



**Aboriginal
Legal Service**
(NSW/ACT) Limited

MEDIA RELEASE

Child protection gap widens as NSW Government delays Aboriginal-led reforms

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Peak organisations for Aboriginal children and legal services have accused the NSW Government of continuing to drag its feet on urgent reforms to the child protection system, while caseworkers remove Aboriginal children from their families at 10.5 times the rate of non-Indigenous children.

Aboriginal communities are calling for the Government to progress all recommendations of the Family Is Culture Review, a landmark investigation of the system's treatment of Aboriginal children and families. When it was released in 2019, Aboriginal children comprised 39% of children removed from their families and living in out-of-home care in NSW. That proportion has since risen to 46%.

"Setting up committees and launching advisory groups is just window-dressing unless it leads to decisive action. Our children's futures are at stake—they cannot afford to wait while the government drags its feet on reforms that should have been implemented long ago," said John Leha, CEO of AbSec - NSW Child, Family and Community Peak Aboriginal Corporation.

AbSec has released a joint report with the Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT) (ALS) saying the government's progress in reforming the system "has been disappointingly and unjustifiably slow".

It comes just a few weeks after damning reports from the NSW Auditor-General concluded the child protection system is inefficient, ineffective, unsustainable, and failing to safeguard the rights of Aboriginal children. The Auditor-General found the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ), which is responsible for the child protection system, has an organisational and governance structure that does not enable system reform.

"We are not on track to achieve the target of reducing over-representation of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care by 45% by 2031. The NSW Government and DCJ must recommit to the ways of working they've already promised under Closing The Gap and properly embrace the roadmap to reform provided by the

Family Is Culture Review, or we will fail to deliver this change for our children – and that would be devastating,” said Karly Warner, CEO of the Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT) Limited (ALS).

The ALS and AbSec are urging the NSW Government to commit to a mutually agreed Family Is Culture implementation plan with clear targets, timeframes and accountabilities to ensure the review’s 126 recommendations are actioned.

“Almost five years since its release, the NSW Government is still yet to make a public commitment to all recommendations of the Family Is Culture Review. The urgent need to overhaul this harmful system is undeniable. Every day of delay is a day too many for our children, who continue to suffer from these longstanding failures,” Mr Leha said.

Key issues highlighted in the Family Is Culture Report Card (July 2024):

- **System failures:** Recent audits continue to expose deep systemic flaws within the Department of Communities and Justice, compromising the welfare of Aboriginal children across the state.
- **Ineffective transitions to Aboriginal community-controlled organisations (ACCOs):** The slow and ineffective transition of child welfare responsibilities to ACCOs continues to deny Aboriginal children culturally appropriate care.
- **Neglected early intervention funding:** The government’s unmet promises to allocate 30% of early intervention funding to Aboriginal families further reflects a long-standing pattern of underfunding and neglect, with only 7.2% of early intervention funding provided to ACCOs.



Carina Stokes
Manager, Communications
and Memberships

carina.stokes@absec.org.au
0493 165 759



**Aboriginal
Legal Service**
(NSW/ACT) Limited

Alyssa Robinson
Communications and
Marketing Manager

0427 950 312

[View the *Family Is Culture Community Report Card July 2024* here](#)

The two Auditor-General reports can be found online at:

- [Safeguarding the rights of Aboriginal children in the child protection system](#)
- [Oversight of the child protection system](#)

[The *Family Is Culture Review* can be found online here](#)