MEDIA RELEASE

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Association of Children's Welfare Agencies welcomes ban on unsuitable emergency accommodation for children in out-of-home care

The Association of Children's Welfare Agencies (ACWA) welcomes the NSW Government's ban on the use of motels and caravan parks as emergency accommodation for children and young people in out-of-home care and encourages greater collaboration on solutions to complex issues faced within the child protection system. ACWA and not-for-profit providers of out-of-home care have long called for an end to the use of unaccredited, for-profit services to provide Alternative Care Arrangements (ACAs).

Non-Government providers have continued to work closely with the Department of Communities and Justice to reduce the numbers of children in ACAs by 72% and yesterday's announcement signals a positive step in ensuring active efforts so children in the out-of-home care system receive appropriate home-based or therapeutic residential care.

However, ACWA's CEO, Maree Walk, says that a proposed return of out-of-home care services to the government is not the answer to complex issues within the system.

"ACWA has concerns for children and young people with the Government planning to increase its role in out-of-home care service provision ahead of the findings of several reviews of the system currently underway, including a detailed examination of the true cost of delivering out-of-home care services by the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal", said Ms Walk.

Recent reports tabled by the Auditor General and NSW Ombudsman outlined in detail the need for the Department to work more effectively with experienced Non-Government Organisations to improve outcomes for children, including use of data to track outcomes for children in out-of-home care.

Ms Walk said, "The system works best for children and young people when there is integration and collaboration between the Government and Non-Government sectors. That's when children and families get the best services."

ACWA believes the Department has a crucial role in finding extended family to help prevent children entering care along with early intervention and investment supports – rather than directing its efforts to grow foster care.

"For example, we would strongly advocate for greater funding of Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations to provide family preservation and foster care support services to Aboriginal children and families as a means of addressing placement breakdown, which is a key driver of children entering ACAs", said Ms Walk.

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Patron: Her Excellency the Honourable Margaret Beazley AC KC Governor of New South Wales

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Today's announcement shows that Minister Washington is determined to address critical issues in the system and is prepared to act decisively. However, ACWA urges the NSW Government to recognise and build on programs and practice that are working well, working collaboratively with existing NGO providers to build a robust and flexible system with a range of care options to suit every child's individual needs.

The Association of Children's Welfare Agencies is the NSW peak body representing non-government organisations that provide services to vulnerable children, young people and their families.

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