the continuum and efforts to ensure that such services are actively linked or 'joined up' together including the idea of co-location outreach centres and community hubs.

## 3

Aboriginal Case Management Policy must focus on culturally competent practice, working with Aboriginal families and communities in culturally embedded ways

- Understanding Aboriginal perspectives and values and lived experiences
- Culturally competent child and family sector
- Understanding of local community protocols
- Culturally appropriate services
- Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation are integral in strengthening the cultural responsiveness of mainstream services

A stronger focus on embedding culture into case management practice and processes was emphasised to ensure that services are achieving positive cultural outcomes for Aboriginal children and families across the areas of safety, connection to family, community and culture.

There was strong and broad support for the framework of a case management policy to be centred around the skills, knowledge, roles and practices that workers and services need to demonstrate in order to perform their duties in a culturally informed and responsive way. The importance of well-defined meaning and understanding of cultural awareness, cultural safety and cultural security was consistently identified. In understanding the historical and lived experiences including the social and cultural context of each Aboriginal community, participants highlighted the importance of applying practice through a lens of cultural competency, including:

- Understanding of Aboriginal perspectives and values, their way of life
- Understanding that trauma has had an inter-generational impact and the importance of healing
- Strong and purposeful engagement based on genuine and respectful relationships
- Understanding of Aboriginal local protocols and cultural differences
- Understanding of Aboriginal knowledge systems and frameworks
- Taking culturally informed approaches and applying evidence based practice
- Ensuring policy, programs and service delivery are culturally appropriate to the needs of Aboriginal children, their families and communities
- Understanding of the broader Aboriginal family and kinship structure that binds families
- Strengthening Aboriginal families to restore their caregiving roles

Participants noted that greater investment needs to occur in building an Aboriginal workforce, the need to recruit Aboriginal practitioners from their local community and create Aboriginal-identified positions was emphasised. Further, training in ongoing cultural awareness and cultural safety was considered necessary though was not considered sufficient enough to embed Aboriginal culture within an organisation.

The importance of culture was a common theme across survey responses, emphasising the need for culture to be embedded into the service system and case management processes for Aboriginal children and young people. It was clear that the safety and best interests of children and young people was paramount however it was important that any approach and application understands Aboriginal people in order to drive better engagement and more valid assessment and understanding.

Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations were seen as being integral in strengthening the cultural responsiveness of mainstream services and embedding cultural safety. Survey respondents noted that Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations were an essential part of embedded culture within service system design and delivery, with some respondents noting that they must be valued for the important role they play in community.

4

Services are tailored, flexible and holistic to meet the individual needs and strengths of Aboriginal children, families and communities

- Focus on prevention, family preservation and restoration
- Relationship based practice
- Accessible and culturally responsive
- Sustainable and ongoing network of supports

There were many examples of promising and innovative strategies that are being used by services and programs to support Aboriginal families and communities. Some of the key strategies focus on family and community responsibility for raising children, evidence based approaches to early intervention and prevention as well as trusting in community and family resources that wrap around the child and family. Survey respondents emphasised that an effective service system will wrap around Aboriginal families, including extended families and other significant people in the child's life, providing key services to support the child to thrive.

There was a strong investment and focus on prevention, family preservation and restoration program approaches across the sector with the Aboriginal Family Preservation, Intensive Family Based Services and Brighter Futures programs notably recognised as successful models in engaging Aboriginal families in a meaningful and culturally appropriate way. Many participants however noted age-range limitations, short-term service delivery and poor referral systems as significant barriers for successful practice. Further, under-resourcing of Aboriginal specific services, inflexible funding approaches, geographical issues and difficulty with low levels of trust and participation were also noted.

Reflecting the importance of a participatory case management approach that empowers Aboriginal children, families and communities, participants emphasised the need for a case management policy to promote flexible approaches tailored to the holistic needs of Aboriginal families, supporting and strengthening families to reduce risk. Survey respondents repeatedly emphasised the need to place Aboriginal children at the centre of our work, and to see and consider the ‘whole’ child in working with families and communities. This requires a tailored and individualised approach rather than prescriptive or programmatic guidelines.

The provision of outreach services, community hubs, in-home supports and community driven initiatives were seen as important features of service accessibility.

Many participants identified that some services continue to work in isolation, the importance of services forming partnerships and collaborations with one another and with other local Aboriginal community organisations were seen as critical to better ensuring that Aboriginal children and families receive the right assistance. Survey respondents wanted stronger partnerships across all services around children and families, including better information sharing and relationships between services. Most importantly, services must form genuine partnerships with those around children, who are the experts in their lives and must be at the heart of effective case plans. Survey respondents wanted a co-ordinated approach that was open, participatory and transparent, with service integration and clear pathways across the service system.

## 5

Accountability for meeting the cultural outcomes of Aboriginal children and young people

- Shared and collective responsibility
- Meaningful planning
- Aboriginal Child Placement Principles
- Oversight and monitoring

Participants identified the need for greater accountability across all aspects of the child and family system, emphasising shared and collective responsibility. This included accountability with respect to a responsive service system at the front end, as well as ensuring meaningful and effective case planning/cultural support planning/after care planning at the statutory end of the system. Consistent with these points, Aboriginal people must be at the centre of accountability mechanisms and organisations must demonstrate to the community how these important issues are being addressed for their children.

The need for more robust commitment and oversight to implementing family contact arrangements, family finding and cultural support plans for Aboriginal children in out of home care, so they remain connected to their families, communities and culture was emphasised. Participants and survey respondents emphasised the need for the auditing of cultural care plans, case plans and cultural support plans to ensure that children remain connected to family and culture.

It should be noted that participants across the consultations expressed frustration that many of these themes are already established and accepted however they are not meaningfully implemented in practice with Aboriginal children and families. In addition, participants cited that the Aboriginal Placement Principles were not being adhered to in practice and were concerned about poor compliance, implementation and monitoring, with strong criticism that the Principles are often understood as a placement hierarchy rather than promoting connection to family and culture.

Participants noted that accountability mechanisms should not be limited to local advisory or Aboriginal governance groups, external consultation panels or community-based consultation, rather an independent peak body with powers to oversee the Aboriginal Child Placement Principles and other core issues across the service system was seen as critical. Further, accountability must be built in to the roles and responsibilities of case management.

### **Other key principles and themes**

Through the initial 2-day workshop with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations seven key themes or principles were identified and strongly endorsed through the on-line survey, with between 75% and 91% of all respondents agreeing that each core principle was either 'very important' or 'absolutely essential'. The involvement of extended family and significant others in decision making and the involvement of community in decision making was strongly endorsed.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principles were also identified as key to appropriate case management practice within child protection and out of home care in NSW. The fundamental purpose of these principles is to preserve and enhance Aboriginal children's culture and sense of identity through strengthening and maintaining connections to their family, extended family, community and Country. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principles recognises five inter-related elements, one of these elements includes the child placement hierarchy, which must be considered for inclusion into an Aboriginal Case Management Policy:

#### *1. Prevention*

Each Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child has the right to be brought up within their own family and community.

2. *Partnership*      The participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community representatives, external to the statutory agency, is required in all child protection decision-making, including intake, assessment, intervention, placement and care, and judicial decision-making processes.
3. *Placement*      Placement of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child in out of home care is prioritised according to the placement hierarchy.
4. *Participation*      Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, parents and family members are entitled to participate in all child protection decisions affecting them regarding intervention, placement and care, including judicial decisions.
5. *Connection*      Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out of home care are supported to maintain connection to their family, community and culture, especially children placed with non-Indigenous carers. (Tilbury et al., 2013)<sup>1</sup>

Participants expressed the importance of ensuring that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Placement Principles were respected and reflected into practice, including family and community decision making, ongoing connection to culture, and a focus on family preservation and restoration.

There was a consensus that a very clear and concise definition of self-determination and other key principles was essential to a meaningful Aboriginal Case Management Policy. AbSec's policy brief on self-determination requires, in practice, the development of local decision making structures to enable Aboriginal communities to collectively engage directly in the design, development and delivery of Aboriginal-led approaches to family and community strengthening and child welfare. This is distinct from the participation of Aboriginal families in decision making of specific cases, which must also be promoted through Aboriginal-led frameworks and processes.

### Next Steps

The key themes and messages arising from the initial 2-day intensive workshop and subsequent series of face to face consultations and survey responses will be aligned to establish a set of Aboriginal Case Management Principles, providing the cornerstone of the Aboriginal Case Management Policy. These principles will then provide a comprehensive framework for the development of Aboriginal Case Management Guidelines, providing

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<sup>1</sup> Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (paper drafted by Claire Tilbury), *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle: Aims and Core Elements* (2013)

practical guidance to practitioners working with Aboriginal children, families and communities across the continuum of care.

The draft Aboriginal Case Management Policy and Guidelines will be tested through two focus groups, including participants from the state-wide consultations as well as representatives of government agencies and peak organisations. A final 2-day intensive workshop with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations will be held to finalise and endorse the Aboriginal Case Management Policy and Guidelines, and to consider how they might be effectively implemented across the sector.

