

AbSec

NSW Child, Family & Community
Peak Aboriginal Corporation

Breaking down barriers and restoring culture

Shining a light on Deadly Practice at
Waminda: South Coast Women's Health
and Wellbeing Aboriginal Corporation

September 2025

Acknowledgement of Country

AbSec acknowledge the Gadigal and Wangal People of the Eora Nation, the land on which our office stands, and pay respect to Elders past, present and emerging. We acknowledge the Elders, leaders and advocates within our sector and pay our respects to them as knowledge holders within this space and every space.

AbSec acknowledges the Stolen Generations who never came home and the ongoing impact of government policy and practice on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families.

Waminda acknowledge the custodians of Wandj Wandandian, Jerrinja, Cullunghutti, Wodi Wodi from the 13 clans, where the mountains and rivers meet the sea. They honour and pay respects to our Elders & Ancestors who have walked this country since the creation of time.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are warned that the following study report may contain images of deceased persons.



AbSec

NSW Child, Family & Community
Peak Aboriginal Corporation

AbSec is the peak organisation advocating for the rights, safety, and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, families, and communities in New South Wales.

As an Aboriginal-led organisation, we champion self-determination and work towards a child and family system that is culturally safe, community-driven, and responsive to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

AbSec leads policy reform, strengthens the capacity of Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), and ensures that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people remain connected to family, community, and culture. We are a key member of the NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations (NSW CAPO) and the primary organisation responsible for Target 12 under Closing the Gap.

Through advocacy, research, and sector leadership, AbSec works to address the disproportionate representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care and promote holistic, community-led approaches to child and family wellbeing. Our commitment is to ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people grow up strong in culture, identity, and connection.

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

In working towards this vision, we are guided by these principles:

- Acknowledging and respecting the diversity and knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- Acting with professionalism and integrity in striving for quality, culturally responsive services and supports for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities.
- Underpinning the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to develop our own processes and systems for our communities, particularly in meeting the needs of our children, young people, families and carers.
- Being holistic, integrated and solutions-focused through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander control in delivering outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, families and communities.
- Committing to a future that empowers Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities, representing our communities, and the agencies there to serve them, with transparency and drive.

Deadly Practice case study

Executive summary



AbSec is shining a light on the Deadly Practice at the Waminda: South Coast Women's Health and Wellbeing Aboriginal Corporation which is an Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisation (ACCO). This Deadly Practice showcases their groundbreaking work for the Shoalhaven and Illawarra regions in breaking down systemic and oppressive barriers to access services and restoring culture within their practice and organisation.

This Deadly Practice focuses on:

- Embedding cultural frameworks for guidance.
- Waminda's staff wellbeing framework.
- Targeted Early Intervention (TEI) programs.

Additional content

Data privacy and protection

We are committed to protecting the privacy and confidentiality of individuals involved in our studies and consultations. Any personal data included in this report has been used with consent and in accordance with applicable privacy laws.

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Glossary of acronyms

AbSec	Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat
ACCO	Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisation
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
ADVO	Apprehended Domestic Violence Order
AVO	Apprehended Violence Order
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
DEX	Data Exchange
DCJ	NSW Department of Communities and Justice
EVP	Escaping Violence Payment
EVUP	Aboriginal Legal Services' Nowra Family Violence Prevention Unit
GP	General Practitioner
SHLV	Staying Home Leaving Violence
TEI	Targeted Early Intervention
UDVIS	Ulladulla Domestic Violence Intervention Service
WDVCAS	Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Services

Introduction

South Coast Women's Health and Wellbeing Aboriginal Corporation (known as Waminda) began operations as the Jilimi Aboriginal Women's Health Centre in 1984, and Waminda was established in 1990. Since its inception, Waminda has grown to include more than 200 staff members.

Waminda operates from multiple locations from Dapto to Broulee and includes the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities of Wreck Bay (ACT), Jerrinja (Orient Point) and South Nowra. These services were established in response to the lack of culturally safe healthcare provision for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their families in the region.

Waminda's vision is for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their families to be leading and living self-determined futures. Waminda is a culturally safe and holistic service that provides women and their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families an opportunity to belong and access quality health and wellbeing support. Their key focus is to provide tailored strength-based care. Waminda also provide services for Elders, youth and men; acknowledging that wraparound supports for all the family from all ages are needed.

Current services and programs include:

Kapburril: Health, wellbeing and primary healthcare.

- **Gadhu Balaang Biyani:** Primary healthcare.
- **Dead or Deadly:** Holistic healthcare for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.
- **Youth Justice:** Intensive support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 10–18 years who are subject to Apprehended Domestic Violence Order (ADVO) conditions.
- **Bulwul Balaang:** For young Koori women to help connect to culture, build support networks and engage in healthy lifestyle changes, as well as physical, social and emotional wellbeing support.
- **Guman Nanga-Mai:** Young boys' group focusing on providing connection to Country, cultural identity and exploring ways of navigating two worlds.
- **Mirriral Bulwul:** Suicide prevention program supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people between 15–25 years in their social and emotional wellbeing journey.

