



AbSec

NSW Child, Family & Community
Peak Aboriginal Corporation




The voice of Aboriginal
and Torres Strait Islander
children, young people and
families in New South Wales.

absec.org.au

**20
25**

**Annual
Report**



Acknowledgement of Country

AbSec acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout New South Wales and their continuing connections to land, waters, and communities. Our head office is located on the land of the Gadigal People of the Eora Nation, in Redfern, and AbSec operates statewide.

We acknowledge and pay our respects to the Traditional Owners of all lands and waters across New South Wales, honouring Elders past, present, and future.

We recognise and respect their enduring connection to Country, their ongoing care for community, and the preservation and practice of their culture for generations uncouthed.

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 also acknowledge 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.

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

Disclaimers



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Information provided in this report is intended to be accurate and up-to-date as of the date of publication. However, changes may occur over time, and AbSec makes no warranties regarding completeness or accuracy after publication.

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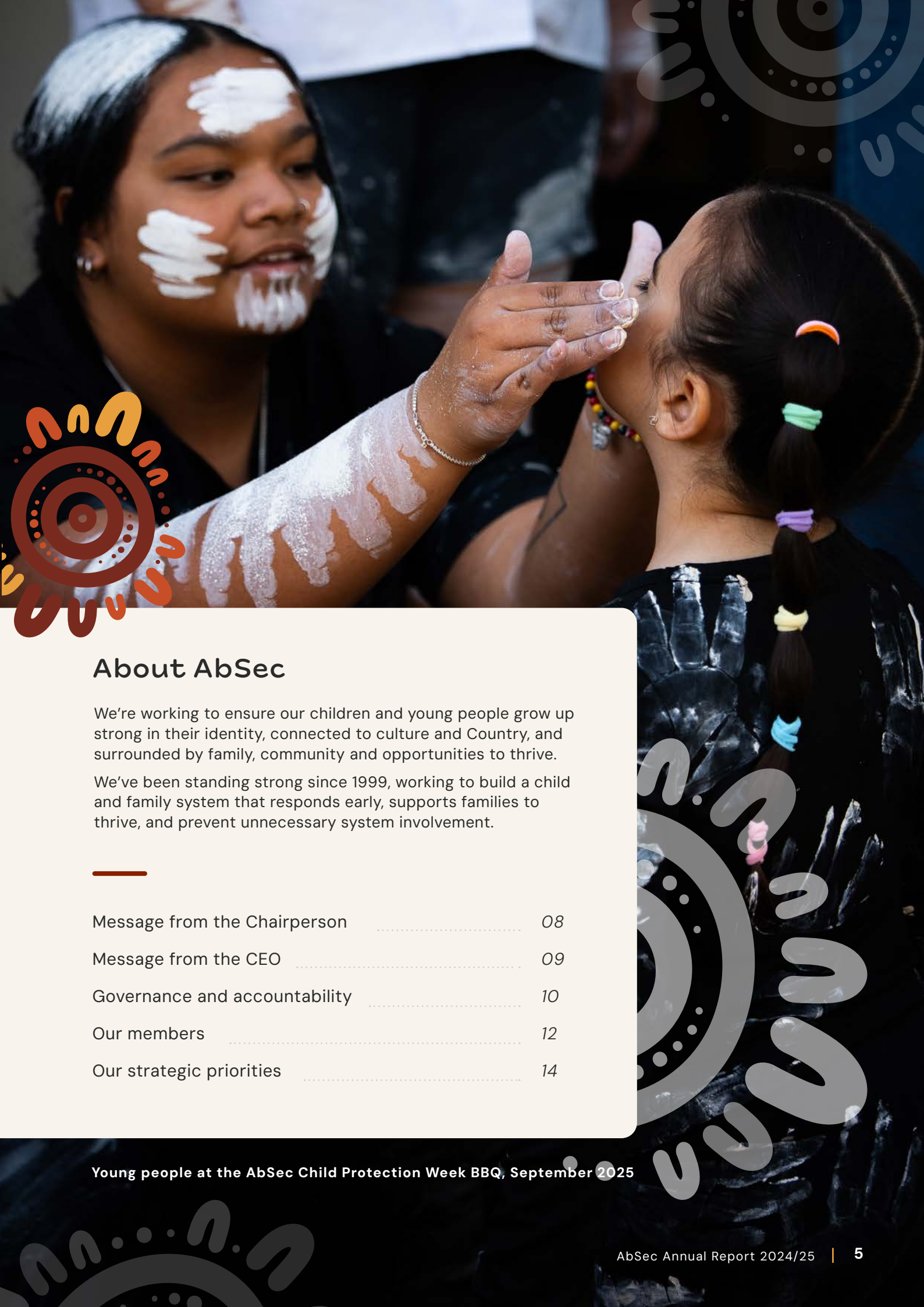
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About AbSec

We're working to ensure our children and young people grow up strong in their identity, connected to culture and Country, and surrounded by family, community and opportunities to thrive.

We've been standing strong since 1999, working to build a child and family system that responds early, supports families to thrive, and prevent unnecessary system involvement.

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Young people at the AbSec Child Protection Week BBQ, September 2025



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 (NSW). 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.

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.

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 (CtG).

Through advocacy, research, and sector leadership, AbSec works to address the disproportionate representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in out-of-home care (OOHC) and promote holistic, community-led approaches to child and family wellbeing. Our commitment is to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people grow up strong in culture, identity, and connection, contributing to the sector-wide goal of reducing the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in OOHC by 45 percent by 2031.



A new look for AbSec

The artwork seen throughout this report, created by Gamilaroi and Wiradjuri artist Sean Kinchela, tells a story of who we are, where we come from, and the purpose that guides us.

It is a visual foundation shared by AbSec and AbSec Learning and Development Centre, binding our brands together through culture, community, and connection.

The new branding, featured for the first time in this report was a major project in 2024–2025, working with Nani Creative agency. Woven through this story are AbSec's guiding pillars: Empower, Unite, and Strengthen. They form the heart of our vision: to create meaningful and lasting change for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, families, and communities across NSW.



About the artwork

The journey begins at the outer borders, which represent Country. They remind us that we are held and strengthened by the lands and waters that sustain us, and by the communities that walk alongside us. Within these borders are hands, each one a symbol of individual identity, reminding us that every person has a place in the story.

At the centre of the artwork flows the river, a lifeline that carries knowledge, connection, and renewal. Resting within the river are two meeting places, reflecting empowerment. They speak to the way AbSec and the Learning and Development Centre create spaces where voices are heard, confidence is nurtured, and communities come together to lead change.

Surrounding these are the larger camps, representing children, young people, families, communities, and AbSec staff gathering in strength and support of one another. Beneath the river, patterned designs tell of kinship ties and the relationships that sustain us in the places we live, grow, and belong.

This year has been one of hard truths and hopeful progress. Our communities, families and ACCOs that work alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families in NSW continue to tell us about the lack of cultural safety and the significant challenges they face in a system that was never designed for them. At the same time, we have seen major shifts that show what is possible when Aboriginal leadership drives reform.

The Partnership Agreement between AbSec, the Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT) Limited (ALS) and the NSW Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) is progress. It is the first time in NSW that Aboriginal leadership has equal standing in at least some parts of child protection reform and governance. The Partnership Agreement will focus on radical redesign of the child protection assessment framework and on mapping and guiding opportunities to implement long overdue recommendations from the landmark *Family is Culture Review Report* (2019).

We have also seen some progress towards an Aboriginal Authority for Restoring Children (AARC) which, if implemented, will play a vital and long overdue role in restoring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people to family, culture and Country from OOHC. NSW records the lowest performance nationally at restoring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people to their families. This is the work that communities have been calling for, and it is work that must happen with urgency to make progress on the CtG target of reducing the rate of over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in OOHC by 45 percent by 2031.

At the sector level, we saw the Special Inquiry into Alternative Care Arrangements expose the harm of children and young people being placed in hotels, motels and caravans. The Government's achievement of an end to the use of these types of placements with unaccredited workers in 2025 is positive and a direct result of community advocacy. However, it must be matched by investment in culturally safe alternatives which has not yet happened.

But progress cannot hide the truth. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people remain significantly over-represented in OOHC, accounting for more than 9 in 20 children and young people in OOHC despite being fewer than 1 in 12 children and young people in NSW. Too many families still face unnecessary trauma and separation, and too often the protective and healing role of culture and connection to community in keeping children and young people safe is not understood and not respected. It is also deeply troubling how little progress has been made in transitioning our children and young people from DCJ and NGO case oversight. Slightly more than 1 in 5 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people have ACCOs conducting casework. This is a far cry from the Minister's stated ambition for all our children and young people to have ACCOs provide case management by 30 June 2026.

Our responsibility at AbSec is to hold governments accountable and to make sure they deliver on their commitments. We know what works. Our communities have always had the answers and have always known what is best for our children and young people.



Petrice Manton

Chief Executive Officer,
Muloobinba Aboriginal Corporation

A proud Aboriginal woman from the Gamipingal clan of the Worimi Nation, Petrice is passionate about advocating for Aboriginal families and making sure our people get a fair go. She is committed to establishing culturally embedded, holistic Aboriginal services to support children and families to flourish.

The past year has been a time of significant reform and persistent challenges for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families in NSW. One of the most important developments was the signing of the Partnership Agreement between AbSec, the ALS and DCJ. This agreement formalises shared governance in driving implementation of Family is Culture Review recommendations and reforms to a child protection assessment framework. The redesign of the child protection assessment framework is long overdue, given tools like Structured Decision Making, components of which are no longer used, inflated risk levels for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, as these derive from wider community dominated data sets and contexts. The Partnership Agreement sets a precedent for how shared decision-making must be embedded in all parts of system reform and accountability going forward.