## Appendix

### Wagga Wagga

#### What you told us: Key Themes

Wagga Wagga 28 June 2017

##### Development of an Aboriginal Case Management Policy and Guidelines

This paper highlights the key themes raised by participants during the consultation held at Wagga Wagga on 28 June 2017. The feedback gathered from participants will contribute to the foundational work being undertaken by AbSec in developing an Aboriginal Case Management Policy and Guidelines. It is noted that many of these themes are interdependent when considering best practice.

There were no direct challenges to the Core Principles established in the initial 2-day intensive workshop, and themes arising from this consultation were consistent with these principles. However, there was a consensus that a very clear and concise definition of self-determination and other key principles was essential to a meaningful Aboriginal Case Management Policy

<p><b>1. Case management policy must focus on families, not the system, and provide supports earlier</b></p>	<p>Across the continuum of care, practitioners noted that supports are most effective when they are tailored to the needs of individual families, and are not constrained by inflexible service requirements or approaches. Respondents also spoke about relationship between services, emphasising the need for an integrated network of services that are able to meet the needs of families, rather than requiring families to navigate a complex local service system. This requires improved communication between services and a greater understanding of the broader service system. A more integrated and planned service system tailored to the needs of Aboriginal children and families would also increase efficiency to meet outcomes and avoid duplication.</p> <p>It was clearly identified that Aboriginal families need assistance to get help before parenting problems reach crisis point as waiting for intervention systems once harm is suspected or has occurred is too late. Many children and families are still not receiving assistance until they reach a threshold for statutory intervention. Emphasis was placed on the need for whole of family and community involvement as early as possible.</p> <p>A collaborative case management approach through shared knowledge, early identification and early response was</p>
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	<p>considered essential to improving wellbeing outcomes and co-ordination across the case management continuum. The following interventions were provided as ‘what was working well’:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Intensive Family Based decision making (families coming up with their own goals, developing family agreements, taking ownership of their own voices and journey)</li> <li>- Voluntary services through Brighter Futures</li> <li>- Family programs such as Youth at Risk, Thrive to Survive, Inter-reach and the Hippi program</li> <li>- Interagency case discussions ‘all of agency response’</li> <li>- IFBS Restorative Programs</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. Service accessibility is key</b></p>	<p>Access and intake to supports and services was identified as a critical issue, with a number of barriers identified that limited family access. These included geographical issues, under-resourcing of services, as well as the “fit” of services to communities. It was noted that there can be “shame” or stigma in seeking support, as well as distrust of the more intensive part of the service system, and these are best mitigated by having approaches that are culturally embedded and seen as “part of the community”.</p> <p>Related to this, referral pathways and processes were consistently identified as an important part of ensuring families received the services they need, when they need them. In particular, there was concern about referrals only coming through FACS, with self/family referral seen as particularly important to capitalise on motivation for change within the family. Similarly, the provision of supports at the point of orders was seen as critical to achieving restoration.</p>
<p><b>3. Skills and practices required for effective case management</b></p>	<p>Effective case management skills and practices are not only learnt through training and life experience, they are also put in place through the basic understanding of values and respect that is important to individuals and communities. Relationships are influenced by the case manager’s ability to be respectful, empathetic and culturally sensitive towards others. This also helps to support child and family centred practice to empower families and tailor approaches to their needs. Improved access to ongoing training and support for practitioners was noted.</p>
<p><b>4. Aboriginal families and</b></p>	<p>A key theme that emerged was the important role that families and communities must be supported to play in effective case</p>

<p><b>communities must be at the heart of a participatory Aboriginal Case Management Policy</b></p>	<p>management. Participatory approaches that focused on family strengthening and prevention of harm were emphasized, drawing on a range of skills, tools and processes to engage with families, having “big” conversations and develop clear, deliberate and achievable plans that are tailored to a family’s needs, strengths and resources. The child’s and family’s voice must be heard throughout, including at all points and in every decision; doing with, not to.</p> <p>Emphasis was placed on the importance of family agreements and family group conferencing, involving families and extended members to share concerns and responsibilities. Shifting the relationships to one that restores the balance of power and empowers families by enabling them to identify solutions to problems that they may be facing in caring for their children. This approach must be undertaken by capable and competent workers who can facilitate engagement in a culturally respectful and culturally safe way.</p> <p>Community involvement was also seen as essential, with the right to self-determination emphasized throughout, and the need to empower Aboriginal communities to design and deliver the services and supports needed in their community. The need for clear community consultation processes and accountability with respect to decisions taken were seen as important. Similarly, recognition of the Aboriginal Child Placement Principles was also emphasized, with this community participation needed to build trust and confidence, removing a barrier for families seeking help.</p>
<p><b>5. Strengthening case management practice with greater emphasis on family finding and restoration.</b></p>	<p>Strengthening families with the aim to achieving restoration was a continual theme, success stories of children being able to remain at home or being returned home were reported by stakeholders. These achievements were linked to the work being undertaken through the Intensive Family Based Service, Intensive Family Preservation Service and Cultural Connection teams. Key messages included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Effective engagement and support of Aboriginal families before, during and after restoration</li> <li>- Matching Aboriginal children and families to the right services and interventions</li> <li>- Restoration to be considered throughout all stages of the case management continuum and at each review point</li> <li>- Care Plans being fluid documents in which contact can change in line with their rights and safety</li> <li>- Contact builds attachment and leads to successful restoration</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Celebrate achievements and positive results</li> <li>- Develop individualized step by step plans with families</li> <li>- Family Finding to commence as early as possible</li> <li>- Contact needs to occur regularly with parents, siblings, families and significant others</li> <li>- Children need to remain connected to their country of birth as well as where they live</li> <li>- Extending referral pathways for IFBS/IFS to NGO sector</li> </ul>
<p><b>6. Accountability is essential to effective case management</b></p>	<p>The need for accountability mechanisms to be built in to the Aboriginal Case Management Policy was clearly identified, including adherence to the Aboriginal Child Placement Principles, consultation protocols and family participation. The need for accountability to follow through on case plan tasks (for practitioners), with appropriate measures and assessment tools, ensuring that the service system is delivering for Aboriginal families and communities. It is important that such processes are transparent.</p>

## Broken Hill

### What you told us: Key Themes

Broken Hill, 30 June 2017

#### Development of an Aboriginal Case Management Policy and Guidelines

This paper highlights the key themes raised by participants during the consultation held at Broken Hill on 30 June 2017. The feedback gathered from participants will contribute to the foundational work being undertaken by AbSec in developing an Aboriginal Case Management Policy and Guidelines. It is noted that many of these themes are interdependent when considering best practice.

There were no direct challenges to the Core Principles established in the initial 2-day intensive workshop, and themes arising from this consultation were consistent with these principles. Further, the need for greater investment in the capacity and capability of the Aboriginal community controlled sector was identified as a significant issue for the local service system.

<p><b>1. Case management policy must structurally support service system integration</b></p>	<p>To enhance prevention and early intervention responses and supports, local service providers need to work together to address the complexities and multi-faceted issues affecting Aboriginal children and families. A collaborative ‘integrated’ case management approach is needed to achieve better outcomes for Aboriginal children and families. This approach will ensure accountability of service providers and better co-ordination of referral pathways and case management, reduce duplication of services and identify potential gaps in service delivery.</p> <p>Strong partnerships benefit Aboriginal families and communities through respectful relationships and understanding of the cultural context of each community. Partnerships are based on shared understanding and responsibilities using a relationship based and community care model approach. Strong partnerships are built through genuine engagement, long term commitment, effective communication, transparency and trust.</p> <p>Partners include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Aboriginal families and communities</li> <li>- Community Networks</li> <li>- Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations</li> <li>- All of government and non-government service providers</li> </ul>
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	<p>An integrated service system must also reach out to communities, rather than requiring communities to navigate the system for themselves. This requires effective communication to families and communities about service access and availability.</p>
<p><b>2. Aboriginal family and community decision making is critical</b></p>	<p>Aboriginal families and communities were identified as being central to good decision making with respect to Aboriginal children and families. This was consistently noted across the continuum of care, with genuine engagement, transparency and partnership with families and communities emphasized. Comments across the group pointed towards a case management policy that engages with Aboriginal families early and often, building a partnership or network of care around children and families. Local Aboriginal decision making was essential, with facilitation independent of FACS noted as a strength (for example, with respect to Family Group Conferencing or Aboriginal consultations).</p>
<p><b>3. Case management must be culturally embedded and delivered by culturally competent services and supports</b></p>	<p>The importance of culturally informed or embedded approaches was consistently identified across the continuum of care. Case management of Aboriginal children and families must be delivered by culturally competent workers and service providers. Case management practice must consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Independent Aboriginal consultants to facilitate Family Group Conferencing</li> <li>- External Aboriginal Consultation Panel (independent from FACS)</li> <li>- Aboriginal Community Advisory Groups consisting of Aboriginal people from government and non-government service providers and community</li> <li>- Culture as being central to case planning</li> <li>- Family Finding to occur at point of first contact and continually throughout case management</li> <li>- Cultural support plans are developed by culturally competent staff</li> </ul>
<p><b>4. Case Management must engage early and often with Aboriginal families and communities, building rapport, trust and promoting accountability.</b></p>	<p>It was a consistent message across the continuum of care that engagement with Aboriginal families and communities must commence at the earliest possible point, in the interest of effectively diverting families from more intrusive intervention. This means that comprehensive, accurate and timely gathering of information, including the identification of Aboriginal children and families, must be a part of first engagement. This must be viewed as an opening point of an ongoing relationship around the needs of Aboriginal children</p>

	<p>and families, facilitating ongoing engagement, family and community-led solutions and decision making regardless of their path through care or across the continuum.</p>
<p><b>5. Case management should focus on strengthening families</b></p>	<p>Case management must be child and family focused that is specifically tailored to the individual’s needs whilst being accessible and flexible. Communities must be given opportunities to create and build pathways for growth and family strengthening, including Aboriginal family preservation and early intervention services. Aboriginal specific programs must be led by Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations.</p>

## Liverpool

### What you told us: Key Themes

Liverpool, 3-4 July 2017

#### Development of an Aboriginal Case Management Policy and Guidelines

This report highlights the key themes raised by participants during the two day consultations held at Liverpool on 30 June 2017. The feedback gathered from participants will contribute to the foundational work being undertaken by AbSec in developing an Aboriginal Case Management Policy and Guidelines. It is noted that many of these themes are interdependent when considering best practice.

