

FAQs for Carers

Aboriginal Out-of-Home Care (OOHC) transition project

This document is for <Agency Name> Authorised Carers. It helps explain what the 'Transition' commitment means and how <Agency Name> will support children, their families and carers during this process.

What's the purpose of the Aboriginal OOHC transition project?

In 2012 the NSW Government committed to ensuring that all Aboriginal children in OOHC would be cared for by carers who are supported by Aboriginal community-controlled organisations (ACCOs).

In NSW, Aboriginal children make up over 45% of the total OOHC population yet only 20% of these children are cared for by ACCOs. The purpose of the Aboriginal OOHC transition project is to facilitate the process of progressively transferring the case management arrangements for Aboriginal children in OOHC to the most suitable ACCO in their area.

What is the Transition commitment?

The Transition commitment is a promise from <Agency Name> to progressively step away from providing care to Aboriginal children and in doing so, transferring that support to come from ACCOs. It is a commitment that is supported in a formal partnership with SNAICC – National Voice for our Children. SNAICC is the peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Australia. This transition is also supported by AbSec, the NSW Aboriginal Child, Family and Community peak organisation, and the Association of Children's Welfare Agencies (ACWA).

This is not just a commitment <Agency Name> is making. Other non-Aboriginal agencies that provide out-of-home care services in NSW will also be transitioning services delivery for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children and young people to Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations from 2023.

Why is it important for Aboriginal carers and children to be supported by ACCOs?

Aboriginal children in OOHC need strong connections to their kin, community, country, and culture to help them build a stronger sense of identity and belonging, especially as they grow into adults and start exploring who they are and where they come from. ACCOs are best equipped to facilitate cultural connection, safety and support.

Ensuring that Aboriginal children and their carers have access to culturally safe care is a priority for the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ), and peak bodies for the OOHC sector, AbSec and ACWA. We are all working closely together to achieve this important goal.

What is <Agency Name> doing?

In New South Wales, <Agency Name> will be progressively transferring services to Aboriginal children to accredited Aboriginal controlled out-of-home care agencies from <Year>. To achieve this, we will partner with a range of accredited Aboriginal Community Controlled out-of-home care service agencies in New South Wales, which have been confirmed by the NSW Children's Guardian to meet the Child Safe Standards for Permanent Care (2015).

We will work with children, carers and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations in each community to transition each child and young person in out-of-home care to the most appropriate local organisation for them.

In most cases, this will include transfer of carer authorisation for children's existing authorised carers to the relevant Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations. We will support you to understand what this may mean for you as a carer.

<Agency Name> will discuss the transition process with you and the children in your care, and work with you to develop an individual transfer plan. <Agency Name> will address any questions that you may have about the transition process.

Why is <Agency Name> transitioning service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people?

We have made this commitment because Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations are best placed to deliver out-of-home care services that prioritise the unique rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people to hold strong connections to their kin, culture and community. Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations also understand how to reconnect Aboriginal children and families to culture where that connection has been disrupted when they come into care.

This is an important step to help achieve *Closing the Gap* targets and the concerning over-representation of Aboriginal children in child protection and out of home care. A substantial body of research shows Aboriginal children will achieve better outcomes in the long term if they are supported to grow in culture and with the support of their Aboriginal communities.

Will all Aboriginal children and their carers transfer?

All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in statutory care will be transferred to ACCOs –this includes statutory foster care and relative/kinship care. As carers, you understand better than most how important it is to reduce the disruption to a child's placement, which is why it's important for carers to transfer with children and young people in their care as soon as it is possible to do so.

Can I choose the agency to transfer to?

Your caseworker will talk to you about which ACCOs are offering placements in your area, so you know which ones are ready to welcome new carers and children. In some areas, there may only be one ACCO available to take on case management, but where there is more than one, we will work with you to decide which agency is the best fit for your child's needs. For example, if you are caring for a child with a disability, then that is likely to be the agency best able to meet your child's specific health and support needs.

In some parts of NSW, work is still being done to establish ACCOs and allow them sufficient time to become accredited by the Children's Guardian. While this is happening, you will continue to receive support from us and can participate in all the activities, events, and training to ensure a smooth transfer from one agency to another.

Will I need to be assessed again as a carer?

Under the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Regulation 2012 (NSW)*, each agency must make its own assessment and authorisation decision for carers it is working with, so there will be an assessment process as part of the transfer.

However, we are working with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation partners to streamline this process to make it as quick and simple as possible, while still giving the Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation the best information possible to support you and the children in your care.

Will my carer allowance change?

For most carers, the allowance you receive is unlikely to change. Agencies provide about the same baseline allowances to carers, but these can vary based on the age and needs of individual children and young people.

The carer allowance you receive will be reviewed in preparation for the transition, to ensure that it is correct for the child or young person you support.

As part of the transition process, you can discuss the allowance you receive with your current Case Manager and the Case Manager of the Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation you will be transferring to.

Will I still get the same services?

All accredited out-of-home care services in New South Wales, including both <Agency Name> and the Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations we are partnering with, provide services in line with the quality benchmarks set out in the Child Safe Standards for Permanent Care (2015).

Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations have the additional ability to ensure culturally responsive and connected services that are so important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander children and young people. We will work with everyone involved to make sure the transition as smooth as possible.

All children in statutory care will have their rights upheld and decisions will centre on their wellbeing throughout the transition process, including:

- maintaining stability wherever possible
- keeping sibling groups together
- ensuring the right supports are in place for children with additional needs.

What can I expect in the transfer process?

We will talk with you individually about how the transfer will work for the child and young person in your care and for you as a valued carer and provide information about the Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation we will support you to transfer to.

Remember, you are not alone! With your agreement, we will personally introduce you to a Case Manager from the relevant Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation, so you can get to know them and ask any questions you may have.

The Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation will provide you with all the information about their service, including who to speak to in an emergency, how to make a claim for reimbursement and will talk with you how you would like to receive information.

Your new ACCO will also discuss with you how you would like to receive information in future. ACCOs will also let you know about the events and activities you can become involved with to meet other carers and establish additional support networks.

When will I find out about the transfer?

Your caseworker will also provide you with advice on how the process is rolling out in your area.

What if I don't want to transfer to an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation?

We encourage all carers of Aboriginal children and young people to transfer to an ACCO because this is in the best interests of the child and their right to cultural connection, safety and support. We strongly believe that ACCOs are in the best position to foster the development of a positive sense of identity and wellbeing for Aboriginal children.

For more information

If you have any questions or would like to know more about the Aboriginal OOHC Transition project, please speak to your caseworker or Area Manager in the first instance.