Karwer: Birthing on Country and maternity services.

Minja Gudjaga Midwifery Group Practice: Providing antenatal, intrapartum and postnatal midwifery services, child and family healthcare, and women's sexual and reproductive health.

Yanaga Dhuga: Family and community client services.

- **Yili Njindiwan:** Case management services.
- **Staying Home Leaving Violence (SHLV).**
- **Ulladulla Domestic Violence Intervention Service (UDVIS).**
- **Various support services** such as healing counsellors, intake, social and emotional wellbeing, family and domestic violence, child, and parenting.
- **Yanaga Gunyah:** Transitional housing, Elders care support.
- **Justice Our Way.**
- **Aboriginal Legal Services' Family Violence Prevention Unit (FVPU).**
- **Balaang Gunyah:** Cultural connection and healing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.
- **Nabu:** Family preservation and restoration.
- **Birrang Babaa Marra:** Men's behaviour change program.
- **Drug and alcohol casework and brokerage.**
- **Strong Yawa:** After hours support service.

Midgen Berry: Education, employment, social and cultural enterprise

- **Blak Cede Café:** Located in the middle of Nowra, Waminda's award-winning Blak Cede Cafe employs Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff. They sell artefacts and collectable items as well as native food supplies. They use fresh produce from their Kareela Ngura community garden with an ever-changing, innovative menu. After opening a little over 12 months ago, Blak Cede excels in the hospitality arena, receiving awards and many 5-star reviews.
- **Kareela Ngura:** Traditional native gardens, providing fresh produce to Blak Cede café, supporting sustainability.
- **Maintenance team:** Supporting the community, Staying Home Leaving Violence (SHLV) safety upgrades, fleet management support, Sorry Business assistance and helping to maintain all Waminda sites.

Collaborative working

Waminda's staff work in partnership with external services schools, police, housing and the NSW Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) particularly. They also attend interagency meetings with local services across communities. Community connections is a core part of their work to support Waminda's clients. It is vital to support community as much as possible to secure positive outcomes for families, so they can overcome systemic barriers and challenges faced within the home and to access equitable health and social welfare support services.

Outcomes and impacts

Waminda's outcomes and impacts go well beyond the numerical DEX portal data reports that are a condition of funding. Waminda prioritises women's health, wellbeing, cultural safety and security for women and children through their Model of Care framework. They work with women respectfully to uphold their autonomy and self-determination throughout their interactions and case management. These approaches aim to strengthen and build women and families capabilities to navigate and confront systemic oppression and racism.

The Waminda Way: Embedding culture in governance and service delivery

The Waminda Way is grounded in culture and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, being, doing. This is embedded through their Cultural Framework Wiyana Yanaga. It acknowledges and honours those who have paved the way and those still walking that path. It is a continuation of ceremony, old and new ways of sharing and teaching culture, and being proud.

The Waminda Way is clear and strong: privileging Koori women's voices and matriarchal lines.

- They are led by Community and Community comes first.
- They are Community and therefore accountable to their communities.
- Their connection to Country, to culture and to their Elders, supports healing.
- They welcome and honour lived experiences, truth telling and the importance of our stories.

The Waminda Way also embodies principles vital to strengthening communities and cultural connection, including:

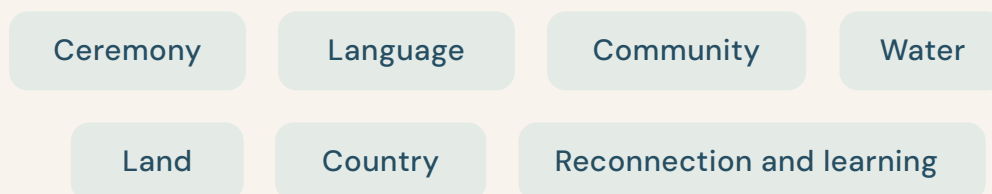
- Self-determination.
- Cultural identity.
- Cultural diversity.
- Respect for Country and our Elders and each other.
- Language and how we speak.
- Knowledge sharing and protocols.
- Respect for the ever evolving change.

Model of Care

Waminda has developed a Model of Care that represents their approach to service delivery and working with and in Community. The model places Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their families at the centre of everything Waminda does.

Waminda's programs wrap around women and families, offering integrated and coordinated pathways of care unique to the needs and circumstances of individual women and their families; they focus on the person as a whole, encompassing their social and emotional wellbeing.

