

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 care. The government has implemented a range of initiatives to address over-representation.

The Roadmap for Reform: children and families

Guided by the principles of Aboriginal self-determination and self-management the reform involves fundamental system change over time as well as immediate improvements of the child and family service system to ensure that Victoria will be a state with strong families and children who are safe, healthy and well. Key reform directions include:

- addressing immediate concerns of carers
- improving services to Aboriginal children in care
- increased emphasis on early intervention
- implementing recommendations of the *Royal Commission into Family Violence* to improve the safety of Aboriginal women and children.

The *Children and Families Reform* team is working towards creating a unified operational and service delivery framework with interconnected operating models, enabling children and families to move seamlessly between services, including Victorian Aboriginal communities. The reform also creates the opportunity for Aboriginal communities to lead and create local solutions through design approaches where Aboriginal people take carriage of designing and delivering policies and programs.

Aboriginal Children's Forum

Operating since 2016 the Aboriginal Children's Forum (ACF), held quarterly is convened by the Minister for Families and Children and co-chaired with a nominated Chief Executive Officer (CEO) from an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO). The forum brings together ACCO's, CSO's and department staff to address the over-representation of Aboriginal children in care by delivering on priorities identified in the submission *Koorie Kids: Growing Strong in their Culture*. From June 2018, the ACF has agreed to adopt the priorities and actions outlined in the *Wungurilwil Gapgapduir: Aboriginal Children and Families Agreement*.

Wungurilwil Gapgapduir

Wungurilwil Gapgapduir: Children and Families Agreement signed by the Minister for Families and Children and Aboriginal and community representatives on 26 April 2018, sets out a vision for the future where all Aboriginal children and young people in Victoria are safe, resilient and thriving and living in culturally rich and strong Aboriginal families and communities.

The 2018-19 Victorian Budget includes \$53.3 million to support implementation of the *Wungurilwil Gapgapduir*.

Transfer of case management and funding from non-Aboriginal providers to ACCOs

In partnership with the ACF the department is gradually transferring case management of Aboriginal children and resources to ACCOs.

The department has agreed to targets set by the ACF to transfer case management of Aboriginal children in care to ACCOs by the end of 2021.

At June 2018, 28 per cent of Aboriginal children and young people on a contractable order in care were managed by an ACCO. This is an 11 per cent increase since 2017. The transfer of the responsibility for these children and young people from the department and Community Service Organisations (CSOs) to ACCOs, represents a significant change in the 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 enables the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services to authorise the Aboriginal principal officer of an Aboriginal agency to undertake specified functions and powers in relation to a Children's Court protection order for an Aboriginal child or young person. *Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care*, the operationalisation of section 18, is a key provision supporting the principle of Aboriginal self-management and self-determination.

Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care was launched in November 2017, with the first authorisations made to the Principal Officer of the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA).

A rural trial pilot is underway in the Dja Dja Wurrung region by Bendigo and District Aboriginal Co-operative (BDAC) with the intention to move to authorisation of BDAC under section 18 later in 2018.

Both VACCA and BDAC have achieved an increase in family reunifications through strong family engagement with the program.

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 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.

A new model has been co-designed with the Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People, ACCOs and CSOs. The 2018-19 State Budget provides \$11.9 million over four years for the new model.

The new model requires cultural plans 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:

- In June 2018 the department appointed the first Aboriginal Statewide Principal Practitioner dedicated to leading practice improvement within the department.
- Expansion of the Aboriginal Child Specialist Advice and Support Service that provides consultation to child protection on all significant decisions through growth funding of \$8.9 million over four years.
- Provision of cultural awareness training to the child protection workforce.
- Procurement of a genealogical service for children involved with Child Protection is underway.

Table 1. Recurrent expenditure for child protection and out-of-home care.

Service	2016-17(\$'000)
Family support services	165,161
Intensive family support services	114,820
Child protection services	242,183
Out of home care services	566,526
Total	1,088,690

Source: 2016-17 Report On Government Services.

Table 2. Aboriginal families use of family support services.

Service	2016-17 Families
Child FIRST and Integrated Family Services (BP3)	2,766
Cradle to Kinder	154
Stronger Families	165

Source: Budget Paper No. 3: Federal Financial Relations and 2016-17 local database reporting.

Table 3. Permanency data: Indigenous children subject to a permanent care order at 30 June 2017, number and % who are placed with an indigenous carer.

Carer indigenous status	Children	Percentage
Indigenous	99	31%
Not Indigenous	91	28%
Not stated	134	41%
	324	100%

Source: 2016-17 local database reporting.

Table 4. Permanency data: Children subject to a permanent care order or equivalent.

	Number and rate per 1000 of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children	Number and rate per 100 of non-Indigenous children	% of Indigenous children with an Indigenous carer
Children subject to a permanent care order or equivalent	324 14.9/1000	2,408 1.8/100	31%

Source: 2016-17 local database reporting.

Table 5. Adoption data: Children subject to a permanent care order.

	Number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children	Number of non-Indigenous children	Number of Indigenous children adopted by an Indigenous person
Children adopted 2016-17	0	23	0

Source: 2016-17 local database reporting.

Table 6. Data on reunification/restoration and reconnection

Financial year	Metric	Total Frequency	Indigenous children	All other children
2016-17	Children admitted to care and protection orders (ROGS)	6,391	1,326	5,065
	Children admitted to care and protection orders for the first time	3,116	584	2,532
	Number of children who were reunified / restored to birth parents within 12 months of admission	2,057	417	1,640
	Overall number of children who were reunified / restored to birth	2,936	592	2,344