At the community level, programs such as Strong Families, Our Way (SFOW) and Aboriginal-led Commissioning continue to demonstrate how cultural authority delivers better outcomes. These initiatives support local governance structures, yarn ups and community mechanisms that give Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families a direct role in decision-making.

At the system level, AbSec has engaged in major reform processes. The retirement of the Structured Decision-Making risk tools and the end of unaccredited emergency accommodation are important steps, but must be followed by strong investment in culturally safe, Aboriginal-led alternatives. We are making steps towards potential development and implementation of an Aboriginal-led program to restore the thousands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in OOHHC to their families and communities.

We welcome the NSW Government's announcement of a \$180 million per annum investment in Family Preservation, including a dedicated Aboriginal Family Preservation approach co-designed with our communities. The model includes five-year block funding contracts, equitable pricing, and a commitment to direct 40 percent of service delivery funding to ACCOs—a significant shift that reflects a more inclusive, culturally grounded response to keeping children and young people safe and connected.

Our role is to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance is built into reforms and that outcomes are measured by what matters: more children and young people remaining safe and with family; and significantly earlier support for families that will benefit from extra assistance.

None of these shifts happen overnight. National data confirms that our children and young people are still grossly over-represented in OOHHC and that prevention and early support are woefully underfunded and uncoordinated. This reality is what drives our advocacy.

In the midst of this reform and renewal, AbSec also began a new chapter by relocating our head office to Redfern. This landmark suburb holds deep cultural and historical significance for our people across the state. Redfern has long stood as a centre of Aboriginal activism, resilience, and community control. Returning to this space continues the legacy of those who fought to build the systems of representation and advocacy we carry forward today.



John Leha

Chief Executive Officer, AbSec

A proud Birri Gubba, Wakka Wakka and Tongan man, John was born and raised on Gadigal Land. John has served as AbSec's CEO since March 2021 and is a board member of SNAICC. An active member of the Sydney Aboriginal community, John has extensive experience in Indigenous health, education, and employment programs.

AbSec's Board, chaired by Petrice Manton, advances strong governance across AbSec through its accountability frameworks and proactive risk management. Our governance approach is grounded in cultural authority, ensuring that decisions reflect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and community expectations. This year saw regular Board engagement with members and direct oversight of key reforms, reinforcing AbSec's role as a transparent and accountable peak body.



Appointed 2021

John Leha,
Chief Executive Officer



Appointed 2024
Chief Executive Officer,
Muloobinba Aboriginal Corp

Petrice Manton, Chair



Appointed 2023
Chief Executive Officer,
Wandiyali

Jai Kilroy, Vice Chair

Jai is a proud Aboriginal man born, raised and living on Awabakal Country. Jai is a founding member of Wandiyali with a career spanning hospitality, establishing successful businesses and more.

Jai is passionate about supporting his community to achieve self-determination through empowerment and the creation of sustainable, community-driven solutions for social, economic, and political challenges.



Appointed 2024
Retired Chief Executive Officer,
Burrumbidgee Aboriginal Corp

Dana Clarke, Director

Dana is a proud Biripi and Worimi woman. Dana has been an active member on the Board since 2005, contributing to our communities through a range of roles in Aboriginal health, child protection, sexual assault and mental health for over 35 years. Dana is committed to ensuring our communities are best supported to guarantee that our kids remain with family, rich in their culture and belonging.



Appointed 2023
Executive Director,
Life Without Barriers

Wendy Knight, Director

Wendy is a proud Barkindji woman from Gamilaroi Country with an unwavering commitment to Aboriginal families and communities – ensuring the promotion of First Nations voices on issues affecting our children and families in today's society.

Wendy is an accomplished senior executive with over 25 years' experience in the social service sector.



Appointed 2023
Chief Executive Officer,
Burrup Dalai Aboriginal Corp

Mykol Paulson, Director

Mykol is a proud Worimi and Bunjalung man, born and raised on Biripi Country. As CEO of Durrun Dalai Aboriginal corporation, he leads a dedicated team committed to ensuring the well-being of children and young people in care remains at the heart of the agency's work across New England and Mid North coast regions.



Appointed 2024
Chief Executive Officer,
Curijo

Tina McGhie, Director

Tina is a proud Wiradjuri and Ngunnawal woman born and raised on Dharawal Country, with extensive management experience in the business, employment, social and community services sectors.

Tina has worked with state and federal governments and with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, families and communities in service delivery and organisational development.



Appointed 2025
Manager Operations,
Permanency Support Program,
Eleanor Duncan Aboriginal

Casey Coss, Director

Casey is a proud Wiradjuri woman living on Darkinjung Country, with over a decade of experience in the child protection and OOHC sector.

Guided by principles of social justice, she is passionate about ensuring the safety and wellbeing of vulnerable children and families, fostering opportunities for healing and empowerment.



Ceased 2024
Chief Executive Officer,
Ngunya Jarjum Aboriginal Corp

Ursula Donohue, Director

A proud member of the Dunghutti Nation, Ursula has over 35 years of experience in the human/community services sector, having worked across the East Coast, New England, and Metropolitan regions.

Passionate about improving outcomes for communities, Ursula is a strong advocate for Aboriginal affairs, with a focus on youth and family welfare.

Our members are the heart of AbSec. ACCOs, carers and community leaders guide our priorities, hold us accountable, and ensure our advocacy is grounded in lived experience.

Through consultations, forums and direct engagement, members shape the reforms we pursue and strengthen the collective voice of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across NSW.

Category A Members

Aboriginal Organisations being Aboriginal controlled organisations delivering early intervention, family support, child protection and out-of-home care and related services.

Armajun Aboriginal Health Service

Biripi Aboriginal Corporation Medical Centre

Bungree Aboriginal Association

Bunjum Aboriginal Corporation

Burrin Dalai Aboriginal Corporation

Coonamble Aboriginal Health Service

Cullunghutti Aboriginal Child and Family Centre

Curijo

Eleanor Duncan Aboriginal Health Services

Gudjagang Ngara li-dhi Aboriginal Corporation

Illawarra Aboriginal Corporation

Katungul Aboriginal Corporation Regional Health and Community Services

Link Up (NSW) Aboriginal Corporation

Muloobinba Aboriginal Corporation

Ngunya Jarjum Aboriginal Corporation

Riverina Medical and Dental Aboriginal Corporation

SNAICC – National Voice for our Children

South Coast Medical Service Aboriginal Corporation

Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service

Waminda Aboriginal Corporation

Wandiyali

Winanga-Li Aboriginal Child and Family Centre

Woomera Aboriginal Corporation

Yenu Allowah Aboriginal Corporation

Affiliate Organisations

Allies and non-ACCOs in service delivery, research and advocacy.

Association of Children's Welfare Agencies

Aspire Support Services

Australian Red Cross

Barnardos Australia

CareSouth

Catholic Care Diocese of Broken Bay

Catholic Care Social Services Hunter – Manning

Challenge Community Services

CREATE Foundation

Homelessness NSW

Key Assets Australia

LEAD Professional Development Association INC

Life Without Barriers

MacKillop Family Services

Mid-Richmond Neighbourhood Centre

Nepean Community and Neighbourhood Services

Ngadhi Family Services

NSW Council of Social Services

NSW Family Services Inc

Ozchild

Pathfinders Australia

Samaritans Foundation

Sector Connect Incorporated

Settlement Services International

Southern Youth and Family Services

Stepping Stone House

The Benevolent Society

The Family Co.

Veritas House

Wesley Mission

William Campbell Foundation

Wiradjuri Condobolin Corporation

Your voice. Our power.

Real change.

Becoming an AbSec member means adding your voice to a powerful movement pushing for community-led solutions, holding decision-makers to account, and keeping our kids strong in culture.

- Have a say in the policies and programs that affect our children and young people.
- Be part of a statewide movement pushing for justice, equity, and cultural safety.
- Access support and resources that strengthen your work in community.
- Stand with others to protect the rights of Aboriginal And Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