There were no direct challenges to the Core Principles established in the initial 2-day intensive workshop, and themes arising from this consultation were consistent with these principles. Key issues such as self-determination, family and community participation and the importance of culture, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) and accountability to community featured throughout these consultations. The importance of a rights-based approach also came through strongly, with particular emphasis on the need to inform Aboriginal children and families about their rights and ensure they are upheld – possibly through dedicated supports.

<p><b>1. Case management policy must structurally support service system integration and adequately meet the cultural needs of Aboriginal families and communities</b></p>	<p>Emphasis was given of the need for early engagement with Aboriginal families and communities through pro-active, participatory and family strengthening case management approaches that enable families to identify and improve their circumstances before harm occurs. A recurring theme was the effectiveness of Aboriginal specific programs in creating a link or 'soft entry' point to a range of universal and primary targeted supports that are inclusive, individually tailored, accessible and flexible, delivering the supports families need from a holistic, family-centred perspective. Many participants expressed the need to develop collaborative partnerships that built on community ownership and creates an environment that is conducive to the sharing of knowledge and information – a network of services under community control working together for children and families. Adopting culturally sensitive and relevant initiatives as early as possible and throughout the continuum of care were considered essential, some of the examples provided include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Use of yarning circles</li> <li>- Cultural role modelling and Aboriginal mentoring services</li> <li>- Aboriginal advocates for children and families</li> <li>- Promoting cultural safety and cultural security</li> </ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Purposeful engagement with Elders, leaders and community groups</li> <li>- Effective outreach services</li> <li>- Multiple service system points ‘no wrong door policy’</li> <li>- Creating environments where children feel connected to family and community, feel culturally safe and comfortable to discuss their issues</li> <li>- Integrated Service Hubs with identified Aboriginal specific roles</li> <li>- Family based care arrangements</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. Case management is applied using an ‘Aboriginal Lens’ and must start from an understanding of culture and community control.</b></p>	<p>It was consistently noted that workers and service providers need to keep building on the strengths, assets and values of Aboriginal families and communities. These were considered as essential processes in practice as current efforts were considered to be ‘tokenistic’ rather than building on positive aspects of culture that are meaningful and motivated by Aboriginal people from their own perspectives. Service providers must think differently, understanding and respecting the historical experiences, social and cultural context of each Aboriginal community. Principles and values specifically identified for Aboriginal case management practice included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Aboriginal self-determination principles</li> <li>- Aboriginal Child Placement Principles (ACPP)</li> <li>- Aboriginal decision making, knowing and exercising their rights and addressing power imbalances within the system</li> <li>- Culture being core to a child’s wellbeing</li> <li>- Empowering families and communities</li> </ul>
<p><b>3. Aboriginal Case Management must keep children and families in mind, providing early supports to strengthen families prior to removal, keeping children connected and regularly reviewing and supporting families for the safe return of their children from care</b></p>	<p>The need for culturally appropriate evidence based (EB) treatment as part of addressing the drivers of child abuse and neglect was a key priority, working with families and communities to prevent the need for removals. Some participants felt that the standard EB practices are based on the majority of the population and may not have relevance to specific Aboriginal communities or groups. Aboriginal-led participatory approaches that empower families and communities were emphasized, particularly Family Group Conferencing and Family Finding approaches, from very early on and at all relevant decision points. Families and communities remain critical even when children are in care and must play a role in care/cultural support planning, with particular focus on maintaining connections for the long-term wellbeing of Aboriginal children and young people. The need for greater focus directed towards restoration was also noted.</p>

	<p>There was consensus that approaches should be derived from the positive attributes of communities, that is, knowing what is working effectively in the local community and what practices have generated positive results.</p>
<p><b>4. Case management must be culturally embedded and delivered by culturally competent services and supports</b></p>	<p>There was a particular focus on the role of cultural competence of service providers and the need for services to demonstrate that they are meeting the cultural outcomes of Aboriginal children and families. It was suggested that a cultural competency framework be linked to the case management continuum.</p> <p>The importance of building individual and organisational cultural awareness was consistency identified. Many participants expressed the need to enhance worker’s understanding and approaches to working with Aboriginal children and families as well as giving good examples of practical tools. The experiences of trauma and loss, as well as intergenerational effects were highlighted as key disruptions to cultural well-being. Cultural identity, connection to family and kinship networks as well as connection to Country were seen as crucial elements to Aboriginal children’s spiritual and emotional wellbeing and development.</p>
<p><b>5. Aboriginal Case Management must include robust accountability mechanisms.</b></p>	<p>The importance of the system taking responsibility for the ongoing over-representation of Aboriginal children within the child protection system was noted, with participants noting the need for the sector to drive changes to achieve better outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people and their families. Participants want to see processes to build and respond to evidence, and robust oversight and accountability processes that place an appropriate Aboriginal community-controlled mechanism as an external (non-FACS/Government) oversight body for all decisions, including assessment, removal, permanency, cultural support and implementation of the ACPP.</p>

<b>6. Other messages</b>	<p>Many participants spoke about applying the lessons from the Adverse Childhood Experiences Study to shift understanding, focus and practice and using this as a foundation to make decisions about child well-being. For example, ACE being used to develop a mechanism for identifying the most vulnerable and at risk children for referral, assessment and case management.</p> <p>Some participants referred to a path-work web app that creates a client safety net allowing practitioners to better collaborate and understand the team of services that support families before a situation escalates.</p> <p>The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) was provided as a good example of an effective engagement framework through increasing level participation across the spectrum of inform, consult, involve collaborate and empower.</p>
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**Nowra****What you told us: Key Themes**

Nowra 6 July 2017

## Development of an Aboriginal Case Management Policy and Guidelines

This paper highlights the key themes raised by participants during the consultations held at Nowra in July 2017. The feedback gathered from participants will contribute to the foundational work being undertaken by AbSec in developing an Aboriginal Case Management Policy and Guidelines. It is noted that many of these themes are interdependent when considering best practice.

Draft Core Principles of the Aboriginal Case Management Policy arising from the initial 2-day workshop with Aboriginal community and practitioners were introduced to participants of the Nowra consultation. Broadly, the themes arising from this consultation were consistent with these principles.

<b>1. “Open and honest”</b>	<p>The importance of an “open and honest” approach to working with children, families and communities, as well as each other, emerged as a clear and consistent theme across the day. In all segments across the continuum of care, participants reinforced the importance of a case management approach that was honest and transparent, and that was capable of having hard conversations. This was seen as essential to creating the conditions for change, and sits alongside the need to empower families and communities to address the challenges they face.</p>
<b>2. Families, community and culture must underpin all aspects of case management</b>	<p>Across the continuum of care participants identified the important role of family, community and culture which must be reflected in any Aboriginal Case Management Policy. This ranged from the importance of pre-ROSH services being embedded in the community and local culture, building trust and improving access/engagement, through to family, community and culture being identified as the key to successful crisis intervention, including placement and keeping children connected. Further, assessment processes must be culturally informed in order to be valid for Aboriginal families. This requires community involvement in assessment processes, allowing an informed view of risk and family strengths to drive effective case planning</p> <p>Participants wanted a service system that was community-led and culturally responsive; one that genuinely understands Aboriginal people. Case management must be family led,</p>