Waminda's model is decolonising and informs their practice of working with Community. This reflects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of being, knowing and doing.



Shared leadership and decision-making

This also includes challenging perspectives and definitions of dominance in hierarchical and governance practices that cause structural power imbalances. For example, Waminda integrates a collaborative governance approach led by four Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who share responsibilities that a single Chief Executive Officer (CEO) would normally perform.

This brings Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, being and doing to life, reviving maternal structures of power and shared decision-making processes that existed long before the impacts of paternalistic colonisation.

Waminda's unique shared leadership model privileges the voices of all staff, regardless of their position or cultural background. It champions the values of respect, equity and integrity for all within the organisation.

Preserving culture, language and lived experience

In embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, being and doing, language is included along with other cultural practices.

For example, the Wiyana Yanaga and Balaang Healing frameworks (Balaang means 'woman' in English) support women on their journeys with guiding principles of family, kinship, Community, language and culture, as well as connection to Country and spirituality.

These frameworks decolonise practice to minimise harm on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities. Such approaches underpin how Waminda works with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families throughout their service journey.

Integrating cultural knowledge on language and respectfully upholding the perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders inform Waminda's cultural frameworks and practices. They have always been the teachers and knowledge holders of lore, kinship and cultural traditions and practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, being and doing—as well as ensuring survival from colonisation impacts.

Staff wellness and wellbeing

Waminda has developed a Staff Wellbeing Framework informed by the Waminda Way, which guides how all employees work together. Staff wellbeing is important, and they are given time and space to look after themselves and each other. They share a collective commitment to growing, learning and improving themselves, and to collaboration and teamwork.

Waminda staff are trusted and respected in their roles, which promotes confidence. This includes when they are in Community. They are empowered to stand up for themselves and others and to challenge the status quo. They have the courage and support to speak up when things don't feel right.

Waminda takes a family oriented and team-centric approach for staff who can lean on one other for support. They strive for a non-hierarchical, non-patriarchal, management and decision-making approach, underpinned by dedication and commitment. They honour and encourage those with lived experience, and they listen to their leaders.

Waminda recognises how to work with Community, dealing with colonial oppressive systems, meeting cultural obligations and balancing practice. Often, staff will be called on to address trauma and other physical, mental or emotional health needs in Community that can impact their own wellness and wellbeing. Waminda applies strength-based approaches to support their workforce of more than 200 people, the majority of whom are long-term workers.

Yunga Yiliga – Staff Wellbeing Framework

Waminda's Staff Wellbeing Framework, Yunga Yiliga, includes culturally relevant healing strategies and resources to support staff wellbeing. This includes regular external clinical supervision, operational supervision, access to allied health, gym sessions and clinical health supports, as well as all-staff workshops and team wellbeing days.

In addition, every staff member, regardless of their position, is given one hour a week of wellbeing time to take during work hours. These wellbeing sessions may include going for a walk, a swim, going to a doctor, utilising the allied health options, going out on Country or practising culture, such as weaving and art.

Four times every year, there is an all-staff gathering with an organisational shutdown to allow space to connect, practice cultural grounding, share information, and take skill-building and leadership training together. The organisation also hosts its own 'Waminda Olympics' that lifts staff spirits and strengthens connections.

Waminda staff operate within its Model of Care, which guides how they work with families to support their culture. Using strength-based approaches without a deficit lens, this model assists and supports families to achieve what is best for them as a family.

Waminda Targeted Early Intervention (TEI) programs

Ulladulla Domestic Violence Intervention Service

Ulladulla Domestic Violence Intervention Service (UDVIS) is an outreach service sitting within the Yili Njindiwan (case management services) team. It was implemented more than a decade ago to assist women and children during or before a domestic violence crisis occurrence.

Using a strength-based approach, UDVIS provides case management for women and children who are in vulnerable situations and need access to culturally safe, wraparound supports that keep the family together safely. This also helps reduce the risk of DCJ involvement.

This service currently has two employed staff located in Ulladulla, who walk alongside women and their children on their journeys. Women are empowered to lead their own decision making and set goals for themselves and their families. The Yili Njindiwan team supported 2,191 clients in 2023–24 financial year.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal women can access this service, which includes:

- Support for children and young people.
- Court support and Apprehended Violence Order (AVO) information.
- Liaising with police and legal representatives.
- Case management and safety planning.
- Advocacy and referrals to external support services.
- Healthy relationship support.
- Assistance with housing (including applications, transfers and/or access to temporary emergency accommodation).
- Support with access to financial assistance and Escaping Violence Payments (EVPs).

Referral processes

Waminda receives internal, external and self-referrals. Eligibility and referral processes differ depending on the needs of individuals and families. Primary referral sources include:

- Self-referrals.
- Department of Education.
- Police and DCJ.
- Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Services (WDVCAS).
- Public health services.
- Other services providers.