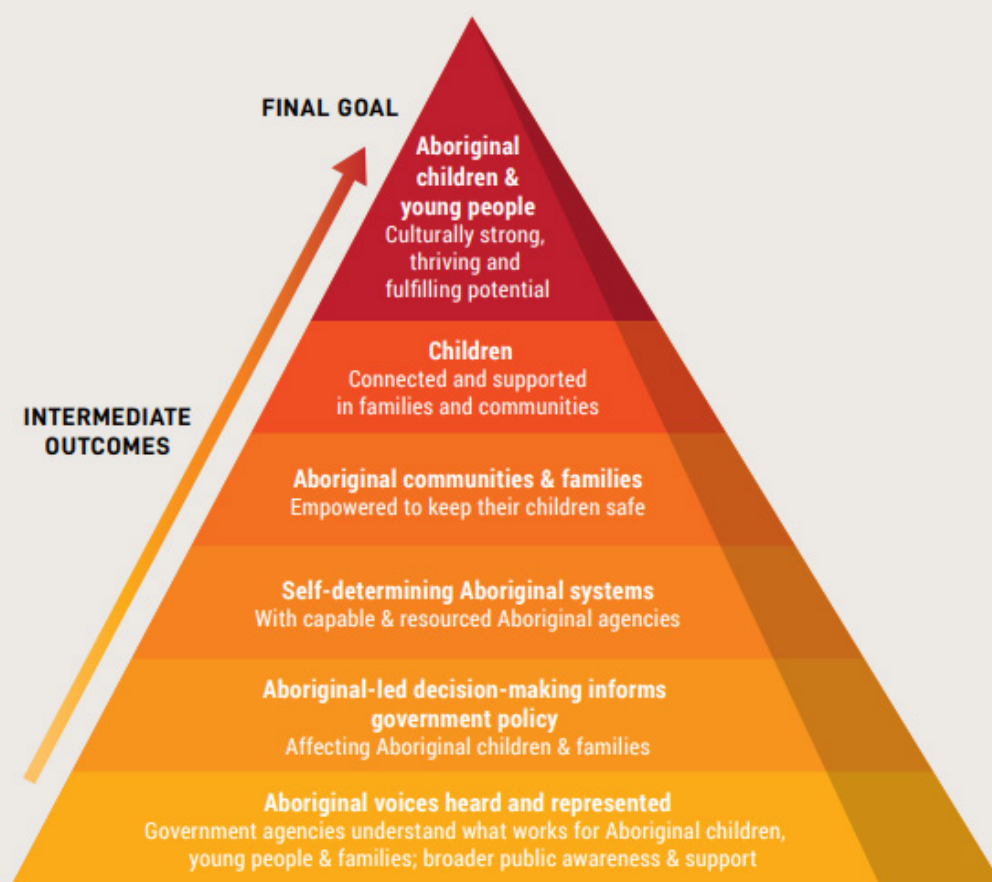
AbSec Theory of Change

AbSec's theory of change sets out key focus areas and their outcomes, as we work towards the ultimate goal of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people thriving, growing up strong in culture, and fulfilling their potential.

Evidence shows that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people must be connected and supported in their families, kinship groups and communities, and that families and communities must be empowered to keep their children and young people safe.

Sustainable change needs self-determination, and self-determination needs Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices to be heard and represented in society.

As a peak body, AbSec's advocacy strengthens the collective capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led services. We demonstrate to the broader community and government the difference that community-led decision-making and community-led solutions make. We have the solutions. ACCOs know what works best for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families.



Strategic priorities

Our *Strategic Plan 2023–2026* sets five priorities that underpin every activity described in this report and reflect our holistic approach to systemic reform.

P.1

Progress self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, families and communities.

Self-determination is at the heart of sustainable change. We believe that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities possess the innate strengths and abilities to solve their own problems when given the right support and trust.

By promoting self-determination, we empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, and families to lead and control their own solutions, ensuring their voices are at the forefront of decision-making processes.

P.2

Grow our Aboriginal community-controlled sector.

Strengthening the Aboriginal community-controlled sector is essential for delivering better outcomes. We work to provide the tools and resources needed for Aboriginal-led solutions that are innovative and forward-thinking.

By building this sector, we ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agencies are equipped to provide optimal care for our children, young people, and their families.

P.3

Ensure government hears our voices.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices must be represented in society to drive genuine improvements. We advocate for community-led decision-making to ensure that government policies and supports are informed by the perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, families, and communities. Our goal is to influence policy and ensure it reflects what works best for our people.

P.4

Leader in the sector.

As a strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child and family peak organisation, we play a pivotal role in building sector capacity and advising governments. Our leadership aims to shape the future of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child and family sector, ensuring it delivers quality services to our children, young people, families, communities, carers, and people with disabilities.

P.5

Maintain a strong AbSec

Our commitment to delivering better outcomes is driven by our robust governance, dedicated people, and adherence to our values and vision. By ensuring our organisation is well-resourced and true to its principles, we are positioned to effectively represent and serve our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, families, and communities.

Principles that guide us

Our team continuously works to progress the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child and family sector into the future, engage and deliver for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families, and inform governments of Mobs' perspectives with the view to advancing greater self-determination in our communities.

Acknowledgement and respect

We acknowledge the diversity of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nations and respect Traditional Owners of the Land, guided by the voices of Elders and the cultural knowledge of communities.

Professionalism and integrity

We act with the highest professionalism and integrity, striving for quality, culturally responsive, and culturally accessible supports.

Self-determination

Our focus is underpinned by the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People to make decisions impacting their lives.

Independence and solutions-focus

We serve the interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, families, communities, and the organisations that support them through holistic approaches.

Transparency and commitment

We remain committed to our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, families, and organisations, ensuring their interests are promoted transparently and our actions are clear.



Mum and bub, shot by Alicia May Photography for our NAIDOC Family Fun Day 2024 event.

Our year in review

2025 was a year of transition in the NSW child and family sector. Inquiries and reforms exposed long-standing failures and have created some space for community-led solutions.

The ending of unaccredited emergency accommodation, the retirement of biased risk assessment tools, and the creation of new Aboriginal governance structures reflected a system beginning to shift. At the same time, national data confirms that over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people at every stage of the child protection system remains entrenched, and prevention and early support is still underfunded and poorly designed.

System snapshot



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people are 10.8x more likely to be in OOHC than other children and young people.

55%

of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in OOHC were placed with their relatives or kin.

25,000

of the 70,100 children and young people on care and protection orders nationally were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children or young people.

71%

of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in OOHC had been continuously in care for 2+ years.

44.5%

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people make up 44.5% of those in the child protection system, but only 6.9% of Australia's child and young people population.

6,312

In New South Wales alone, more than 6,312 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people were in out-of-home care as at 30 June 2024.

Against this backdrop, AbSec advanced practical solutions: place-based Aboriginal Community-Controlled Mechanisms, Aboriginal-led commissioning pilots, rights-based resources, and case studies that highlight the strength of ACCOs and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community groups. Our work this year was about turning community voices into systemic change and driving reforms that deliver tangible outcomes, not just words.



Jessy McKinless Currie, founder of Nulungu Dreaming, performing the Smoking Ceremony at the November 2024 NSW Aboriginal Child & Family Conference.

AbSec's reach in 2024/25

"We know the answers. The challenge
is making sure the system listens."



Sector

347+ delegates at the 2024 NSW Aboriginal Child and Family Conference.

500+ participants across Quarterly Sector Forums in FY24/25.

4 Deadly Practice case studies and films produced and shared.

Government and advocacy

16 meetings with NSW MPs, with 14 pledging support for an Aboriginal Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People.

Multiple submissions lodged on national and state policy reforms (Prenatal Policy Review, National Child Safety Standards, IPART, Senate Select Committee for Measuring Outcomes for First Nations Communities).

Community engagement

1,800+ community members joined the NAIDOC Family Fun Day 2024.

83 yarn ups and 116 community meetings held through Strong Families, Our Way.

Workforce

303 practitioners trained in NSW through Project Waterways workshops.

92 percent of participants reported lasting workplace change.



Top performing social posts



A huge thank you to everyone who joined us on Dharawal Country for two incredible days of connection, and conversation.



AbSec kicked off the year with a dynamic and enlightening Quarterly Sector Forum!



At AbSec, we mark January 26 not as a day for celebration but as a moment for deep reflection, resilience, and truth-telling.

Website metrics

40,244
total users

66% ↑
new users

Social metrics

f **6,933**
followers

450% ↑
post shares

646% ↑
post reactions

478% ↑
content reach

in **4,755**
followers

68% ↑
post shares

89% ↑
post impressions

ig **688**
followers

62% ↑
follower gain

1,500% ↑
content reach

Major media coverage



"This isn't history, this is now': Children still being removed at Stolen Generations levels, Yoorrook Commissioner says".

National Indigenous Times

"Enough is enough': NSW child protection system needs to be in the hands of Indigenous-led organisations, experts say."

National Indigenous Times

"Aboriginal organisations call for urgent overhaul of beleaguered NSW child protection system".

The Guardian

"I was never told I was in care': The reality behind the rising number of out-of-home children."

ABC News

AbSec analytics shown from July 2024 to June 2025.



Supporting voices, driving change

AbSec's Policy and Advocacy team plays a central role in ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices shape the child and family system in NSW. This work spans community empowerment, systemic reform, and government engagement — all with a clear focus on self-determination and accountability.

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Tara-Lee Weldon, Policy Officer, Policy and Advocacy | AbSec

Building strength for the future

AbSec's Policy and Advocacy team continued to drive systemic reform throughout 2024/25, ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices are at the centre of policy and practice design.

A major focus of the year was advancing the *Family Is Culture* (FIC) initiative, which reached two critical milestones: the release of the *Family Is Culture Community Report Card* (July 2024) and *Family Is Culture: Five Years On* (November 2024). Together, these reports highlighted the limited progress on the original 2019 recommendations and sharpened calls for independent oversight and self-determination. Copies of *Five Years On* were sent to every sitting NSW Member of Parliament, leading to 16 direct meetings with MPs—of which 14 resulted in formal support for a Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People.

AbSec also partnered with the Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research to develop stronger accountability mechanisms for NSW, reinforcing the need for transparency and independent monitoring in child protection reform. As we move into 2025/26, AbSec will prioritise advocacy for an independent Child Protection Commission along the lines recommended by Professor Megan Davis in the *Family Is Culture Review Report* (2019).

Our team's advocacy extended to a wide range of State and Federal processes. We made written and verbal submissions to inquiries and reviews including the Prenatal Policy Review, National Child Safety Standards, the Fair Work Commission review of the Social, Community, Home Care and Disability Services Award 2010, the Senate Inquiry on Measuring Outcomes for First Nations People, and the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) review of OOHHC costs in NSW.



Staff from AbSec, Justice & Equity Centre, Jumbunna Institute, University of New South Wales and Lil Gordon, then Acting National Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People.

