



AbSec

NSW Child, Family & Community
Peak Aboriginal Corporation

MEDIA RELEASE

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NSW Ombudsman delivers damning findings on Intensive Therapeutic Care program, reinforcing the urgent need for an independent commission

AbSec – NSW Child, Family and Community Peak Aboriginal Corporation – is deeply concerned by the NSW Ombudsman’s report into *Intensive Therapeutic Care* (ITC), tabled in Parliament yesterday, which exposes serious and ongoing failures that place vulnerable children at risk and says it reinforces the urgent need for an independent *Child Safety and Wellbeing Commission* in New South Wales.

The Ombudsman’s report reveals a system lacking basic safeguards, clear accountability and effective oversight for children with the highest and most complex needs. Many of these children are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, and the system failures identified in the report show that they are at serious and ongoing risk within a system that is meant to protect them.

AbSec CEO John Leha said, “These findings make clear that internal oversight is not working. Children are falling through gaps, plans are missing, and no one is independently checking whether decisions are safe or appropriate.”

The Ombudsman also found there is no minimum standard of care across Intensive Therapeutic Care and no clear oversight for children who leave placements for extended periods, despite them being at high risk of homelessness and exploitation. The DCJ does not routinely monitor whether the ten Essential Elements of Therapeutic Care are being implemented, or whether children are achieving safe and therapeutic outcomes.

The report further identified serious gaps in health, education and cultural planning. Alarming, only 42 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children had an approved Cultural Plan, or one in progress. This should be 100 per cent. Education outcomes were equally poor, with just 13 per cent of children known to be attending an education setting and many others not attending or having unknown attendance.

Additionally, there is no independent mechanism in place to review placement decisions or advocate for children in ITC, meaning children’s voices and placement preferences are not consistently heard or considered. The report concluded that the DCJ “has a responsibility to actively assist agencies to address systemic barriers that hinder their capacity to deliver therapeutic care to children”, and that “DCJ could and should do more in this area”.

Mr Leha said the lack of an independent mechanism to review placement decisions or advocate for children in ITC leaves them exposed. “This report makes it clear that the current Intensive Therapeutic Care system is failing all children, including particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

NSW must stop propping up a broken model and invest in Aboriginal-led solutions that have long been proven to work.”

AbSec continues the call for the immediate establishment of a *Child Safety and Wellbeing Commission* in New South Wales to make government actions visible and accountable in a way that DCJ internal processes cannot i.e. the Commission can review decisions, investigate systemic failures, set standards for practice, & publicly report on performance. This is crucial to building public trust in a system that another inquiry has found is not protecting our state’s most traumatised children and at most risk of exploitation and poor outcomes but placing them at risk.

The report can be read in full on the [NSW Ombudsman website](#).

About AbSec

AbSec is the peak Aboriginal organisation in NSW dedicated to empowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities by advocating for the rights, safety, and wellbeing of our children, young people and families. We build strength and resilience by supporting community-led solutions, shaping policy, and driving reforms that ensure every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child and young person grows up strong in culture and identity.

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