	<p>embedded in the community to provide important supports and oversight at the local level. Community-led responses were seen as more accountable to Aboriginal communities. This includes empowering Aboriginal families and communities in decision making, which necessarily requires practitioners to “share power” with families and communities.</p> <p>All key participants in the service system and decision making processes must be culturally competent, including the Children’s Court/Children’s Court Clinic.</p> <p>Consistently, families, communities and culture, as well as the voice of children and young people themselves, were seen as the key participants in all decision making processes. This included an important role for advocacy.</p>
<p><b>3. Flexible, holistic approach centred on the child and family</b></p>	<p>Reflecting the importance of a participatory Case Management approach that empowers Aboriginal children, families and communities, participants emphasized the need for the Case Management Policy to promote a flexible approach tailored to the holistic needs of Aboriginal families, supporting and strengthening families to reduce risk. The lack of such an approach was identified as a key gap within the current service system, exacerbated by inflexible funding approaches. Being family centred requires identifying and communicating clear goals that are realistic and relevant to each family. Families should be engaged as early as possible, particularly by point of ROSH. While a holistic service system was seen as important, there was an identified risk of “over-servicing” families. Rather, there should be one lead case manager who has developed rapport and trust with the family to support seamless service delivery. This requires strong partnerships and information exchange across the service system, allowing required supports to be wrapped around families, rather than requiring families to navigate.</p>
<p><b>4. The Case Management Policy should focus greater effort on early intervention, family preservation and restoration. Removals must be clearly placed as an option of last resort</b></p>	<p>Early identification of families in need of support and the need to intervene to address concerns as early as practicable was particularly emphasized. The need for a timely response and an orientation toward prevention and family preservation through proactive family strengthening was noted. The removal of children from their families was noted as an option of last resort, with many noting the need for ongoing monitoring and review of children and young people removed from home with a particular focus on working towards restoration. This requires strong engagement and rapport</p>

	<p>building with families. Many participants emphasized the importance of ensuring that the Aboriginal Child Placement Principles were respected and reflected in practice, including family and community decision making, ongoing connection to culture, and a focus on family preservation and restoration.</p>
<p><b>5. Accountability mechanisms</b></p>	<p>Participants emphasized the importance of accountability mechanisms to ensure that the Aboriginal Case Management Policy is faithfully implemented in all cases, providing local communities some form of oversight in those processes. This included family and community participation in decision making, the use of local Aboriginal panels, including ACCOs and other community-led processes, as well as some form of independent Aboriginal oversight body to ensure that agencies are applying the ACPP and building genuine relationships with Aboriginal families and communities. This accountability needs to be built in to the roles and responsibilities of case management, with oversight by a relevant ACCO to ensure that recommendations and actions are followed through in practice. At the heart of this was the need to monitor how children’s needs are being met and outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people are being achieved.</p>

**Dubbo**

**What you told us: Key Themes**

Dubbo 10 and 11 July 2017

Development of an Aboriginal Case Management Policy and Guidelines

This paper highlights the key themes raised by participants during the consultations held at Dubbo in July 2017. The feedback gathered from participants will contribute to the foundational work being undertaken by AbSec in developing an Aboriginal Case Management Policy and Guidelines. It is noted that many of these themes are interdependent when considering best practice.

Draft Core Principles of the Aboriginal Case Management Policy arising from the initial 2-day workshop with Aboriginal community and practitioners were introduced to participants at the Dubbo consultation. There were no direct challenges to the Core Principles established in the initial 2-day intensive workshop, and themes arising from this consultation were consistent with these principles. A particular issue that emerged was the idea of trust or confidence in the service system, which was related to a range of issues and needed to be addressed through a multifaceted approach. This might include greater participation of Aboriginal community and families in service design, delivery and decision making, the presence of accountability mechanisms, a culturally competent workforce and a concerted effort towards community engagement.

<p><b>1. Aboriginal Case Management Policy must empower Aboriginal children, families and communities</b></p>	<p>Consistent with the core principles of self-determination and participation, and arguably reflecting a community perception regarding the failure to deliver on s. 11 and 12 of the Act in practice, there was a common theme about empowering the voices of Aboriginal people across the service system. There were a number of references to processes being community-led, and designed by community, or ensuring that Aboriginal children and family were decision makers in their cases. Aboriginal communities, collectively, must be empowered to drive program development and service system design at the local level, establishing the processes that impact on Aboriginal children and families, and the services and supports that are available across the continuum of care. At the individual case levels, Aboriginal families were acknowledged as the experts in their own lives, and must likewise lead all decisions that impact on them. This included elevating the voices of Aboriginal children and young people, and noted some positive and proactive local attempts to strengthen the voice of young people at the community level. Clear guidelines around community engagement were recommended, in addition to sensitive relationship-based practice at the family level.</p>
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<p><b>2. Service integration in key to effective work with families. The Aboriginal Case Management must support this practice across the continuum of care</b></p>	<p>The importance of connections between services, including for example information sharing and clear referral pathways, were consistently noted across all levels of the service system. Whether universal, targeted and crisis interventions, a holistic approach that supports families and is tailored to their needs was seen as essential for an effective and efficient service system that minimized duplication. Many examples of effective services across the continuum were noted, including education, mental health, parenting supports and youth services, and efforts to ensure that such services actively linked together (including the idea of co-location or service hubs) was seen as a critical feature to support effective case management. Of note, the range of services noted included intensive family supports right through to community events that bring the community together and offer an opportunity for outreach and support. Related to this is the idea of open doors/no wrong door/soft-entry, in which a well-coordinated local service system is able to connect families to the services they need, regardless of the service they enter seeking help.</p>
<p><b>3. Practice must be flexible, tailored to the individual needs of children/families, and focused on preventing harm as much as possible</b></p>	<p>Many participants noted that positive practice across the continuum was flexible and responsive, while inflexible or tightly programmed approaches presented significant barriers for successful practice. Aboriginal children, families and communities must be at the centre of practice, both in service system design and in case management at the individual family level. By having a flexible service system that empowers Aboriginal families in goal setting and case planning, a more tailored, responsive and effective service system will be achieved.</p> <p>Building from this, relationship based practice was identified as being critical. Goals for families across the service system must be clearly defined, developed with families, and realistic. This helps to empower families to make the changes identified, rather than providing additional experiences of powerlessness/hopelessness at the hands of the system, thereby undermining trust and confidence in supports.</p> <p>Participants noted examples of promising/positive practice in justice, health etc that seek to minimize harm by working proactively to prevent issues, rather than responding after harm has occurred. A case management policy must likewise be focused on prevention and early intervention, although must also be able to respond to harm.</p>

	<p>Goal of case practice for many included the establishment of robust networks of care around children and family that are able to provide ongoing support, rather than building dependence on a service. Targeted or crisis services should address the identified issues, then link people back to the broader universal system and peer/community works for sustainable ongoing supports.</p> <p>As noted above, Aboriginal families and communities must be involved in all decisions about Aboriginal children at every point, however it was particularly noted that when Aboriginal children are removed from their family, the question of their restoration must be regularly revisited so that children are not needlessly kept apart from their family.</p>
<p><b>4. The Aboriginal Case Management Policy must focus on culturally competent practice, working with Aboriginal families and communities in culturally embedded ways.</b></p>	<p>The issue of cultural competence or culturally embedded practice that respects and observes local protocols emerged as a theme across the continuum of care. Some of the solutions noted include greater investment in Aboriginal practitioners that are connected to their community (noting additional supports needed, addressing staff turnover), Aboriginal-identified positions and greater community engagement and involvement in service system design and delivery. Similarly, training for all practitioners in cultural awareness/competency was emphasized.</p>
<p><b>5. The Aboriginal Case Management Policy must focus on making the supports that families need accessible when and where they are needed and actively address the barriers to engagement.</b></p>	<p>Participants noted that the service system must make it as easy as possible for families to access services. This includes soft-entry through a range of services (AMS etc) and a “no wrong door” approach within a truly integrated service system. Further, outreach and community education initiatives must be included to inform the local community on services available, and to address issues of trust and confidence. Similarly, stigma and shame were identified as potential barriers, emphasizing the need to get out into the community, build relationships with families and grow trust.</p> <p>Many practitioners noted gaps in resourcing and capacity building. Policy is meaningless without being resourced properly to ensure timely access to the services that are needed. Lack of local services, unmanageable caseloads or the presence of lengthy waiting lists were identified as missed opportunities to meaningfully deliver on momentum for change.</p> <p>There was an identified need for investment in services, the infrastructure of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations with a mandate for community development and</p>

	<p>family supports, providing stability and consistency in services available. This allows communities to build trust in the local community controlled service, while offering flexible services that are responsive to changing local needs.</p>
<p><b>6. Accountability for case planning responsibilities must be built in</b></p>	<p>Accountability to Aboriginal families and communities for practice within the child and family space was noted as a common theme. This included accountability with respect to a responsive service system at the front end, as well as ensuring meaningful and effective case planning/cultural planning/after care planning at the statutory end of the system. Consistent with the above points, Aboriginal people must be at the centre of accountability mechanisms – they must demonstrate to the community how these important issues are being addressed for their children. A case management policy without accountability will not be consistently implemented. This includes effective administration and data-driven approaches, however should not detract from the key issue of relationship-based practice. Case Management should not have the unintended consequence of chaining practitioners to their desk, but should assist them to spend the majority of their time in the community, working with children and families. Accountability mechanisms noted included, but should not be limited to local advisory or Aboriginal governance groups, external consultation panels or community-based consultation, and an independent peak body with powers to oversee the Aboriginal Child Placement Principles and other core issues across the service system.</p>

**Moree****What you told us: Key Themes**

Moree 18 July 2017

## Development of an Aboriginal Case Management Policy and Guidelines

This paper highlights the key themes raised by participants during the consultations held at Moree on 18 July 2017. The feedback gathered from participants will contribute to the foundational work being undertaken by AbSec in developing an Aboriginal Case Management Policy and Guidelines. It is noted that many of these themes are interdependent when considering best practice.