One of the year's key achievements was the co-development of the *Active Efforts Practice Rules and Guidance* in collaboration with DCJ, ALS, and Jumbunna Institute. This work was informed by over 30 hours of intensive advocacy meetings, ensuring that the final framework reflects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander expertise and community priorities.

AbSec also contributed to the *Family Matters Jurisdictional Report* (November 2024), which reinforced the ongoing national disparity in child removal rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people and further demonstrated why we need systemic, transformational change in NSW to close the gap.

Through these efforts, AbSec strengthened its role as the peak body, a bridge between community voices and government decision-making, and as a relentless advocate for a future where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people are safe, connected to family, and strong in culture.

- **2 major reports published:** *Family Is Culture Community Report Card* (Jul 2024) and *Family Is Culture: Five Years On* (Nov 2024).
- **126 MPs engaged** – copies of *FIC: Five Years On* (Nov 2024) sent to all NSW Parliamentarians.
- **16 meetings with MPs, securing support of 14 MPs for a Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People.**
- **30+ hours of advocacy meetings** to co-develop the *Active Efforts Practice Rules and Guidance* with DCJ, ALS, and Jumbunna.
- **6+ submissions lodged** including Prenatal Policy, National Child Safety Standards, Fair Work Commission, IPART, Senate Inquiry on Measuring Outcomes for First Nations People.
- Collaboration with Jumbunna Institute on **new accountability mechanisms for NSW.**
- Contribution to the *Family Matters Jurisdictional Report* (Nov 2024).

A major achievement this year was the continued development of the Know Your Rights (KYR) project, which is equipping Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families with practical know-how to navigate the child protection system. Guided by the *Bring Them Home, Keep Them Home* research team and developed in partnership with Waminda, ALS and Curijo, the project has secured funding for a dedicated one-stop website that will launch in early 2026. For families who mostly have insufficient information, KYR provides not only knowledge but the confidence to advocate for their children and young people grounded in the insights of other families with experience of the child protection system.

AbSec also advanced the establishment of an Aboriginal Authority for Restoring Children (AARC) (see page 34 for details). What began as a community-driven concept is now a structured plan with a program logic, cost models, and early adopter sites identified. In 2025/26, we are hopeful that the project will move into a Discovery Phase, where we will test and refine community-led approaches to restoration, in advance of wider implementation from 2027. This work represents a long-overdue shift: placing responsibility for reunifying children and young people with their families and into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander hands, where cultural authority and ways of doing, being and knowing guide decision-making.

The year also saw the signing of a landmark Partnership Agreement between AbSec, the ALS and DCJ. This agreement is more than symbolic; it formalises shared governance in key elements of child protection policy and practice, an initiative that AbSec has long advocated for. The Partnership Agreement creates a structure where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership is recognised as equal and essential. We will work with partners and the wider ACCO child and family sector to develop a bespoke, culturally safe approach to assessing risk for children and young people across the child protection continuum, and as much as possible, for this to bring to life long overdue recommendations of the *Family is Culture Review Report* (2019).

Through the Deadly Practice project, AbSec continued to highlight the leadership of ACCOs in keeping children and young people safe and connected to culture. Case studies, films and presentations at Quarterly Sector Forums captured the stories of the Dubbo Grannies, Orange Aboriginal Medical Service (AMS), South Coast AMS and Waminda. These stories not only celebrated community strength but also exposed the systemic barriers ACCOs face, from funding inequities to rigid service models. By documenting and disseminating these practices, Deadly Practice is building an evidence base for reform while amplifying community voices and experiences.

At the systemic level, AbSec maintained a strong presence in policy reform. We co-chaired the Ministerial Aboriginal Partnership Group, providing direct Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander input into government decision-making. We continued to advocate for an independent Child Protection Commission and an independent Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People, recognising the need for significantly improved and dedicated system oversight and accountability.

Through regular meetings with parliamentarians, submissions to State and Federal inquiries, and direct engagement with Ministers and senior officials, AbSec amplified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander needs and experiences in all reform agendas. The message was clear: without Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership, change will be incomplete and unsustainable.

Together, these achievements reflect AbSec's role as a strong peak body; amplifying community voices, shaping government policy, and insisting on systemic accountability. The task ahead is to build on this momentum, ensuring that the reforms underway deliver real outcomes: more children and young people growing up safe and together with family and kin, and stronger recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander authority across the child and family system.



Know Your Rights

Navigating the child protection system can be overwhelming for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and families, with limited knowledge often leaving them vulnerable. The KYR project was developed to change this reality, putting crucial resources directly into the hands of families and communities.

Launched in February 2024, the project emerged from the *Bring Them Home, Keep Them Home* research led by Associate Professor BJ Newton at UNSW. Beginning as a local initiative with Waminda, a Nowra-based ACCO, the project grew into a co-designed partnership comprising of AbSec, the research team, Waminda, ALS and Curijo. Together, the partners worked to create resources that are practical, culturally appropriate, and directly responsive to community need.

In 2025, AbSec is releasing the first set of KYR resources: five easy-to-use guides supported by two webinars. These tools provide clarity for families interacting with the child protection system, based on the lived experience of other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. These equip families with the confidence to ask questions, advocate for their rights, and secure supports they need.



Neika Tong, BJ Newton,
presenting at Aug 2024 QSF;
'Introducing the KYR website.'

Thanks to funding secured from the CAGES Foundation, the project will expand in 2026 with the launch of a dedicated KYR website. Following this, we intend evaluating the impact and drawing other lessons from the project to guide future work. For instance, exploring the opportunities for similar resources specific to children and young people and equipping practitioners that work alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to make effective use of the resources.

KYR demonstrates how research, advocacy and lived experience can come together to create practical tools that empower families, strengthen Mob's knowledge, and hold the system to account.

- **5 guides developed** in 2024/25.
- **2 webinars delivered**, reaching families across NSW.
- **1 presentation at the August 2024 Quarterly Sector Forum.**
- 2026 launch of dedicated website (phase one).



Supporting Young Care Leavers with Access to Housing

Safe and stable housing is essential for everyone, and especially so for young people leaving care. Without it, too many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people face a cycle of homelessness, poor life chance outcomes and further contact with the child protection system when they become parents. To address this urgent need, AbSec has secured funding from the Aboriginal Housing Office (AHO) to commence work on the *Client Experience Initiative: Supporting Young Care Leavers with Access to Housing*.

The initiative was informed by a scoping study in August 2024 which found a strong link between housing instability and child protection involvement and identified a significant gap in formal research on the issue. Feedback from 50 participants at AbSec's May 2024 Quarterly Sector Forum, follow-up listening sessions, an online survey, and community yarns revealed the challenges that families, young people and children face, including excessive wait times for housing, complex and inflexible application processes, poor maintenance of social housing properties, and the impact of natural disasters.

The project is shaped by voices from across the sector. This includes the ALS, AHO, Aboriginal Housing Company (AHC), Kinchela Boys Home Aboriginal Corporation (KBHAC), Family and Community Services Insights, Analysis and Research (FACSIAR) and Aboriginal Land Councils. Their input has created a shared understanding of the systemic barriers that young people and families face, as well as the opportunities for reform.

The solutions identified through this work are clear: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership must be embedded in housing and child protection policy design; legislative change is needed to prevent removals based on housing related concerns; and greater collaboration between housing providers, ACCOs, DCJ and OOHHC providers is critical. Increasing social housing stock, more innovation in housing responses and the NSW Government committing to no Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people exiting care into homelessness are essential priorities.

This project will continue into 2026, with the aim of creating, implementing and evaluating culturally safe resources to assist young care leavers have their needs met in relation to housing and independent living skills when transitioning from care.

- **50 participants engaged** through Quarterly Sector Forum and follow-up sessions.
- **18 responses received** through an online survey.
- **6+ organisations partnered:** ALS, AHO, AHC, KBHAC, FACSIAR, Aboriginal Land Councils.
- 2024 scoping study confirmed critical link between housing instability and child protection.
- 2025–26 to create culturally safe resources to address needs related to housing and independent living for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people exiting care.



Paving a path to self-determination: Deadly Practice

AbSec's Deadly Practice series highlights the powerful work of ACCOs every day to support children, young people and families. These case studies give long-overdue recognition to frontline leaders and staff, while also demonstrating how ACCOs hold the solutions to the challenges that face our communities.

Deadly Practice case studies focus on service delivery that prioritises prevention, early intervention, restoration and cultural connection. Each case study shares what works, as well as the systemic barriers ACCOs seek to overcome, including funding shortfalls and bureaucratic obstacles. In this way, the series celebrates leadership and impact while evidencing what else is needed to achieve positive outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families.

This year, AbSec published four Deadly Practice case studies relating to the early intervention work of Dubbo Grannies Group, Orange Aboriginal Medical Service (OAMS), South Coast AMS, and Waminda. These case studies have been shared at Quarterly Sector Forums and more widely through AbSec's communications channels.

In 2025/26, AbSec is engaging with four additional community groups and partnerships to expand the series.

Deadly Practice underscores a simple truth: ACCOs, led by community and grounded in culture, are best placed to keep our children and young people safe, support families, and design solutions that work.



OAMS Mums and Bubs Playgroup

- **4 case studies completed:** Dubbo Grannies, OAMS, South Coast AMS, Waminda.
- **3 new releases planned** for 2025 (OAMS, South Coast AMS, Waminda).
- **4+ organisations engaged** for 2025–26 case studies.
- Videos and papers produced for wider sector awareness.
- Shared via Quarterly Sector Forums, policy submissions, AbSec channels.



