

Department of Communities' Strategies and Initiatives

The Western Australian (WA) Government is committed to creating opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and their communities. In February 2019, Premier Mark McGowan announced the Government's 'Our Priorities Sharing Prosperity' program. Our Priorities outlines six key outcome areas which aim to deliver better outcomes for all Western Australians. Two of the key outcome areas, 'A Bright Future' and 'Aboriginal Wellbeing', set out tasks to implement real, positive change for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

The State Government is working in partnership with Aboriginal communities to have a positive impact on the cultural, social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal people, their families and communities. Services are being delivered in partnership with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) to provide earlier and more intensive family support to divert children from the child protection system and reduce the number of children entering care.

In 2018 and 2019, progress has been made against priority reform areas through new initiatives or projects which address the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care. A number of these have been implemented or are currently being developed. Some of the key work currently being undertaken is detailed below.

Aboriginal Services and Practice Framework 2016 - 2018

The Aboriginal Services and Practice Framework 2016 – 2018 (the Framework) has been integral to the work underpinning the child protection reforms within WA to improve outcomes for Aboriginal children and families. Options are currently being explored regarding a future Framework which will incorporate current projects and strategies and reflect the WA Government's focus on integrated service design.

Aboriginal Advisory Panel

An Aboriginal Advisory Panel to the Minister for Child Protection; Women's Interests; Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence; Community Services, is under development and will convene in 2019 to provide cultural and expert advice to inform government decisions affecting Aboriginal children, families and communities.

The Early Years Initiative

The Early Years Initiative is an unprecedented 10 year partnership between the WA Government, Minderoo Foundation and the Telethon Institute. \$49.3 million has been invested in the Early Years Initiative which responds to research indicating that one in five children aged four years and under in WA is considered developmentally vulnerable, as measured by the Australian Early Development Census. It supports local communities to implement a range of evidence-based changes to make better use of existing services and supports for families with young children.

In December 2018, it was announced the Central Great Southern Shires of Katanning, Broomehill-Tambellup, Kojonup and Gnowangerup will work with State Government services and researchers to develop new ways to improve the health and wellbeing of its youngest residents. The chosen communities will develop and implement their own strategies, backed by evidence, to improve child development and outcomes. In 2019, three additional communities will be announced to take part in the Early Years Initiative.

Regional Services Reform

The East and West Kimberley District Leadership Groups continue to work with government, service providers, Aboriginal organisations and local leadership to find solutions to complex local issues and to help improve the well-being of families in the Kimberley.

The District Leadership Groups include representatives from State and Commonwealth governments, local government, the community services sector, ACCOs and industry. The two groups identified three regional priority areas to collaboratively focus on, to deliver responsive, integrated place-based solutions, including:

- Collectively addressing family violence – the groups will locally lead the implementation of the Kimberly Family Violence Regional Plan 2015-2020
- Supporting the early years – the groups will provide leadership to early learning and development initiatives at key locations, and
- Targeted support for vulnerable children and young people – the groups will lead the development of integrated and tailored earlier support services for young people and their families

West Pilbara Plan

The State Government continues to work closely with Aboriginal elders and community members. Under the West Pilbara Plan, the State Government has committed to focus a collectively and coordinated approach in six priority areas:

1. More support for children, carers and families
2. A safer community for children
3. Tackling alcohol and drugs
4. Greater engagement in school and work
5. Healing the community, and
6. Reprioritising government contracts and services.

The West Pilbara Plan will be delivered with better coordination of effort and expertise across a number of agencies. The plan is an opportunity for agencies to better prioritise, focus and coordinate their existing programs to achieve the best outcomes for the community.

Building Safe and Strong Families: Earlier Intervention and Family Support Strategy

The procurement of the Intensive Family Support Services, Family Support Networks, and the Aboriginal In-Home Support Service are key elements of the Early Intervention and Family Support Strategy which focuses on four areas:

- Delivering shared outcomes through collective effort
- A culturally competent system
- Diverting families from the child protection system, and
- Preventing children entering out-of-home care.

The Department of Communities is funding Wungening Moort (Healing Families), a consortium of ACCOs through a restricted tender process, to deliver the Aboriginal In-Home Support Service. Under this initiative, the Department of Communities is providing \$20.7 million over three years and five months, for intensive in-home practical support for up to 240 high risk Aboriginal families per annum, in the Perth Metropolitan area.

Intensive Family Support Services are funded \$55.9 million over five years, for intensive in-home practical support across 17 service sites State-wide. There are a variety of service providers, who each partner with an ACCO. Aboriginal family referrals are prioritised.

Family Support Networks are funded almost \$20.1 million over five years, to provide a co-ordination role to vulnerable children and families who find it difficult to navigate the service system. They comprise two service streams including Assessment and Coordination and Intensive Case Management and operate in the Perth metropolitan area. There are three lead service providers, who each partner with an ACCO. Aboriginal family referrals are prioritised in both service streams.

Statutory Review of the *Children and Community Services Act 2004*

The recommendations of the Statutory Review align with the Department of Communities' current work to review the Permanency Planning Policy and related practice guidance. The Department of Communities is finalising its Stability and Connection Policy, to replace its Permanency Planning Policy. Stability and connection planning concerns much more than a child's care arrangement. It includes alignment with all five elements of the Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle and a focus on relational permanence. Linked closely with this policy and relevant legislative recommendations, further work is occurring in relation to cultural support planning, which is identified as an important mechanism for improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Building a Better Future: Out-of-Home Care Reform in Western Australia

The Out-of-Home Care Reform Project Reference Group (the Reference Group) is to provide advice and support on the design and implementation of a better out-of-home care and family support system within WA that:

- Is focused on the needs of the child
- Delivers improved outcomes for children in care
- Is a safe care system which is held to high standards
- Is culturally safe for all children in care, especially Aboriginal children
- Is a co-ordinated and flexible service system
- Delivers value for money
- Incorporates the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Child Sexual Abuse, and
- Incorporates WA's commitments to the Fourth Action Plan under the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020.

The role of the Reference Group is to provide strategic advice and support to the Service Delivery Program Board on reform of the out-of-home care system and related services that impact on the rates of children entering care within WA.

In particular, it will advise and support the Out-of-Home Care Reform Project to procure new models of out-of-home care from the community services sector (the Sector) to enable delivery of the agreed outcomes for children, particularly Aboriginal children in the care of the CEO who are placed in care arrangements provided by the Sector.

The Family Care Support Service commenced in October 2018 to provide support for family carers where there is a risk of children being moved to non-family care arrangements. Intensive in-home practical support is provided to stabilise and maintain family care arrangement and Aboriginal children and their family carers are prioritised.

Family carers, including grandparents, aunts and uncles, make up for more than 40 per cent of carers for children in out-of-home care. The service will help these carers to improve parenting routines and build capacity to safely care for the child or young person. This includes supporting the carer and child or young person to develop safe networks and remain connected to family, country and community.

The Native Title for Children in the Care Policy will be implemented in 2019. This Policy aims to connect Aboriginal children in care to any entitlements arising from current or future Native Title claims in WA. Future planning includes working with key stakeholders and district staff to progress practice alignment in relation to Native Title for Aboriginal children in out-of-home care.

Family and Domestic Violence

Aboriginal Family Safety Summit

In February 2019, the Aboriginal Family Safety Summit (the Summit) was held by the Department of Communities with experts and leaders in Aboriginal family safety to determine next steps for progressing a dedicated approach to Aboriginal family safety. The Summit is part of the Department of Communities' 10 Year Strategy for Reducing Family and Domestic Violence.