There were no direct challenges to the Core Principles established in the initial 2-day intensive workshop, and themes arising from this consultation were consistent with these principles.

<p><b>1. Case management policy must be founded on Aboriginal values</b></p>	<p>Emphasis was placed on the need to shift the construct of a non-Aboriginal case management system to one that embeds the cultural values of Aboriginal people. This must be done through recognising the Aboriginal way of doing things and understanding the diversity of Aboriginal family life as it is today. The commonality in the vision and values of Aboriginal people was noted however there was a strong message that there can be 'no one size that fits all' approach. Improved knowledge and understanding of the broader Aboriginal family and kinship structure that bind families was seen as critical as the meaning of 'extended family' is not simply a nuclear family unit but rather a family unit that extends beyond this. Respondents shared that case management must place greater value on including Aboriginal family as a cohesive group particularly when diverting children from the statutory system, such as preservation and restoration. An example was provided that current intake and referral systems need to include entire dependents within the family group not just the client's children. The need for Aboriginal families to instill and reinforce their roles and responsibilities within community was seen as important to strengthening families to fulfil their sharing and caregiving roles. In supporting these roles and responsibilities, service providers must engage early with families and communities, involve them at all points in decision making and ensure family meetings and family group conferencing occurs from the onset and throughout the child's time in care.</p>
<p><b>2. Aboriginal community play an</b></p>	<p>Aboriginal Advocates were seen as playing a key role in communities to help build understandings and relationships and</p>

<p><b>important role in case management, including advocacy and direct support</b></p>	<p>are better able to sensitively represent the rights of Aboriginal children, their families and their communities. Aboriginal advocacy needs to be community driven and community controlled in order to co-ordinate these processes.</p> <p>Participants identified the need for families to draw on Aboriginal Advocates to help overcome barriers and ensure their rights are safeguarded, these roles may differ to the role of an Aboriginal Elder or leader and can help facilitate the voices of Aboriginal children and their families who are affected by the care system. It was noted that Aboriginal children and families continue to face barriers in accessing and participating in Children’s Court proceedings. Legal representatives and judiciary officers do not take a culturally inclusive approach when representing or considering cases involving Aboriginal people, with many being unable to demonstrate cultural competency in the work they do. Aboriginal advocates involved at the beginning and throughout the court process can assist families in understanding and exercising their rights and responsibilities within this system.</p>
<p><b>3. Case management must extend beyond a narrow view of child protection, orientated toward the statutory system</b></p>	<p>Participants identified that case managers perform a number of diverse roles that need to take on broader responsibilities than just child protection and out of home care alone. Examples of important roles and responsibilities included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Engaging early with families to build trust and rapport, a respectful and non-judgement approach that avoids assumptions being made.</li> <li>- Community engagement, especially the cultural protocols of each community. Aboriginal leaders and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations hold the knowledge and cultural net of resources and support.</li> <li>- Empowering families and communities by involving them in decision making and driving solutions for themselves. Aboriginal people are capable of making decisions and setting their own goals.</li> <li>- Solutions focused with no time or age restraints, tailoring supports to the person’s needs and giving people sense of hope. Aboriginal people are capable of solving problems, solutions need to be community driven.</li> <li>- Child and Family Centered, resources are wrapped around to try and help each person to achieve their goals. Aboriginal people are capable of taking control of their lives.</li> <li>- Highlighting the achievements being made by Aboriginal communities and individuals.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Applying trauma informed practice, understanding the impact of removals and knowing how to support Aboriginal children, families and their carers.</li> </ul> <p>A relationships based practice is important to effective case management, respectful relationships are established and maintained through practice that is honest, flexible, reliable and consistent. Relationships are built through respecting the rights of Aboriginal people and aligning services that meet the community needs as determined by them. Self-determination was seen as a fundamental component of these relationships.</p> <p>Collaborative and multi- agency partnerships were seen as critical to building quality relationships and providing greater clarity of roles and responsibilities of service providers. These partnerships were seen as a way to enhance the outcomes of Aboriginal children and families through a range of joined up services that are made easily accessible.</p>
<p><b>4. Accountability</b></p>	<p>Participants identified the need for greater accountability across all aspects of the system, emphasizing shared and collective responsibility. In line with the strong theme of the importance of Aboriginal community advocacy, there was an identified need for community mechanisms to support families and monitor systems to ensure policies are adhered to, including participation of Aboriginal families and communities and the implementation of the Aboriginal Child Placement Principles.</p> <p>A greater focus must be had on the consent mechanisms to ensure that Care Plans demonstrate that parents have been involved in the decision making process, that they understand their rights and that they understand what they are consenting to. Consent mechanisms also need to include significant family members to ensure they have been involved in the decision making process regarding the child’s care arrangements. Parents and significant family members need to know what is expected from FACS or the NGO to achieve restoration, a restoration plan must be developed with the parents and family at the same time a Care Plan is being developed so that each party understands what they must do.</p>

**Bourke****What you told us: Key Themes**

Bourke 20 July 2017

## Development of an Aboriginal Case Management Policy and Guidelines

This paper highlights the key themes raised by participants during the consultations held at Bourke on 20 July 2017. The feedback gathered from participants will contribute to the foundational work being undertaken by AbSec in developing an Aboriginal Case Management Policy and Guidelines. It is noted that many of these themes are interdependent when considering best practice.

There were no direct challenges to the Core Principles established in the initial 2-day intensive workshop, and themes arising from this consultation were consistent with these principles. Further, the need for greater investment in early intervention and preservation programs specifically targeted for Aboriginal children and families and delivered by Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations was identified.

<p><b>1. Case management must support integration and service accessibility across the continuum of care</b></p>	<p>A number of barriers were highlighted for Aboriginal families to access culturally appropriate services in the space of early intervention and preservation supports and services. These included the under-resourcing of Aboriginal specific services in the local area and geographical issues. The importance of a culturally responsive service system that is flexible, consistent and visible was highlighted including for example, the need to develop collaborative partnerships that are built on community protocols similar to the Maranguka protocol and existing agreements such as MOUs and recommendations previously made by the Royal Commission. Examples of the Uniting Newpin Model, Practice First and Brighter Futures Programs were noted by some participants as working well however contracting and age-range limitations were highlighted as significant barriers in terms of flexibility and accessibility for families in need. Other factors that hinder the successful delivery of services to Aboriginal families and communities included the lack of appropriate infrastructure and difficulty with low levels of trust and participation.</p> <p>Many examples of effective services across the continuum were noted including education, youth services, police (SAMs), family supports, Aboriginal medical services and the NSW Health Integrated Pilot in Walgett and Coonamble. The provision of outreach services, community driven initiatives and in home supports were seen as important features of service accessibility. Many participants expressed concern</p>
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	<p>with poorly resourced health and transitional supports in the area of sexual assault, birthing and post-natal care. It was noted that these supports were not locally inclusive resulting in Aboriginal people needing to access these supports and services out of country (Dubbo).</p>
<p><b>2. Aboriginal Case Management Policy must empower Aboriginal children, families and communities</b></p>	<p>Community raised the importance of empowering the voices of Aboriginal children and families who are affected by the care system. Case managers were seen as legally obligated to uphold the rights of Aboriginal children and young people by ensuring they are treated equally and allowed to have a say and participate in decisions affecting them. To effectively do this, case managers must be empathetic, genuine, culturally respectful and proactive in their engagement role giving young people time to express their voices whilst at the same time acknowledging their capabilities. Aboriginal youth need to be able to express their concerns in a way that works for them, though this may take time for the young person, their concerns must be genuinely followed up by the case manager and they must know the outcomes soon after.</p> <p>Involving Aboriginal children, young people, their families and communities in decision making was seen as an integral part of case management practice. Emphasis was placed on the need for Aboriginal families and communities to be engaged early and often, to be involved in placement decisions, safety planning and case planning throughout the life of a case. Family group conferencing and family meetings facilitated by culturally competent and respectful people were identified as important tools in creating a space for Aboriginal people’s voices to be heard and understood as well as improving communication and information sharing between parties. Some participants noted that evidence regarding effective cultural responses to problems faced by families and communities is limited.</p>
<p><b>3. The Aboriginal Case Management Policy must focus on culturally competent practice, working with Aboriginal families and communities in culturally embedded ways</b></p>	<p>A common theme was the role of cultural competency of service providers and staff to demonstrate they are meeting the cultural outcomes of Aboriginal children and families. The importance of a well-defined meaning of cultural awareness, cultural safety and cultural security was consistently identified. Service providers who are providing direct services to Aboriginal children and families must demonstrate a commitment to promoting cultural competence through staff learning and development, recruitment of local Aboriginal</p>