Community voice and partnerships

Community voice has remained at the heart of AbSec’s work throughout 2024/25. Consistent with our Strategic Plan priorities, AbSec advocates on behalf of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families, and seeks to create the structures and spaces that allow communities to speak for themselves and drive the reforms that matter most.

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Writer and activist Dajuan Hoosan at the 2024 NSW Aboriginal Child and Family Conference

Leading change through the NSW Closing the Gap Partnership

In 2024–25, AbSec continued to lead systemic reform and champion Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination through our active role in the NSW Closing the Gap Partnership Agreement—reaffirmed in 2024 between the NSW Government, Local Government, and Aboriginal communities. This agreement reflects a collective commitment to achieving better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, families, and communities.

As a member of the NSW CAPO, AbSec played a central role in shaping the 2025–2028 NSW Implementation Plan (NSW IP) for CtG. This forthcoming plan will include a Change and Transformation Strategy and a whole-of-Government Transformation Plan, supported by Sector-specific Transformation Plans. The NSW IP is set for finalisation in September 2025.

AbSec holds key leadership positions within the refreshed governance structure:

- **Co-Chair of the Families and Justice Sector Committee** alongside DCJ, where we are developing a strategy to embed the true intent of Priority Reforms within government systems.
- **Co-Chair of the Transformation Sector Committee** which oversees the implementation of Priority Reforms across all sectors, reinforcing structural and systemic change to deliver on the National Agreement.
- **Member of the Housing, Land and Water Sector Committee** where we intend progressing and negotiating solutions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people exiting care in NSW faced with chronic housing need.
- **Member of the Priority Reform 5 Economic Prosperity Working Group** where the focus is on Aboriginal employment, business growth and economic prosperity.
- **Member of the soon-to-be refreshed Priority Reform 2** building the community-controlled sector where we intend to advocate for a strong and sustainable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sector delivering high quality services to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People.

Together with CAPO members and in partnership with government agencies, AbSec is driving the development of the Change and Transformation Strategy, ensuring that community voices are not only heard but lead decision-making at every level.

Through our CtG projects, we are building strong, community-led services that reflect community priorities and improve outcomes for our children, young people and families.

AbSec is also an active member of the National Coalition of Peaks which is made up of more than 80 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled peak bodies and members across Australia, who represent some 800 organisations. The Coalition of Peaks bring forward the views of their members and communities to all their discussions with governments.



Strong Families, Our Way

With funding made available through CtG, the Strong Families, Our Way (SFOW) program has been a cornerstone of this effort. Operating across four active Aboriginal Community-Controlled Mechanisms (ACCMs) in Illawarra, Newcastle, Dubbo and Wagga Wagga, SFOW has embedded Aboriginal authority into local child and family decision-making. SFOW community engagement workers are actively working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People across the state to support the growth of further ACCMs.

Over the past year, SFOW project facilitated more than 80 Yarn Ups and over 100 community meetings, directly engaging with 34 communities. These gatherings gave families a safe and culturally appropriate forum to share their experiences, identify barriers in the system, and shape solutions that work for them. The impact has been clear: families who felt powerless in the face of the child protection system have found their voices, and local services have been challenged to respond in more culturally safe and supportive ways.

“

“I loved the opportunity to sit down with a group of warm, supportive, knowledgeable people to share our experiences and struggles and be lifted up by the group with real plans for change.”

— Community member, Wee-ya Win-na



Penny Magann-Jones, Program Manager, and Margarette Davis, Community Engagement Officer discussing ACCM One Mob Connection's impact in Wagga Wagga, August 2025.

- 4 ACCMs active across NSW (Illawarra, Newcastle, Dubbo, Wagga Wagga).
- 83 yarn ups facilitated.
- 116 community meetings attended.
- 34 communities directly engaged.
- 87 events supported.



Aboriginal-led Commissioning

In parallel, the CtG funded, Aboriginal-led Commissioning program took significant strides. For too long, commissioning has been done to communities rather than with them, leaving services misaligned with local needs and disconnected from culture. This year, pilot communities were identified in freshwater and saltwater regions, with governance structures and co-design frameworks established to ensure decisions reflect community priorities. Indigenous Data Sovereignty has been a guiding principle throughout, giving communities control over how information is collected, interpreted and used to drive investment. By shifting commissioning authority to the hands of Mob, this project sets the stage for a more responsive and sustainable service system.

These initiatives are not just projects; these represent a broader shift in the design and delivery of child and family services. These demonstrate that when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families are trusted with decision-making power, outcomes improve. These also show government that partnership must go beyond consultation and into genuine, shared governance and decision-making.

The next steps are about scale and sustainability. SFOW will continue to embed cultural authority into district pathways, while Aboriginal-led Commissioning will test new models of service design and delivery in pilot communities. Both initiatives will generate evidence for a future in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance is a permanent feature of the child and family system in NSW.

Through these programs, AbSec has shown that community voice is not a “nice to have”, it is the foundation of effective reform. Strong families, supported by culture and community, are the best

- **2 pilot sites selected** (freshwater and saltwater).
- **Governance frameworks established** with community leadership.
- **Indigenous Data Sovereignty embedded** in design.
- **Co-design sessions held** with local families and ACCOs.
- First commissioning pilots to commence in FY2025/26.



Family Preservation

AbSec was delighted to see the results of sustained advocacy and partnership that secured record funding for the Family Preservation program. The NSW Government announced investment to \$900 million over five years. Family Preservation focuses on:

- Preventing children and young people from entering foster care.
- Improving family functioning by creating safe and stable home environments.
- Building parenting skills and confidence.
- Supporting healthy child development.

A record 40 percent of this investment—almost \$350 million—will go directly to ACCOs who are best placed to work alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people to stay safe and together. This includes a dedicated Aboriginal Family Preservation approach that was developed in partnership with AbSec and communities. The model includes five-year block funding grants and equitable pricing.

Developed in partnership with AbSec and ACCOs, the reforms ensure community organisations take a leading role in designing and delivering services by and for their communities. **As Minister for Aboriginal Affairs David Harris said:**

“

“This is the largest investment ever directed to Aboriginal-led family preservation services in NSW—and it’s a vital step in keeping Aboriginal children safe, connected to culture, and with family. For too long, Aboriginal communities haven’t had a real say in the decisions that affect their children—this funding changes that, by backing solutions designed and delivered by ACCOs. We’re turning our CtG commitments into action, with long-term support for Aboriginal organisations to lead the way in keeping kids safe and families strong.”



Minister for Families and Communities, Kate Washington and AbSec CEO John Leha, August 2025.

To support ACCOs through the application process, AbSec launched a new initiative offering free, independent consultancy support during DCJ's eight-week tender window. This was open to all ACCOs, regardless of membership with AbSec, and enabled access to expert procurement and tender-writing advice to ensure proposals reflected the full quality and cultural responsiveness of their services.

Minister for Families and Communities, Kate Washington said:

“

“This \$900 million program is a clear demonstration that the Minns Labor Government is investing in community support for vulnerable families.

“Family Preservation services help address safety concerns and build parenting capability and confidence, so more children can avoid OOHC and stay safely at home.

“Far too many Aboriginal children are growing up in the foster care system. We all know that must change. Aboriginal-led, designed and delivered programs are going to help drive that desperately needed change.

“Investing in families and safety for children is an investment in our state's future.”

CEO of AbSec – NSW Child, Family and Community Peak Aboriginal Corporation, John Leha said:

“

“AbSec welcomes the NSW Government's commitment to reforming Family Preservation and acknowledges the vital partnership with Aboriginal communities that has shaped the Aboriginal Family Preservation framework.

“This approach is more than a policy shift—it is an act of justice. It restores our communities' right to care for our children and young people in ways that reflect who we are, where we come from, and what we need to thrive.

“We look forward to walking alongside our sector partners to bring this framework to life—because when Aboriginal communities lead, our children and young people are safer, our families are stronger, and our futures are brighter.”

- Largest investment in family preservation services.
- **40 percent of funding for ACCOs.**
- **5-year contracts** and equitable pricing.



The Aboriginal Authority for Restoring Children

The Aboriginal Authority for Restoring Children (AARC) represents a landmark step towards Aboriginal authority in child protection decision-making.

First envisioned at the Aboriginal Child Safety and Wellbeing Reform Forum in 2023, AbSec together with partners is charting a genuinely innovative approach to restoring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people to their families and communities from OOHC.

It is essential that transformation in restoration practice takes place in NSW, as it is the only way that there is to reduce the disproportionate number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in OOHC and make progress on CtG targets. The AARC is directly aligned to the recommendations of the *Family Is Culture Review Report* (2019).

In 2024/25, the partnership laid crucial groundwork for the Authority's next phase:

- A literature scan informed the draft practice framework and shaped planning for a proposed Discovery Phase.
- Engagement with 39 stakeholders across NSW, nationally and internationally, guided strategies to overcome barriers to restoration.
- A draft program logic was co-designed through forums with community, DCJ Aboriginal staff and Aboriginal leaders.
- Cost models and analyses were developed to inform the business case and budget submissions to DCJ.
- A case file audit project, led by the AARC Practice Lead and Associate Professor Dr BJ Newton, commenced with ACCO and NGO partners, providing early insights into restoration barriers.

The Authority is now planning a Discovery Phase from 2026, testing a hub-and-spoke model with three early adopter sites before scaling statewide.

As Richard Ardler, Manager of Child and Family Services at South Coast Medical Service Aboriginal Corporation, reflected:

“

“The findings from the file review highlight what the Bring Them Home Keep Them Home research told us. We are looking forward to the next phase, we need all the support possible to progress the work that needs to be done when it comes to restorations.”

