

Western Australia - Department of Communities Strategies and Initiatives since the last report

The Western Australian Government is committed to working with Aboriginal¹ people for better outcomes and is developing a whole-of-government Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy to make this commitment a reality. The strategy will be long-term, high-level, and built around Aboriginal people's views, priorities, voices, and aspirations.

The Aboriginal Advisory Panel has provided cultural expert advice to the Minister for Child Protection; Women's Interests; Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence; Community Services on the Children and Community Services Amendment Bill 2019, the Aboriginal Family Safety Strategy, investment in Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations and child protection reform.

As outlined below, the Department of Communities (Communities) is undertaking a number of initiatives to improve adherence to the five elements of the Aboriginal child placement principle: Prevention, Participation, Partnership, Placement and Connection.

A priority for Communities is improving the agency's cultural competency through:

- Aboriginal Inclusion and Engagement Strategy which aims to promote inclusivity and connectedness through enhancing Aboriginal cultural engagement and awareness.
- Aboriginal Cultural Capability Reform Program which will lead the development of a culturally competent organisation that recognises and appreciates Aboriginal values and traditions and understands how culture influences behaviours, interpretations and evaluations of behaviours.

Communities, in partnership with the Aboriginal Cultural Council², has commenced stakeholder engagement to inform the development of a 10 year Roadmap to address the unacceptably high number of Aboriginal children in care. It will provide a long-term vision and actions to reduce the rate of Aboriginal children and families in contact with the child protection system, and to improve their safety and wellbeing outcomes.

In 2019, the Children and Community Services Amendment Bill 2019 (the Bill) was tabled in Parliament. On 25 June 2020 it was referred to the Standing Committee on Legislation who tabled the report in the Legislative Council on 10 September 2020.

The amendments in the Bill seek to improve the outcomes for Aboriginal children in care by building stronger connections to family, culture, community and Country, and promote greater transparency and accountability. New requirements include³:

¹ Please note that within Western Australia, the term Aboriginal is used in preference to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, in recognition that Aboriginal people are the original inhabitants of Western Australia. Use of the term Aboriginal within this document refers to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

² Communities established the Aboriginal Cultural Council in October 2019 to provide cultural advice on a range of matters. It works closely with the Leadership Team.

³[https://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/Parliament/Bills.nsf/B283F888C69DAC85482584C0001481AA/\\$File/Bill157-2.pdf](https://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/Parliament/Bills.nsf/B283F888C69DAC85482584C0001481AA/$File/Bill157-2.pdf)

- provision of cultural support plans in written proposals to the Children's Court;
- the Children's Court must consider a report from certain Aboriginal agencies or persons about whether the Protection Order (Special Guardianship) should be made for an Aboriginal child with a non-Aboriginal carer(s), and
- in addition to family and Aboriginal staff, an approved Aboriginal Representative Organisation will be consulted prior to making placement decisions and in the development and review of cultural support plans.

In August 2020 the Minister for Child Protection announced funding of \$715,000 for two years to pilot Aboriginal Family Led Decision Making (AFLDM). The trial will empower Aboriginal families to make decisions about their children in a culturally safe way. The pilot will be led and co-designed by Aboriginal people and will complement changes to the *Children and Community Services Act 2004*.

Planning and consultations are underway to inform the establishment of a Specialist Child Protection Unit in Communities. Its key role will be to strengthen Communities internal child protection expertise and professional practice to improve stewardship of the child protection system and better support children in care, their families and child protection workers.

The Aboriginal Family Safety Strategy is being developed to address the disproportionate impact of family violence on Aboriginal women, children, families and communities. The Strategy will build on outcomes of the Aboriginal Family Safety Summit, which brought together Aboriginal leaders and experts to discuss the dedicated approach to Aboriginal family safety.

Details of the Building Safe and Strong Families: Earlier Intervention and Family Support Strategy was provided for the 2019 Family Matters Report. Work in this important area and out of home care reform are continuing.

A revised Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCO) Strategy and Implementation Plan is currently under development through a co-design process inclusive of ACCOs, Department of Communities divisions and other government agencies. It is anticipated that the strategy will be ready for implementation in early 2021. The ACCO Strategy will work to empower and promote a strong and driven ACCO sector, by creating an equitable system that delivers culturally secure outcomes.