	<p>people where possible and developing policies that support culturally competent and culturally appropriate practice. Service providers must be active and visible in local communities and consult/engage communities and families in service delivery.</p>
<p><b>4. Service integration is key to effective work with families, focus is given to sharing of information and tailoring supports to each community</b></p>	<p>Case managers need to be provided with additional guidance based on lessons from research and practical experience, considerations must be given to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Aboriginal families and communities are engaged in a consultative process as they need to identify the most appropriate supports. Actions must be followed through by balancing consultation with putting into practice.</li> <li>- Case management needs to be creative and flexible to respond to the changing needs of individuals and communities. This includes the delivery of services to families in their own environments.</li> <li>- Building strong relationships through employment of local people and/or culturally competent staff who have a good understanding of the issues and respect for local protocols.</li> <li>- Forming partnerships and collaborations with other service providers and government organisations to ensure families can access the right help.</li> <li>- Strengths based approach including participatory processes that are aimed at tailoring supports to each community as there needs to be linkages between cultural practices and ways of working.</li> <li>- Reflective practice must occur, being self-aware and building on current knowledge and experience through learning and development.</li> <li>- The principles of self-determination must be integrated into the case management system.</li> </ul>
<p><b>5. Accountability</b></p>	<p>Demonstrated compliance of the Aboriginal Child Placement Principles, including evidence that agencies are consulting with Aboriginal families and communities and including them in decision making is critical. Family empowerment, self-determination and listening to the voices of Aboriginal children and young people were seen as fundamental to meeting positive outcomes. These responsibilities should be oversighted through agreed community protocols or an independent Aboriginal body which reports back to community.</p>

## Coffs Harbour

### What you told us: Key Themes

Coffs Harbour - 25<sup>th</sup> of July 2017

#### Development of an Aboriginal Case Management Policy and Guidelines

This paper highlights the key themes raised by participants during the consultations held at Coffs Harbour on 25 July 2017. The feedback gathered from participants will contribute to the foundational work being undertaken by AbSec in developing an Aboriginal Case Management Policy and Guidelines. It is noted that many of these themes are interdependent when considering best practice.

The themes emerging were consistent with the Core Principles established in the initial intensive workshop. Participants highlighted several key themes including the importance of empowering Aboriginal children, families and communities and maintaining effective communication links between services and communities. In the delivery of services, there is an overall need to observe and integrate local culture as well as maintain continuity and flexibility to suit the needs of individual families. Further, accessibility of services and accountability mechanisms to the Aboriginal Case Management Policy were raised. The strengths of Aboriginal cultural practices in family life and child rearing should also be reflected in the case management policy and guidelines.

<p><b>1. The empowerment of Aboriginal children, families and communities is a priority.</b></p>	<p>A recurring theme was the importance of empowering Aboriginal voices, in particular the voices of the individual child, family and community across all stages of the care system. The focus of case management should always be to keep children safe and families together, at the same time giving the family the power and means to determine their own future and employ the strengths of their own family networks.</p> <p>Ensuring the involvement of children/young people, family and significant others in joint decision-making was emphasised from point of first contact (pre-risk of significant harm) throughout all points across the continuum of care, particularly in the development of family contact plans, cultural care planning and cultural support planning. Participants cited Family Group Conferencing (FGC) as an effective decision making model that should be applied as early as possible, starting before risk has escalated and a report being generated. Further, it was emphasized that a FGC must be facilitated and led by Aboriginal people and be connected across the entire continuum.</p> <p>Empowering families also involves giving families choice and access to self-refer to services. The PUPP (Parents Under Pressure Program) was provided as a good example where parents could voluntarily access a service, centering around goal</p>
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	<p>setting as determined by the family and tailoring supports to the individual needs of each family. Effective case management was seen as setting obtainable and realistic goals, ensuring follow up and providing ongoing feedback to allow families time to reflect and make changes for themselves.</p> <p>It was also mentioned that services should implement a ‘step-down’ approach, whereby they gradually reduce the level of support they directly provide families with the goal of giving the family the means to function autonomously (so that changes can be sustained).</p>
<p><b>2. Effective linkages and relationships between services and the Aboriginal community</b></p>	<p>In order for there to be a holistic Aboriginal service system, it was noted that there needed to be more effective linkages made between services and Aboriginal communities to strengthen communication networks and address the issue of agencies working in silos that has contributed to families and communities feeling disconnected, not knowing where to receive help and therefore perpetuating fear around unfamiliar agencies.</p> <p>Agencies/services should focus on working together, sharing resources, have clearer referral pathways and attend inter-agency meetings so that they can strengthen their own networks to integrate their service delivery. For example, education and health care services were connected at the pre-ROSH stage when pre-schools directly referred families to community health providers if they detected difficulties with the child’s speech development. Another example mentioned was the Safety Action Meetings (SAM), which is an inter-agency meeting of police, housing, health and domestic violence and family support providers that shared information and resources to keep families safe.</p> <p>Strengthening the networks between services improves support for families and fosters positive relationships between a wider range of agencies and Aboriginal communities. It was emphasised that Aboriginal organisations are best placed to provide services to Aboriginal communities and this relationship should be established whenever possible. The importance of building open and lasting relationships with families and communities was a consistent theme, a case management approach that evolves through early engagement with communities in decision making and clearly communicating up front was seen as critical.</p>
<p><b>3. Cultural competency, employment and access to Aboriginal workers</b></p>	<p>Many participants noted that negative experiences within communities with government agencies or service providers can make Aboriginal people reluctant to seek out support due to mistrust. Greater investment in community engagement and community-led initiatives such as ‘getting to know us’ and attending</p>

	<p>local events was highlighted. Strategies to improve accessibility of services for Aboriginal people, including embedding services within local communities, employing Aboriginal staff and developing the cultural competency of agencies and non-Aboriginal staff. Further, beginning with a relationship of trust and building partnerships with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and services was strongly supported. Workers need to have an understanding of local culture and be able to embed this into practice. This includes an understanding of family structures and working with families collectively rather than holding an individual parent solely responsible for maintaining a safe/suitable home environment. Advocacy was also identified as an important role. Participants identified the need for external Aboriginal advocates to help overcome some of these barriers and ensure rights are safeguarded.</p>
<p><b>4. Service delivery should be consistent, flexible and tailored to meet the needs of individual families and communities.</b></p>	<p>A key issue across all stages of the service system is the lack of continuity of services. Participants expressed that families are left feeling abandoned by both government and non-government agencies and were left to fill in the gaps in the service system. This also resulted in families having to re-tell their stories and re-build trust with services. Inflexible funding approaches and program time restrictions were seen to exacerbate the gaps in the service system.</p> <p>Case management should be flexible to meet the needs of the family and allow for proactive and creative solutions to improve outcomes to adequately keep families together and safe. Early intervention providers raised the need for better service co-ordination and communication between services at the point of risk of significant harm, particularly when FACS is determining intervention types, such as community intervention or child protection intervention, there needs to be more effective facilitation of service responses including shared responsibility of ongoing intervention with the family.</p> <p>Many participants spoke about the need for services to strengthen current approaches to family preservation and restoration, building on good evidence and practice that is culturally based and driven through learning and collaboration.</p>
<p><b>5. Accountability mechanisms</b></p>	<p>Participants emphasised the need to ensure that an Aboriginal Case Management Policy is implemented and monitored by an independent Aboriginal peak body to ensure that the Aboriginal Child Placement Principles are being applied. The oversight of the development and implementation of cultural support plans, family</p>

	finding and permanency planning was seen as critical to ensure that recommendations and actions are not only being put into place/carried through but are also culturally appropriate and endorsed.
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**Newcastle**

**What you told us: Key Themes**

Newcastle 27 July 2017

Development of an Aboriginal Case Management Policy and Guidelines

This paper highlights the key themes raised by participants during the consultation held at Newcastle on 27 July 2017. The feedback gathered from participants will contribute to the foundation work being undertaken by AbSec in developing an Aboriginal Case Management Policy and Guidelines. It is noted that many of these themes are interdependent when considering good practice.

Draft Core Principles of the Aboriginal Case Management Policy arising from the initial 2-day intensive workshop with Aboriginal community and practitioners were introduced to participants at the Newcastle consultation. In general, the themes emerging from this consultation were consistent with these key themes. However it must be noted that there was a significant frustration expressed with respect to these themes. Some participants felt that these principles are well established and have been for quite some time, however continue to be poorly implemented in practice with Aboriginal children and families. This emphasizes the importance of adequate and robust accountability mechanisms that empower Aboriginal communities to oversee casework practice and service system design to ensure the needs of Aboriginal children and their families are being met.