For families, the AARC is about restoring children and young people home. For ACCOs, it is about embedding community leadership into decisions that affect our children and young people. For government, it represents a structural shift towards self-determination, accountability, and lasting reform.

- **39 stakeholders engaged** across NSW, nationally and internationally.
- **Program logic co-designed** with community and Aboriginal leaders.
- **Cost models and business case developed** with Lumenia.
- **Case file audit commenced** with ACCO and NGO partners.
- Discovery Phase planning with three early adopter sites being negotiated for 2025/26– 2026/27.



Research and knowledge sharing

Research and evidence are powerful tools for change; but only when shaped by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices and translated into action. For AbSec, research is never abstract; it is how communities hold systems accountable and demand reform. In 2025, the combination of mounting evidence and an urgent community mandate made this role clearer than ever.

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AbSec events	44

Participants of a Project Waterways session, Penrith 2025.



Family Is Culture: Five Years On

At the heart of this work was the release of *Family Is Culture: Five Years On*, launched at the AbSec 2024 NSW Aboriginal Child & Family Conference in November. Co-authored by AbSec with the ALS, Jumbunna Institute and the Justice & Equity Centre, the report laid bare a confronting truth: only 12 of the original 126 recommendations from the *Family Is Culture Review Report* (2019) had been fully implemented. Despite years of commitments, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people remain grossly over-represented in the system, and the pace of reform has been far too slow.

The report captured national attention. Coverage in *The Guardian*, ABC News and the National Indigenous Times underscored the scale of the crisis, with articles noting that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are now nearly 12 times more likely to be placed in OOHC than their non-Indigenous peers, up from 9.5 times in 2017–18. The findings reverberated across the media, in parliamentary debate, and across the sector, placing unprecedented pressure on government to respond.

As Auntie Debra Swan, Gomeroi woman, Grandmothers Against Removals (GMAR) NSW founder and co-author of the report, wrote:

“

“Our community is strong because we are deeply connected. We know what’s best for our children. And we know that removing them from their families, their communities, their culture, and their Country causes harm.”



Dr Paul Gray, Jumbunna Institute, Auntie Deb Swan, GMAR, Jonathan Hall Spence, Justice & Equity Centre, and Zoe De Re, Aboriginal Legal Service, presenting at the 2024 AbSec NSW Aboriginal Child & Family Conference.

The *Five Years On* report also set out a clear pathway forward. It called for:

- An Independent Child Protection Commission and the appointment of a Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People.
- Proper resourcing of Aboriginal peaks, including AbSec and ALS, to provide oversight and support reform.
- Transition of funding and decision-making into Aboriginal community control.

At its core, the report reinforced that self-determination and public accountability are the foundations for change. Until Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities lead the design and delivery of policy, programs and decision-making, the system will continue to harm our children, young people and families.

For AbSec, the launch of *Five Years On* was more than a milestone. It was a tool of accountability, ensuring that the voices of families, Elders and advocates cannot be ignored, and that evidence continues to shine a light on systemic injustice.

Alongside this flagship report, AbSec strengthened oversight of research through the Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study (POCLS) Aboriginal Governance Panel (AGP). Consistent with Recommendation 3 of Professor Megan Davis's *Family Is Culture Review Report* (2019), the AGP provides independent accountability and ensures decision-making is grounded in self-determination.

Over the past year, the AGP achieved several milestones:

- Five peer reviews of research projects led by Aboriginal researchers using POCLS data.
- Two scientific working groups with researchers and senior government leaders.
- Three collaborators' meetings to guide study direction.
- A revised Terms of Reference and Contract for the AGP.
- Ethics approval for the ongoing POCLS study.

These achievements reinforced Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership in research, ensuring studies about our children and young people are accountable, culturally safe, and focused on what matters most: safety, restoration to family, and strong cultural identity.



"I can't recommend enough to other researchers using the POCLS data to engage with the AGP, I got so much out of our meeting, and it was really interesting."

– Associate Professor BJ Newton, Social Policy Research Centre, UNSW

Evidence from the *AIHW Child Protection Report 2023–24* and *Family Matters 2024* further reinforced the urgency of reform. These reports confirmed what communities have long said: Aboriginal children remain nearly ten times more likely to be in out-of-home care than non-Indigenous children, while prevention and family preservation services are chronically underfunded. AbSec drew directly on these findings in our submissions on the *Active Efforts Practice Rules* and in our advocacy following the launch of *Family Is Culture: Five Years On*. The message was clear: systemic inequity cannot be ignored when the evidence is this stark.

Through the Project Waterways program, AbSec ensured that national research and training translated directly into culturally safe practice in NSW. By delivering workshops that reached hundreds of practitioners, we equipped frontline workers and services with the tools to embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of doing, being and knowing to dismantle systemic barriers from the ground up.

Taken together, these initiatives demonstrate how research can be transformed into accountability. For government, these provide an evidence base that demands structural reform. For ACCOs, they supply tools to strengthen advocacy and practice. For carers and families, they validate lived experience with data and truth-telling. For communities, they reinforce a principle that we have always known: evidence is only powerful when it leads to real change for our children, young people and families.

- **Launched:** November, AbSec 2024 NSW Aboriginal Child & Family Conference.
- **12 of 126 recommendations implemented** since the *Family Is Culture Review Report* (2019).
- **3,000+ case-specific recommendations** remain with little transparency.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are close to **12 times more likely to be in care than non-Indigenous peers**.
- Calls to action: Independent Commission, Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People, funding community-led solutions.

Media coverage



Dr Paul Gray from UTS Jumbunna Institute:

"Business as usual, or small tweaks at the margins, will not deliver the transformative change that children and families need."

Karly Warner, the CEO of the Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT):

"Five years is an eternity in the life of a child. The past five years presented countless opportunities to take decisive action and protect Aboriginal children from the trauma and lifelong harm of being torn away from their families, but the NSW government has willingly let another generation fall victim to bureaucratic inertia."

National Indigenous Times, 4 July 2024



John Leha, CEO AbSec:

"Almost five years since its release, the NSW government is still yet to make a public commitment to all recommendations of the Family Is Culture Review. The urgent need to overhaul this harmful system is undeniable. Every day of delay is a day too many for our children, who continue to suffer from these longstanding failures."

The Guardian, 13 November 2024



Project Waterways

The Project Waterways Training Program is a national initiative led by SNAICC and co-delivered with partners including AbSec, Victorian Aboriginal Child and Community Agency (VACCA), the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak (QATSICPP), Kornar Winmil Yunti (KWY) and Yamurrah. Funded by the Department of Social Services, this training equips frontline workers and services with tools to deliver trauma-informed, culturally safe practice.

Between October 2024 and June 2025, the program engaged more than 1,000 participants nationally, including practitioners, caseworkers and managers. In NSW, AbSec delivered 25 workshops through our Learning and Development Centre (LDC), reaching 303 participants. Independent evaluation found 92 percent reported sustained changes in their workplace practice; proof that Project Waterways is more than training, it is system transformation in action.



John Byrne, Coordinator, Cultural Programs, AbSec LDC, with participants of the training program.



"...I wanted to express how valuable I found both the content and its delivery. The material was clear, informative, and delivered with great sensitivity to the nature of the subject. [The trainer's] presentation style was particularly engaging—his warmth and honesty, especially in sharing his own experiences, created a genuine and respectful atmosphere that made the two days both meaningful and memorable."

– Project Waterways participant

For AbSec, Project Waterways demonstrated the power of community-led partnerships: combining national collaboration with local delivery, and ensuring cultural authority is embedded in workforce development across the state.

National program (Oct 2024 – Jun 2025)

- **1,032 participants** trained across Australia.
- Co-delivered by SNAICC, VACCA, QATSICPP, KWY, Yamurrah, AbSec.
- Funded by the Department of Social Services.

NSW delivery (AbSec LDC)

- **25 workshops** delivered across NSW and ACT.
- **303 participants** trained.
- **92 percent reported** sustained workplace change in evaluation.



Aboriginal Carer Support Service

AbSec is dedicated to standing by our deadly carers and our Aboriginal Carer Support Service aims to improve the information, support, and training opportunities for carers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in NSW.

It comprises a free telephone advice and advocacy service and includes assistance with foster care recruitment activities, including events and promotions, to ensure carers have access to the resources and guidance they need. Our senior client support officer works cooperatively with Aboriginal OOHC agencies, DCJ and other relevant government and non-government agencies to improve communication, support and training for carers. Key services include:

- Independent information, advice and assistance.
- Culturally appropriate training.
- Networking opportunities.
- Maintaining a register of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal foster and kinship carers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.
- Support to agencies.



Shanelle Beazley, Indigenous Partnership & Development Engagement Officer, Benevolent Society and Tanya Miles, Senior Client Support Officer, Sector Operations.

- **5,389 total** call and email minutes across 2024/25.
- **325 children** involved within all scenarios, with 86 percent being Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.
- Themes across calls included DCJ, carer, foster care, kincarner, casework and guardianship.
- Most enquiries originated from Hunter (20%), followed by South West Sydney (15%) and Sydney CBD (11%). Other regions contributed between 4–11%, demonstrating a broad distribution of contacts across both metropolitan and regional areas.

AbSec Carer Support Line case study: Restoration of children

- Scenario Date: 7 July 2025
- Location: Lismore, Northern NSW
- Family: Melissa* (Mother), Beverly* (Kincarar)
- Children Involved: Three
- Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander Status: Yes

Background

Melissa's children had been in OOH under Lismore DCJ. The children were previously placed with a relative carer grandmother Beverly. Melissa contacts the AbSec Carers Support Line after phone conversations with the children raise concerns about false allegations and misunderstandings.