Safe and accessible healthcare

Waminda has set up a healthcare clinic at the Ulladulla centre. A general practitioner (GP) makes fortnightly visits so that women and children can safely access GP services without visiting the medical centre. At other times, staff are available to transport women and children to attend their appointments at the centre.

Women from the community and workers from other organisations can also access the service—just by walking in for a yarn and a cuppa anytime throughout the day—to access information, advice and support, without scheduling a visit. Open-door access means people can gather, socialise and connect, and are made to feel welcome to do so. It is core to providing a safe and supportive space.

Multiple other wellbeing programs are also offered in the Ulladulla area to support women's emotional and cultural wellness.

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Nabu Family Preservation

The Nabu Family Preservation Targeted Early Intervention (TEI) program was developed to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families who have been involved with the child protection system. Nabu aims to provide intensive family and case management support to keep families together.

In the 2023–24 financial year, Nabu supported 54 families across Nowra, Shellharbour, Wollongong and Ulladulla areas. Referrals to Nabu come from DCJ and internal referrals are from Waminda's programs.

The Nabu team includes:

- Elders.
- Cultural mentors.
- Family support workers.
- Caseworkers.
- Counsellors.
- Support staff for men.

Nabu is another one of Waminda's significant cultural programs. 'Nabu' means 'grandmother', which underpins the cultural aspects of the birthing cycle—with the grandmother being the beholder and the mother of all beings, that circle of family and that circle of life and creation. 'Nabu' is not just a word used to name a program, but it brings meaning. It represents a grandmother to reflect the wraparound support with culture, safety and nurturing elements to care for families.

Grandmothers are a significant part of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, kinship ties and lore, as they hold wisdom of culture and knowledge, as well as providing caring and nurturing elements to look after a family.

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Collaborative working

Waminda staff work in partnership with diverse services, including schools, police, housing and with DCJ in particular. They also attend interagency meetings with local services across communities.

Community connection is a core part of their work to support Waminda's clients. It is vital to support Community as much as possible to secure positive outcomes for families, so they can overcome systemic barriers and challenges faced within the home and to access equitable health and social and welfare support services.

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Paving the future

Waminda works towards impactful community-driven programs and services that will continue to uplift and support those in need. Upcoming expansions to Waminda's service delivery include:

- A new women's refuge (by end of 2025).
- A new drug and alcohol rehabilitation facility (2026).
- A Birthing on Country centre (2027).

Everything is designed to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children in the community, providing pathways to a new and brighter future, whilst continuing and enhancing a culturally targeted approach.

New services

Mudginaal Balaang (Spirit Protector)

Waminda will open a women's refuge for women and children escaping domestic and family violence. This is set to be one of the first refuges in NSW for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children.

The refuge service provision will extend to support the family's overall wellbeing and get them through their hardship. This includes allowing space and time for the women to regain their strength and to get back onto their feet again, allowing for a more positive future.

Wiyanga Mirriral Nanga–Mai Gunyah

Due to open in 2026, Waminda's new residential rehabilitation facility is for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women and their children with client-centred approach to care.

Residents will complete a six-month program, which will support people who are dealing with alcohol and/or substance misuse and empower them to take back control and make a positive future for themselves and their family.

Minga Gudjaga (Mother and Baby)

Waminda provide holistic, wraparound maternal and child and family healthcare for women and their families, embedding cultural integrity and safety in the care provided to women during pregnancy, labour, birth and the postnatal period.

Minga Gudjaga currently offers maternal, child and family health services, as well as sexual and reproductive health services within Waminda. Recently, the program extended to offer enhanced continuity of care via Minga Gudjaga Midwifery Practice.

The new Gudjaga Gunyahlamia Birthing Centre and Community Hub will open by 2027 and offer high-level support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their families during pregnancy, labour, birth and children's early years. The centre and its services have been designed with extensive consultation, including yarns with Elders and community leaders.

As a primary healthcare service, Waminda continue to provide health and wellbeing support throughout the continuation of Minga's and Gudjaga's lifecycle.



Conclusion

Waminda is a shining example of an ACCO with a deep understanding of the needs of their community and delivers a range of services and programs designed with purpose and cultural fluency to make a meaningful difference in the communities they serve.

Waminda's Deadly Practice also exhibits their dedication to the preservation of culture, centring governance and decision-making in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of being, knowing and doing. This commitment has been—and continues to be—held true as Waminda has grown over four decades to offer more programs, services and facilities for not only Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their families, but also for men, young people and Elders in their Community.

AbSec thanks Waminda's team for their insights into their work and allowing us to showcase how they contribute to our mutually shared vision for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people to be cared for in safe, thriving Aboriginal families and communities, where they are raised strong in spirit and identity.