



Safe Children, Strong Families, Supportive Communities

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The Hon. Gladys Berejiklian MP
Premier of NSW
52 Martin Place
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Premier,

The impacts of COVID-19 have caused unprecedented disruption to the not-for-profit sector as well as a significant increase in demand for services. This is particularly the case in regional and remote areas.

You are no doubt familiar with the work of peak organisations AbSec, ACWA and Fams to support delivery of quality services by non-government, not-for-profit organisations working with vulnerable children, young people, families and communities, including providing coordination and leadership in the policy development, advice and advocacy spaces.

Our current key area of concern is the precarious funding for intensive support programs to keep children and young people safe at home and stop them escalating into the out of home care system. Our priority at this time is to enable all services to continue providing essential support, particularly in rural and remote areas. With no funding certainty beyond 31 December 2020, and the NSW Government Budget not being announced until 17 November, local organisations are not confident that they can deliver intensive support programs with fidelity and in line with best practice.

Further, with the significant overrepresentation of Aboriginal children and young people generally in the child protection system and statutory out of home care, the current situation is of substantial concern to us and the organisations we represent.

We were pleased the NSW Government recently made a new positive commitment in relation to the *Close the Gap* agreement, specifically: "By 2031, reduce the rate of over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care by 45 per cent."

We fear this target is unachievable without immediate and long term funding for appropriate early intervention services.

Our collective experience tells us that delay in the announcement of forward funding presents long lasting negative consequences, including:

- erosion of participating families' confidence in services;
- reduced capacity within organisations to service vulnerable families and the increased pressure on crisis responses that will inevitably result;
- increased numbers of children and young people entering the OOHC system as safety issues are unable to be mitigated, for example, where families have to exit an intensive support program prior to its conclusion;

- increased unemployment, particularly of women in regional and rural NSW, as the capacity to retain social work and child protection staff is directly related to funding certainty to meet legal workforce obligations; and
- long-term social and financial costs to children young people, families, communities, non-government organisations and government that are impossible to quantify.

Recently, correspondence was prepared by ACWA – which included four case studies – for the Hon. Gareth Ward, Minister for Communities and Justice, to highlight the potential impact on vulnerable children and young people if funding certainty is not immediately guaranteed for intensive support services within his portfolio. The case studies and the issues contained in ACWA’s correspondence are endorsed by AbSec and Fams (a copy is attached).

We acknowledge and recognise this is an extremely busy time for both you and the Government, however of course you will agree that ensuring the continuation of critical child protection services to keep children and young people safe must be a priority.

To arrange a meeting or if you or your office would like any further information, the signatories to this letter can be contacted. We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

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