Situation

Son (9) expresses worrying sexualised behaviours towards family members, referencing confusing past incidents, e.g., "Remember the times you don't make me wear pants."

Daughter (14) questions kincarar Beverly about favouritism among grandchildren, which Beverly denies, stating she has never discussed such matters.

The children are confused and distressed, creating tension within the family.

Intervention

The AbSec Carers Support Line staff discuss children's consent, safety, and rights with Melissa. Consent forms are arranged to progress discussions and ensure all actions are documented.

DCJ caseworker is contacted to clarify the care plan and next steps for the children.

Resolution

Melissa is informed of the process and engages with DCJ.

On 3/09/2025, Melissa confirms via email that her children have been removed from the previous carer and successfully restored to her care. Collaborative efforts between family, the AbSec Carers Support Line, and DCJ result in a safe reunification and clear understanding of the children's care needs.

Key learning points

1. Early intervention and clear communication between carers, family, and DCJ is critical.
2. Misunderstandings or allegations among children can create confusion; careful discussion and documentation are essential.
3. Restoration requires coordinated support and consent from all involved parties.
4. Cultural safety and family connections are central to successful child reunification in Aboriginal families.

**Names have been changed for privacy and confidentiality.*



National leadership in *Safe & Supported*

Driving systemic change across the care continuum

AbSec continues to play a leading role in advancing the *Safe and Supported: National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children*, ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices, leadership and aspirations are central to all actions taken under the strategy. As the NSW peak body, AbSec works in close partnership with government, ACCOs and sector stakeholders to influence policy, shape implementation priorities and embed accountability across the entire care continuum. This is seen from early intervention and family preservation through to residential care, restoration and transition to adulthood.

This year, AbSec represented NSW at national governance forums, contributing to cross-jurisdictional coordination and ensuring that reforms meaningfully uphold the four elements of the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle*: prevention, partnership, placement and participation. AbSec has strongly advocated for system transformation that empowers ACCOs to lead the design and delivery of culturally embedded supports aligned with long-term healing, not short-term crisis response.

Strengthening the Workforce: Aligning Accreditation and Capability Across Systems

Driving genuine reform requires more than policy—it demands a workforce that is skilled, culturally capable and accountable. AbSec has been a strong advocate for embedding Aboriginal cultural competence and safety across all workforce development and accreditation frameworks connected with *Safe and Supported*. This includes influencing the alignment between the National Early Childhood Education Partnerships, Vocational Education and Training (VET) pathways, and the National Skills Agreement to ensure consistent expectations of practice from early years services through to statutory child protection, disability supports, family law and youth justice systems.

AbSec representatives consistently emphasised the direct link for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people's outcomes to the capability of the professionals who work alongside them. AbSec calls for a nationally recognised accreditation framework that embeds cultural safety as a core competency—not an optional module—and ensures that practitioners across NGOs, ACCOs and government agencies are equipped with the knowledge, behaviours and relational approaches required to work with our families in a respectful and strengths-based way.

AbSec has also advocated for practical measures to promote workforce sustainability. For example, career pipelines for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander practitioners, ACCO-led community-based training, and recognition of lived experience within skills frameworks. By partnering with training regulators, higher education institutions and peak workforce bodies, AbSec is helping to redefine what “quality practice” means in the care and protection system—shifting it from compliance-based to culturally grounded and relationally driven.

Accountability through measurement and community control

Central to AbSec's leadership is the co-design of measurable actions under *Safe and Supported* that reflect the lived realities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families in NSW. AbSec has reinforced that genuine change cannot be achieved without shared accountability, transparent monitoring and sustained investment in community-led solutions. Through roundtables, submissions and direct engagement with State and Federal agencies, AbSec has championed approaches that move beyond ‘words’ to tangible commitments in workforce capability, funding reform and data sovereignty.

AbSec remains unwavering in our vision: a future where every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child grows up safe, connected to kin, culture and Country, with their rights upheld and their identity celebrated. *Safe and Supported* provides the framework—but it is community leadership, underpinned by a culturally safe and skilled workforce, that will deliver the change.

Events and community engagement underpin AbSec's strategic commitments to facilitate growth in the sector and ensure government hears Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices.

In 2024/25, AbSec was involved in more than 100 events across NSW, including yarns in community, sector gatherings and cultural calendar highlights. Two of the largest AbSec-hosted events were the 2024 NSW Aboriginal Child & Family Conference and NAIDOC Family Fun Day.



2024 NSW Aboriginal Child and Family Conference

In November 2024, AbSec brought together more than 340 delegates and community members on Dharug Country for our state's leading forum on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child and family issues. The theme, *Truth Telling: A Journey Towards Understanding and Empowerment*, guided three days of courageous conversations, cultural celebration and sector leadership.

The program featured 39 sessions and keynote addresses from national leaders including Adjunct Professor Aunty Muriel Bamblett AM, Catherine Liddle, Djuwan Hoosan, and the newly appointed National Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People (from September 2025), Sue-Anne Hunter. Sue-Anne's words challenged delegates to confront the reality of how child protection systems have been designed and the need for Aboriginal authority in reform:



"The system is working exactly as it was designed to. The task before us is to redesign it — with Aboriginal people holding genuine decision-making power."

– Adjunct Professor Sue-Anne Hunter, Deputy Chair and Commissioner, Yoorrook Justice Commission



A defining moment was the launch of *Family Is Culture: Five Years On*, which exposed the lack of progress on reform and generated widespread media coverage across The Guardian, ABC News and the National Indigenous Times. Delegates responded with urgent calls for action, including the creation of a NSW Aboriginal Commissioner for Children and Young People and the establishment of an Aboriginal Authority for Restoring Children.

Culture remained at the heart of the event, with 12 performances showcasing the strength and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity. The Gala Dinner and Awards Night honoured the achievements of Aboriginal organisations and leaders across the sector, while creating space for connection and celebration.

The reach extended beyond the conference walls, with 60,000+ social media impressions and 13,700 website views, amplifying the voices of Mob to a national audience.

The AbSec 2024 NSW Aboriginal Child & Family Conference reinforced our role as the peak body: a place where truth is told, evidence is shared, and community-led solutions drive the path forward.



- 347+ participants.
- 39 sessions over three days.
- 12 cultural performances.
- Launch of *Family Is Culture: Five Years On*.
- 60,000+ social impressions, 13,700 website views.
- Major media coverage: The Guardian, ABC, NIT.



NAIDOC Family Fun Day 2024

In July 2024, AbSec's annual NAIDOC Family Fun Day in Marrickville brought together more than 1,800 people to celebrate NAIDOC Week. The event was alive with culture, connection and fun. Families enjoyed rides, a petting zoo, performances, games and creative activities that placed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity and pride at the centre.

Beyond the celebrations, the day created a safe, culturally affirming space for families to gather, share yarns, and engage with local services. Community members shared powerful stories of the Stolen Generations, including the lived experiences of men from Kinchela Boys Home, reminding all in attendance of the strength, resilience and enduring impact of truth-telling.

For many families, the Fun Day was both a joyful outing for children and young people, and an important opportunity to connect with information, services and community support.

The NAIDOC Family Fun Day remains a cornerstone of AbSec's engagement strategy; a reminder that strong, connected communities and cultural pride are the best protections we can offer our children and young people.



- **1,800+ attendees** at Marrickville.
- **10+ cultural performances** and activities.
- **20+ service stalls** offering family support and information.
- Stories shared by Kinchela Boys Home survivors of the Stolen Generations.
- A safe, joyful, and culturally affirming day for children, young people and families.



Quarterly Sector Forums FY24/25

AbSec's Quarterly Sector Forums (QSF) remained a vital platform throughout FY25, bringing together ACCOs, government partners, academics and community voices to engage in open dialogue and collective problem-solving. Held four times a year, the forums provide a consistent space for truth-telling, knowledge-sharing, and strengthening partnerships across the child and family sector.

Each forum focused on themes identified by community, ensuring the agenda was grounded in lived experience and practical solutions. Key topics included:

- Housing instability and its direct impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families' involvement with the child protection system.
- Progress towards Aboriginal-led commissioning and co-design of services.
- System accountability and the importance in practice of Active Efforts to keep Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people safe and together with their families or restored to their families when they have been in OOHC.
- Truth-telling and stories of lived experience, particularly from children and young people in and leaving care.

