



Jenny Mikakos MP

Minister for Families and Children
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Natalie Lewis and Gerry Moore
Co-Chairs, Family Matters – Strong communities. Strong culture.
Family Matters C/o SNAICC
PO Box 1445
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Dear Ms Lewis and Mr Moore

Thank you for your letter requesting information to inform the Family Matters 2017 Annual Report. I apologise for the delay in responding.

The Andrews Labor Government shares your commitment to eliminating the over representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children placed in out-of-home care and to improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

I have attached for your information (Attachment 1) a short overview of the current strategies being implemented by my department to reduce the over representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the child protection system. Data relating to Aboriginal families' use of family support services is also included.

Unfortunately, my department has advised that data relating to payments to Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations is insufficiently delineated for it to be meaningful. Attached, however, is recurrent expenditure data for child protection and out-of-home care services.

As you note in your letter, there are a number of national data gaps in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Reunification data is one such gap. I have been advised that my department does not currently have access to reliable reunification data.

I trust the information provided will be of assistance and thank you again for your work in this area of vital importance. Please contact Mr John Cheshire, Principal Project Officer, Child Protection by phone on 9096 7806 should you any require further assistance.

Yours sincerely



Hon Jenny Mikakos MP
Minister for Families and Children
Minister for Youth Affairs

15/8 / 2017

Encl:

Key strategies currently being undertaken by the Department of Health and Human Services Victoria

The Victorian Government is committed to improving the safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal children and families and to reducing the over representation of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care. The government has implemented a range of initiatives to address over-representation.

Aboriginal Children's Forum

An Aboriginal Children's Summit was convened by Minister Mikakos on 13-14 August 2015 with the key Victorian Aboriginal organisations and other agencies involved in the delivery of statutory services to Aboriginal children and young people. The purpose of the Summit was to establish the format, priorities and Terms of Reference for an ongoing Forum to address the needs of Aboriginal children and young people involved in child protection. The Aboriginal Children's Forum (ACF) was established as a result.

The ACF is a representative forum of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), the community sector, and government convened quarterly. The forum was established to drive the safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal children and young people in, or at risk of entering, out-of-home care (OOHC). The ACF is co-chaired by Minister Mikakos and a CEO from an ACCO.

Transfer of targets and funding from non-Aboriginal providers to ACCOs

The department, in partnership with the ACF will utilise a transition strategy, timeline and action plan to implement the transfer of case management of Aboriginal children and resources to ACCOs over an agreed period of time.

The ACF has set the following Key Performance Targets for the transfer of case management of Aboriginal children to ACCOs:

'A progressive increase in the proportion of Aboriginal children and young people in out of home care case managed by an ACCO from 14 per cent in 2016, to 30 per cent in 2017, to 80 per cent in 2018 and 100% in 2021'

Currently, approximately one fifth of all children in out-of-home care are Aboriginal. The transfer of the responsibility for these children and young people from the department and Community Service Organisations (CSOs) to ACCOs, therefore, represents a significant change in the out-of-home care system. It also represents a key element of the Victorian Government's commitment to self-determination and self-management for all Aboriginal Victorians.

The department is working in partnership with ACCOs and CSOs to develop a robust, transparent and sustainable framework that enables Aboriginal communities to assume increased responsibility for vulnerable Aboriginal children and young people in care.

Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care

Section 18 of the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* enables the Secretary of the department to authorise the Principal Officer of an Aboriginal agency to perform specified functions and powers conferred on the Secretary in relation to an Aboriginal child subject to a protection order. *Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care*, the operationalisation of section 18, is a key provision supporting the principle of Aboriginal self-management and self-determination.

The 2017-18 State Budget committed \$1.1 million to support implementation of Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care. The department is working in partnership with the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) and other ACCOs to develop the systems and processes necessary for the first authorisations to occur in the second half of 2017.

Improving responses to Aboriginal children – new model for cultural planning

The Children, Youth and Families Act was amended in March 2016 to require a personalised cultural plan be provided to each Aboriginal child in out-of-home care.

A cultural plan aims to strengthen and build a child's connection to their Aboriginal community and culture. It outlines the goals and tasks needed to do this.

The 2016-17 State Budget provided an additional \$5.3 million over two years to develop and implement a new operational model for cultural planning. A revised model has been co-designed with the Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People, ACCOs and CSOs.

The new model requires cultural plans to be endorsed by an ACCO CEO and includes funding for ACCOs to employ Aboriginal Cultural Planners to assist care teams to develop and implement cultural plans as well as a statewide co-coordinator employed by VACCA. The new model also includes the development and management of a cultural information portal where information can be shared with professionals and carers to assist with cultural planning and the building of children's connections with their community.

Training for child protection practitioners and sector partners on cultural planning has also been provided.

Further initiatives include:

- Establishment of a Statewide Principal Practitioner for Aboriginal Children to lead practice within the department
- \$5.3 million over two years to support Aboriginal foster care and kinship care
- \$3.6 million over two years to expand the Aboriginal Child Specialist Advice and Support Service that provides consultation to child protection on all significant decisions.
- Procedural reform and practice guidance to improve the early and timely identification of a child's Aboriginality
- Provision of cultural awareness training to the child protection workforce
- Improving the number of children placed with Aboriginal carers by focussing efforts to identify Aboriginal kinship carers and using genograms to map the child's extended family and community
- Developing practice advice to ensure no child is de-identified as being Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander without consultation with the Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People and endorsement at a very senior departmental level
- Review of the functioning of the Aboriginal family-led decision making program.

Recurrent expenditure for child protection and out-of-home care

Service	2015-16 (\$'000)
Family support services	143,950
Intensive family support services	95,236
Child protection services	227,102
Out of home care services	492,066
Total	958,354

Aboriginal families' use of family support services

Service	2015-16 (Families)
Child FIRST and Integrated Family Services	2,766
Cradle to Kinder	122
Stronger Families	138