<p><b>1. Service integration is key to effective work with families. The Aboriginal Case Management Policy must support this practice across the continuum of care</b></p>	<p>There was strong support for a single ‘front door’ or “no wrong door” approach; one point of contact for triage, referrals and assessments designed and overseen by an independent Aboriginal body, one that offers a culturally sensitive response and is able to match families to the right cultural supports and interventions. An example provided, though not Aboriginal specific, was the Central Coast Multi Agency Response Centre where multiple agencies are co-located, enabling integrated service delivery and triaging of cases. Further, VACCA’s Child First and Family Referral Service approach was cited as a differentiated referral service offering promising practice of a single entry point for Aboriginal children and families who need family support and access to a range of integrated and culturally appropriate services to help them care for their children. These approaches would facilitate a coordinated holistic approach tailored to the needs of Aboriginal children and families. It was noted that Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations must be supported to lead this change and be the key drivers of an integrated child and family system.</p>
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	<p>The need for greater collaboration between service providers, government, Aboriginal Community Controlled organisations and families was noted. More consistent practices across the service system, including comprehensive handovers, referral pathways for closed cases and transitioning to Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, was emphasised. A well-coordinated local service system is better able to connect with families to provide a range of opportunities and networks to inform choice and decision making. Relating to this is the importance of providing differential service responses that are boosted and streamlined through one point and better targeted at individual needs regardless of program eligibility requirements. An integrated service system should actively encourage early intervention approaches (universal and targeted support), including through referrals of cases that don't meet the threshold for a statutory response, and as such may receive no response. There was a need to involve Aboriginal organisations in these processes to provide services and prevent risks from escalating before a response is provided.</p> <p>Case management was seen to work well when agencies are locally connected, knowledgeable of the community and take a 'joined up' approach in supporting families and prevent them from having to 're-tell' their stories. A step-down support model should be a strategy across the sector to enable families to receive concentrated support but are then given resources and networks so that they are sustainable after services withdraw. Most importantly, is the need for Aboriginal programs and services to be more integrated and visible within communities.</p> <p>Participants emphasized that services need to ensure that universal and secondary services are more inclusive and that non-Aboriginal services adopt culture across their organisations to ensure that a range of services are available to Aboriginal children, their families and communities.</p>
<p><b>2. Service delivery must be flexible and accessible for Aboriginal families and actively address the barriers to engagement</b></p>	<p>In building on the above, the importance of flexibility and accessibility was highlighted including sharing and replicating successful service delivery and program models in areas where the service system is fragmented. Many barriers were noted by participants including, time limited restrictions, age</p>

	<p>restrictions as children between 8-13 years and 13-18 years do not fit certain eligibility requirements, and LGA restrictions. The value of flexibility and creativeness in the delivery of child and family services was seen as critical.</p> <p>Some participants noted that Aboriginal families still fear intervention from services and that this can be a real barrier to engagement, participants suggested that agencies need to respectfully work around these issues and offer more flexible options such as placed-based support i.e., visiting in the family home or establishing outreach supports to where Aboriginal people are.</p>
<p><b>3. Values need to be meaningful and incorporated into roles and responsibilities</b></p>	<p>The following values were identified as important in working with Aboriginal children and families:</p> <p>Safety - Aboriginal children are safe and cared for by their families wherever possible.</p> <p>Collaborative – Services must establish strong partnerships with one another, including with the local communities and with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations.</p> <p>Self-determination and participation (inclusive) – Systems must empower Aboriginal communities to design responses and make decisions, and empower families by promoting and embracing their strengths, including them in decision making that impact on their lives and promote their rights.</p> <p>Responsive - Services must be culturally responsive, respectfully listen and genuinely engage and act on the views of Aboriginal people.</p> <p>Pro-active – Services must include Aboriginal people in the design of services and meet families and communities changing needs. Services must engage, intervene and support families at the earliest point to prevent escalation.</p> <p>Partnership - Services must work together to maximise outcomes and improve the lives of Aboriginal children and families.</p>
<p><b>4. Aboriginal Case Management Policy must empower Aboriginal children,</b></p>	<p>Aboriginal self-determination and community self-management was strongly advocated, including greater investment in the establishment of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations. Self-determination was seen as</p>

<p><b>families and communities</b></p>	<p>an ‘overarching principle’ to an effective Aboriginal Case Management Policy. The term self-determination was used in different ways, some participants referring to the representation of the whole community or giving back the voices to Aboriginal people in decision making (including Aboriginal governance processes in shaping local service systems), as well as the role of families in making decisions about their own lives (participation). Regardless, self-determination and family participation was seen as fundamental to empower Aboriginal people and was a dominant theme throughout the consultation. Consideration will need to be given to a well-defined meaning for self-determination to be effective within the policy.</p> <p>Strengthening family networks including parents, extended family and kin should be done through taking a child and family centred, culturally-sensitive approach. Family Group Conferencing (FGC) was seen as an effective evidence-based model that allows families to participate in decision-making. As such, a FGC should be included at all stages of intervention (not just statutory) to truly empower families.</p> <p>Many participants raised the issue of FGC being used as a tool to engage families’ once statutory intervention has occurred and that it is not a genuine way to build community partnerships or strengthen family involvement in decision-making. The Victorian Aboriginal Family-led Decision Making Model was cited as a promising model to offer families the opportunity to meet and make decisions about the safety and well-being of their children before statutory intervention occurs. There was a recognition for Aboriginal community led approaches, independent of FACS. Further, it was seen as a better way to achieving a balance between child protection and family preservation.</p>
<p><b>5. The Aboriginal Case Management Policy must focus on culturally competent practice</b></p>	<p>There was strong emphasis placed on the lack of cultural readiness of services and the need for more Aboriginal-specific positions to be employed across the sector, this particularly related to the need for services to demonstrate that they are culturally competent and that their practice is aimed towards knowledge of and skills in working with Aboriginal people. This includes promoting empowerment and inclusion of Aboriginal people in decision-making.</p>

<b>6. Accountability</b>	<p>Participants emphasised the need for greater oversight of the permanency and early intervention principles that will be built into casework practice, related to this is the need for an independent body to monitor the application of the Aboriginal Child Placement Principles, ensuring that cultural support plans and family finding is implemented in practice for every Aboriginal child and young person. There was a consistent focus on the use of outcomes, clearly defining what would be achieved and tracking outcomes to promote achievement. Aboriginal commissioning was also noted, with Aboriginal communities determining the appropriate services and supports and whether these are being effective, through their own community-controlled mechanisms.</p>
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**Western Sydney**

**What you told us: Key Themes**

Rooty Hill, 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2017

Development of an Aboriginal Case Management Policy and Guidelines

This paper highlights the key themes raised by participants during the consultation held at Rooty Hill on 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2017. The feedback gathered from participants will contribute to the foundational work being undertaken by AbSec in developing an Aboriginal Case Management Policy and Guidelines. It is noted that many of these themes are interdependent when considering best practice.

The themes arising in this consultation were consistent with the Core Principles established in the initial 2-day intensive workshop. These themes included the importance of inclusive and participatory approaches that promote meaningful and sustainable relationships, the need for early engagement with families and kin, greater flexibility in program delivery and collaboration between services to meet the individual needs of Aboriginal families was identified, and the importance of a culturally competent workforce, including the need for more culturally appropriate services and involvement of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations.

<p><b>1. Family and Community inclusion central, relationship and building continuity throughout the care continuum</b></p>	<p>An Aboriginal Case Management Policy must support meaningful family and community engagement that promotes inclusive and continuous approaches to working with Aboriginal families and communities across the care continuum. The involvement of families and communities must occur at the earliest point and be based on effective and sustainable relationship building, this is done through establishing relationships before you need them, making genuine connections and going to where Aboriginal people are, such as community events, community hubs and home based services. Programs such as Gathering the Dots, Night Patrol, Kool Kids, Clean Slate, Park Warrior and Breaking Barriers were cited as effective youth and family community-led initiatives.</p> <p>Participants emphasised the need for services to identify and harness these relationships through getting to know the local community and creating awareness of what services and programs are being delivered. Further, emphasis was placed on the importance of practitioners understanding the wider family and community structure, including the roles of Elders, community groups and the strong family networks that exist, including family and kin dynamics. Identifying suitable Aboriginal advocates within the family and community were noted as good practice to help empower families in decision</p>
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	<p>making. The use of Yarning Circles, Aboriginal Family Planning Circles and family meetings were seen as successful ways to engage family in identifying solutions for themselves and participate in decisions affecting their lives. The above characteristics were seen as smooth soft entry points that meet the families' needs, while linking them to more formal supports without the need for statutory intervention. Finally, engaging with families and building trust requires transparency, being upfront with families about the issues and risks, and developing shared goals and solutions, keeping the focus on the impact on the child. This requires sensitivity, understanding and listening, as well as the ability to communicate clearly.</p>
<p><b>2. Importance of culture with cultural competency</b></p>	<p>Participants consistently raised the importance of culture and the connection to culture that must be respected and upheld for all children in care, including the knowledge of culture being as equally important to ensure that practitioners are making culturally informed decisions in their case management approach. Greater investment in ensuring cultural competent practice, Aboriginal-identified positions and training for all practitioners in cultural awareness was emphasised. This included greater investment in Aboriginal approaches, such as Koori Listing Court or the need for more Aboriginal practitioners across the system to work with Aboriginal families.</p>
<p><b>3. Holistic, integrated and coordinated approach</b></p>	<p>The need for greater investment for integrated services and collaborative models of care was identified to address fragmentation within services, including the need to establish partnerships with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and services. A collective case management approach that focuses on co-operation and co-ordination, a system that is seamless in sharing of information (with the client's consent) and includes a continuum of support and resources was seen as successful to meeting the needs of children and families. The role of "key workers" were also noted, supporting families and linking with services and supports to address risk as well as the underlying causes. Interagency meetings were seen to be working well providing a platform for information flow and accuracy.</p> <p>In promoting child safety and wellbeing, participants suggested comprehensive wrap around services providing a 'one-stop-shop' to ensure that Aboriginal families receive culturally appropriate and quality services. Bara Barang and Tharawal</p>