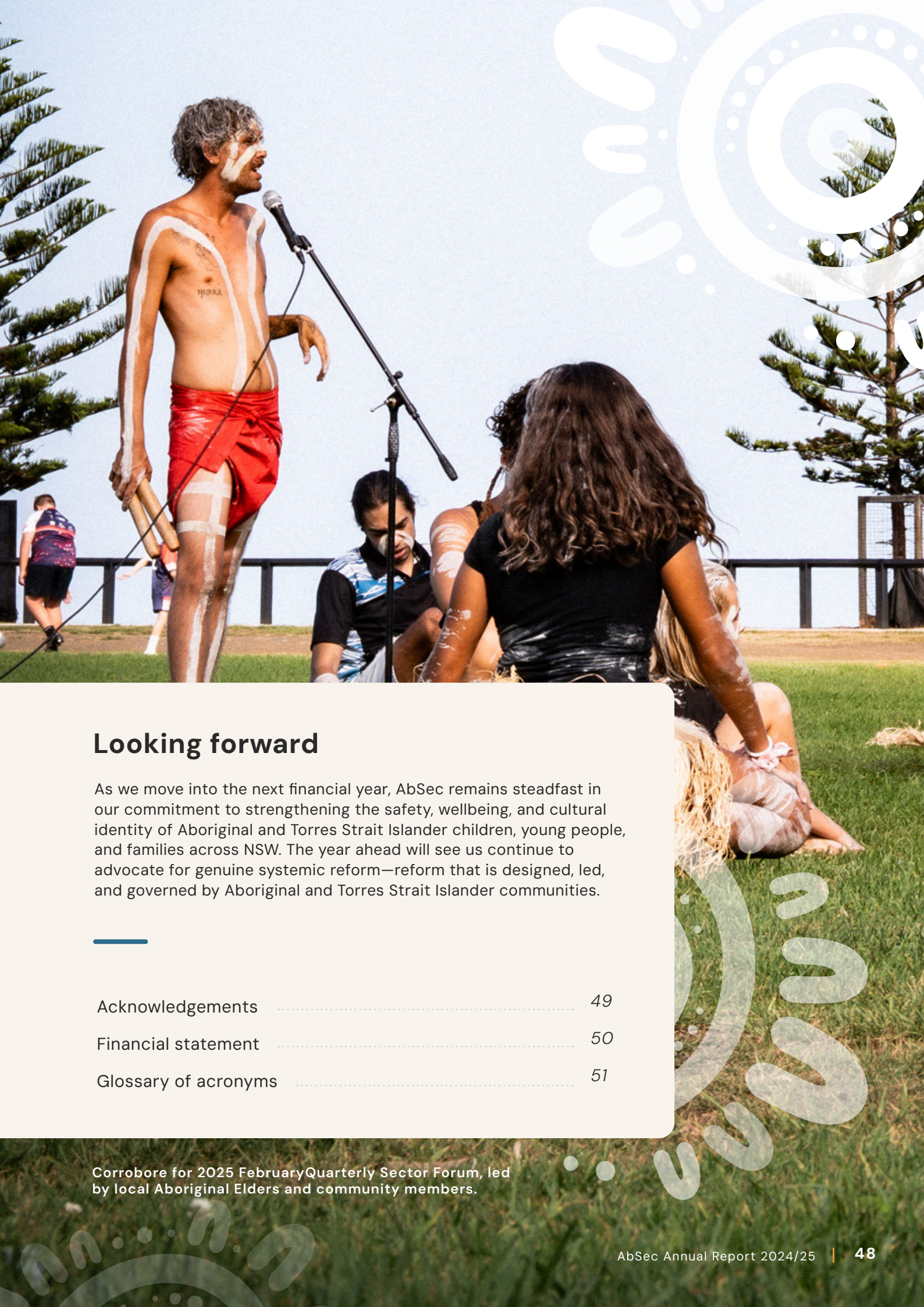
Across the year, forums also provided updates on *Family Is Culture: Five Years On*, SFOW, steps towards establishing a Child Protection Commission and the KYR project, ensuring the sector remained informed and engaged in reform efforts.

Beyond information sharing, the forums foster collaboration and solidarity. ACCOs share examples of their best practices, identify barriers in working with government agencies, and reinforce the message that ACCOs must be at the centre of solutions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families.

The forums are a core component of AbSec's engagement strategy. These ensure that community voices shape our advocacy, guide our partnerships, and hold the system accountable for real outcomes for children and young people.



- **4 forums** held across FY25.
- **500+ participants** engaged across the year.



Looking forward

As we move into the next financial year, AbSec remains steadfast in our commitment to strengthening the safety, wellbeing, and cultural identity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, and families across NSW. The year ahead will see us continue to advocate for genuine systemic reform—reform that is designed, led, and governed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

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Corroboree for 2025 February Quarterly Sector Forum, led by local Aboriginal Elders and community members.

Guided by the voices of our members, the expertise of our staff, and the wisdom of our Elders, we will continue to build strong partnerships, influence policy, and deliver programs that empower communities to lead their own solutions. This includes supporting the expansion of Aboriginal-led commissioning, embedding community governance in reform processes, and driving accountability to ensure that system change delivers real outcomes for families.

A significant milestone in this journey has been AbSec's relocation to Redfern—a place synonymous with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander activism, resilience, and self-determination. Establishing our home in Redfern represents more than a change of address; it is a symbolic return to the heart of community, where so much of the movement for Mob's rights and representation began. From this historic centre, we are better positioned to connect, collaborate, and continue the legacy of those who fought for our children and families to have a voice in their own futures.

Looking ahead, AbSec will deepen its focus on innovation, collaboration, and cultural leadership. We will continue to strengthen the capability of Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations, advocate for early intervention and prevention pathways, and promote holistic supports that keep families together, and children and young people connected to culture.

Our vision remains clear: to create lasting impact and shape a future where every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child and young person grows up safe, strong, and proud in their identity—surrounded by the love and support of family, community, and culture.

Acknowledgements

AbSec extends our deepest gratitude to our **community, Elders, carers, and dedicated staff**. The strength of our organisation is grounded in your commitment, cultural leadership, and enduring belief in our shared purpose—to keep children and young people safe, to keep families strong, and to ensure every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child and young person grows up surrounded by love, community, and culture.

We acknowledge our **CEO, John Leha, Chairperson, Petrice Manton, and our Board members** for their steadfast guidance and vision. We also recognise our **community partners**, whose collaboration and support continue to shape meaningful outcomes across the sector.

AbSec's members are the heartbeat of our organisation. They bring lived experience, cultural authority, and deep community connection to everything we do. Our members represent a network of ACCOs, carers, and individuals who share a commitment to building a better future for mob across NSW.

AbSec's staff are the driving force behind our vision. Their dedication, cultural integrity, and professional expertise ensure that our work reflects the values and voices of the communities we serve. We recognise their hard work and commitment as they walk this journey with integrity and purpose.

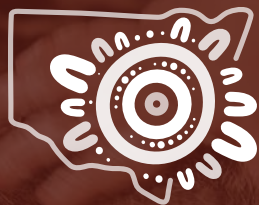
The expertise, patience, and cultural wisdom of all who engage with AbSec ensure that it remains true to our mission. We will continue to use our position as a peak body to strengthen partnerships, influence policy, and build systems that reflect the strength, identity, and self-determination of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, families, and communities.

Consolidated statement of financial position

As of 30 June 2025

	Notes	Economic entity 2025 (\$)	Economic entity 2024 (\$)	Chief entity 2025 (\$)	Chief entity 2024 (\$)
ASSETS					
Current assets					
Cash and cash equivalents	7	5,694,585	6,238,961	4,466,645	4,891,113
Financial assets	8	1,433,380	1,374,147	1,433,380	1,374,147
Trade and other receivables	9	843,368	113,530	1,883,004	1,373,058
Other current assets	10	111,293	1,510,062	105,868	1,506,431
Total current assets		8,082,626	9,236,700	7,888,897	9,144,749
Non-current assets					
Investments		-	-	20,000	20,000
Property, plant and equipment	11	5,050,306	4,124,860	5,050,306	4,124,860
Intangibles		20,000	20,000	-	-
Other non-current assets		44,222	44,221	44,222	44,222
Total non-current assets		5,114,528	4,189,081	5,114,528	4,189,082
TOTAL ASSETS		13,197,154	13,425,781	13,003,425	13,333,831
LIABILITIES					
Current liabilities					
Trade and other payables	12	397,539	591,996	397,205	592,469
Employee benefits	13	151,555	162,429	151,555	162,429
Lease liabilities	14	135,580	113,787	135,580	113,787
Other current liabilities	15	5,735,704	6,837,646	5,229,240	6,350,427
Total current liabilities		6,420,378	7,705,858	5,913,580	7,219,112
Non-current liabilities					
Employee benefits	13	53,097	22,077	53,097	22,077
Lease liabilities	14	423,687	529,948	423,687	529,948
Total non-current liabilities		476,784	552,025	476,784	552,025
TOTAL LIABILITIES		6,897,162	8,257,883	6,390,364	7,771,137
NET ASSETS		6,299,992	5,167,898	6,613,061	5,562,694
EQUITY					
Reserves		2,752,982	2,068,085	2,752,982	2,068,085
Retained Earnings		3,547,010	3,099,813	3,860,079	3,494,609
Total Equity		6,299,992	5,167,898	6,613,061	5,562,694

AARC	Aboriginal Authority for Restoring Children
AbSec	AbSec – NSW Child, Family and Community Peak Aboriginal Corporation
ACCO	Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisation
ACCM	Aboriginal Community-Controlled Mechanism
AHC	Aboriginal Housing Company
AHO	Aboriginal Housing Office
AGP	Aboriginal Governance Panel
ALS	Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT) Limited
AMS	Aboriginal Medical Service
ATSICPP	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young Persons Principle
CAPO	Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations
CtG	Closing the Gap
DCJ	NSW Department of Communities and Justice
FACSIAR	Family and Community Services Insights, Analysis and Research
FIC	Family is Culture
GMAR	Grandmothers Against Removals NSW
IPART	Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal
KBHAC	Kinchela Boys Home Aboriginal Corporation
KWY	Kornar Winmil Yunti
KYR	Know Your Rights
LDC	AbSec Learning & Development Centre
NSW	New South Wales
OAMS	Orange Aboriginal Medical Service
OOHC	Out-of-home care
POCLS	Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study
QATSICPP	Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak
QSF	Quarterly Sector Forum
SFOW	Strong Families, Our Way
VACCA	Victorian Aboriginal Child and Community Agency



AbSec

NSW Child, Family & Community
Peak Aboriginal Corporation

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

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