	<p>Aboriginal Corporation were provided as examples of multi-functional Aboriginal organisations providing quality services that are holistic and responsive. These approaches must ensure continuity of service provision even in the absence of key workers, whether that's through illness/leave or career change.</p>
<p><b>4. Early Engagement and Family Finding</b></p>	<p>Identifying Aboriginal children and families early was seen as a critical practice requirement to protect a child's culture and identity, this must be done with respect and sensitivity. Whilst confidentiality of families must be respected it was noted that more must be done to protect the rights of children, helping them understand their culture to ensure that they remain strong in culture and connected to their families.</p> <p>A greater push in early family engagement and efforts in making connections with family was seen as a core responsibility of case management. Participants emphasised the need for services to commence family group conferencing and family finding as early as possible and throughout a child's time in care. Employing culturally competent staff to conduct extensive and comprehensive relative and kin searches, including both maternal and paternal sides, was seen as essential. Further, engaging Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations in family finding activities was considered necessary to demonstrate that every effort has been made.</p>
<p><b>5. Flexibility</b></p>	<p>Participants raised the need for greater flexibility and continuity across the care continuum, this included the need for greater flexibility within funding and program streams, flexibility in the system to work with families before referral (ie flexible prevention support packages), flexibility in care pathways and allowing a whole of community approach to service delivery.</p> <p>Flexible person-driven case management approaches was a consistent theme where services are responsive to the individual needs of families and includes parents/families as 'equal partners' in considering their roles and responsibilities for their child's safety and wellbeing. Further, collaborative family decision making through engaging culturally competent facilitators was seen as offering greater choice and flexibility in meeting the needs of families, empowering them to be involved in decisions that affect their lives.</p> <p>Case management needs to be flexible adapting to the changing circumstances and needs of families but also requires the</p>

	<p>capability of practitioners to have open, honest and hard conversations with families to ensure expectations are clear. Flexible-goal setting is not just about seeking out a range of therapeutic or evidence based interventions, it also requires services to find a range of culturally appropriate interventions as determined by the family's needs.</p>
<p><b>6. Accountability</b></p>	<p>The Aboriginal Child Placement Principles, including cultural care and support plans, must be included within a monitoring framework to ensure they are properly applied. Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and community groups must be involved in placement decision making as accountability is seen as a shared responsibility.</p>

## Online Survey

### What you told us: Key Themes

#### Survey Responses

##### Development of an Aboriginal Case Management Policy and Guidelines

This paper highlights the key themes raised through completion of AbSec's Aboriginal Case Management Policy survey. This survey was intended to provide an additional avenue for participation, in addition to the series of direct consultations conducted in various areas. The feedback gathered from respondents will be added to those that emerged from the face-to-face consultations to contribute to the foundational work being undertaken by AbSec in developing an Aboriginal Case Management Policy and Guidelines. It is noted that many of these themes are interdependent when considering best practice.

Forty nine responses were received during the period that the survey was open from a range of respondents, including carers (30%), practitioners with ACCOs (16%), NGOs (16%) and FACS (16%), as well as community members (12%). The vast majority of respondents agreed that the survey provided a useful opportunity for their participation in the development of the Aboriginal Case Management Policy and have their views heard.

It should be noted that not all respondents completed all items, however all responses were included in thematic analysis.

<p><b>1. How important are these core principles to an effective Aboriginal Case Management Policy</b></p>	<p>The Core Principles identified in the initial 2-day intensive workshop were presented in the survey for validation. Each of the Core Principles were strongly endorsed, with between 75% and 91% of all respondents agreeing that each Core Principle was either "very important" or "absolutely essential". Consistent with other themes emerging throughout the survey, the involvement of extended family and significant others in decision making, and the involvement of community in decision making was particularly strongly endorsed, with 63% and 59% of all participants indicating it was "Absolutely essential".</p>
<p><b>2. Commencement and referral pathways</b></p>	<p>The majority of respondents (55%) endorsed case management for Aboriginal children and families commencing early, at the point of first contact (pre-ROSH). This was followed by "at point of referral" (18%). Participants were also presented with three possible referral pathways (FACS referral, Family Self-referral, Other Aboriginal community referral pathways) and asked to select all that were important to an effective Aboriginal Case Management Policy. All were strongly endorsed (all &gt;81%), emphasising the need for a</p>

	<p>broad range of referral options across the continuum of care to enable access to services and supports.</p>
<p><b>3. What's being done well?</b></p>	<p>Across the continuum of care, there was a general sense of pessimism about the effectiveness of the current service system for Aboriginal children and families. While some respondents noting silver linings in changes such as greater involvement of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (particularly the commitment to placing Aboriginal children with accredited Aboriginal community-controlled agencies or Aboriginal intensive family services where they exist), community engagement, cultural understanding and cultural care planning, the dominant theme emerging was that much more needs to be done to create an effective Aboriginal child and family service system. Some of the themes important to this system also emerged (discussed below), and included the importance of implementation and a long term commitment to an Aboriginal community approach. A number of participants emphasized the need to follow through on the implementation (generally consistent with the themes of the Core Principles, such as the ACPP).</p>
<p><b>4. Key theme: Family and community involvement</b></p>	<p>Across all identified segments (Pre-ROSH, ROSH, Crisis intervention) survey respondents emphasized the importance of family and community involvement, and the need for “shared power” in decision making. That is, the case management policy must reinforce the need for participatory/inclusive practice with family (including extended family) and Aboriginal community, commencing at the earliest point and continuing throughout. Aboriginal children’s families, kin and community must be genuine partners driving decision making about Aboriginal children and young people. This includes regular review, where all stakeholders are able to come together around the child/young person. There was an identified need for greater community engagement, both in local service system design as well as decision making processes, and guidance for practitioners on community engagement and how to make decisions together. This might include Aboriginal Family-led Decision making approaches. Related to this, many participants noted the importance of better Family Finding, building a network of support.</p>
<p><b>5. Tailored, holistic response</b></p>	<p>Survey respondents repeatedly emphasized the need to place Aboriginal children at the centre of our work, and to see and consider the “whole” child in our work with families. This requires a tailored/individualized approach rather than</p>

	<p>prescriptive or programmatic guidelines. Respondents emphasized that an effective service system will wrap around Aboriginal families (including extended families and other significant people in the child’s life), providing key services to support the child to thrive. Survey respondents wanted strong partnerships across all services around children and families, including better information sharing and relationships between services. Most importantly, services must form genuine partnerships with those around children, who are the experts in their lives and must be at the heart of effective case plans. Survey respondents wanted a coordinated approach that was open, participatory and transparent, with service integration/clear pathways across the service system.</p>
<p><b>6. The Aboriginal Case Management Policy must be culturally embedded</b></p>	<p>The importance of culture was a common theme across responses, emphasizing the need for culture to be embedded into the service system/case management processes for Aboriginal children and young people. It was clear that this was not about having different “thresholds”, and the primacy of the concept of safety and working in the “best interests” of children was noted, however it was important that our approach and application understands Aboriginal people in order to drive better engagement and more valid assessment and understanding. Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations were an essential part of embedded culture within service system design and delivery, with some respondents noting that ACCOs must be valued for the important role they play in community. Cultural understanding/cultural competence must be tailored to local communities, recognizing the diversity of the Aboriginal community, and should be broader than the service system but also seek to improve public understanding of culture.</p>
<p><b>7. The Aboriginal Case Management Policy should be oriented towards intervening early and minimizing harm, providing support to families and communities</b></p>	<p>It was clear across responses that survey respondents wanted a service system that was able to work at the community or early intervention end of the continuum to prevent harm wherever possible. However, survey respondents indicated that they felt that these services were often the most under-resourced, particularly in the Aboriginal service system.</p>
<p><b>8. Accountability to the Aboriginal community is a critical element of ensuring the Aboriginal Case Management Policy is</b></p>	<p>Consistent with the issues regarding implementation noted above, survey respondents consistently noted the importance of accountability mechanisms with respect to policy and practice. Importantly, the emphasis was on accountability of systems and services to the Aboriginal community, including Aboriginal community controlled mechanisms for oversight</p>

<p><b>implemented appropriately</b></p>	<p>and accountability. This included elements such as Aboriginal audit of cultural care plans and case plans, oversight of the full implementation of the ACPP and other elements of practice and policy. Consistent with other comments, survey respondents reiterated the need for community control at the local level, as well as a broader independent oversight body.</p>
<p><b>9. Building capacity and capability</b></p>	<p>While not specifically related to the Aboriginal Case Management Policy, survey respondents noted the need for greater capacity and capability building for services and supports to Aboriginal children and families. This included strengthening Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, better resourcing for services across the continuum of care, and improved training for all stakeholders, including practitioners and caregivers. This should also include greater cultural awareness/competency. However, survey respondents remained wary of tools and guidance becoming too prescriptive where responses tailored to the needs of individual children and family are needed. The focus was on skills, with templates reserved for key areas of coordination (recording issues/goals, sharing information across services etc). Additionally, technology was identified for its potential at reducing administrative burden of various tasks to allow practitioners to spend more time in the field (for example, voice to text software).</p>