

What We Heard



Aboriginal families, communities, and service providers and their experiences of family preservation in NSW



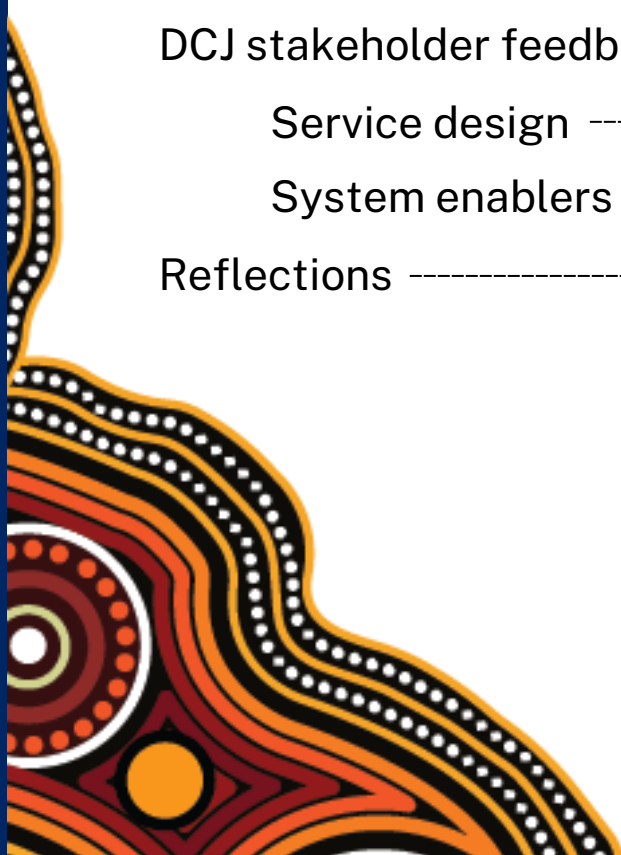
ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

March 2024

Prepared in partnership by AbSec – NSW Child, Family and Community Peak Aboriginal Corporation (AbSec) and NSW Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ)

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Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge Aboriginal people as the First Nations Peoples of NSW and pay our respects to Elders past, present, and future.

We acknowledge Aboriginal peoples ongoing connection to country and that sovereignty was never ceded.

We reflect on the continuing impact of government policies both in the past and present, in particular the suffering of the Stolen Generations survivors, their descendants and the children that have never made it home.

We advise this resource may contain images, or names of deceased persons in photographs or historical content.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

AbSec	Peak Body for Aboriginal Children and Families
ACCO	Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation
ACMP	Aboriginal Case Management Policy
AFP	Aboriginal Family Preservation
CSC	Community Services Centre
DCJ	Department of Communities and Justice
FAP	Family Action Plan
IFP	Intensive Family Preservation
NGO	Non-government organisation
NSW	New South Wales
OOHC	Out-of-home care
PSP	Permanency Support Program
ROSH	Risk of significant harm
SARA	Safety and Risk Assessment
SDM	Structured Decision Making
TEI	Targeted Earlier Intervention

PURPOSE OF ENGAGEMENT

The NSW Government is redesigning family preservation services as part of the current recommissioning cycle. By June 2025, contracted family preservation services will be brought into a single integrated system. The new system will be designed to be responsive and provide the right support at the right time.

Many Aboriginal family preservation services have consistently identified the need to provide greater supports to families to prevent entry into out-of-home care (OOHC) and harm associated with removal of Aboriginal children. The existing overseas-developed models have little evidence of positive outcomes in Aboriginal communities. Nor are they culturally safe or responsive. ^{1,2}

The Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) is committed to creating a system that works for Aboriginal families and communities by empowering and supporting the implementation of Aboriginal and locally led family preservation services. DCJ has partnered with AbSec, the peak organisation for Aboriginal families and children in NSW, to work with Aboriginal service providers and communities to develop an Aboriginal Family Preservation (AFP) Framework.

The foundations of the AFP framework will be informed by community – ensuring Aboriginal voices are genuinely heard and placed at the centre of its design. As such, AbSec and DCJ undertook a series of ‘listen and learn’ workshops to better understand Aboriginal families, communities, and service providers, and their experiences of family preservation in NSW.

This paper reflects ‘what we heard’ and acknowledges that Aboriginal people are the experts in determining best practice in their own communities. It presents two sets of feedback, which reflect the different experiences and perspectives of different stakeholder groups. The first set of feedback is from stakeholders who AbSec engaged with, including Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), Aboriginal community groups, and Aboriginal staff working for non-government organisations (NGOs) delivering child and family services. This feedback was analysed and summarised by AbSec. The second set of feedback is from stakeholders who DCJ engaged with, including the Aboriginal Knowledge Circle, DCJ District executives, Aboriginal people working in DCJ, and non-Aboriginal staff working in NGOs. This feedback was analysed and summarised by DCJ.

1

Aboriginal Intensive Family Based Services Plus: An expanded model of Aboriginal intensive family support and advocacy December 2017, Retrieved from <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1f3XBZSEh8WMvNtYkv4sqbjhMbpICOLOm/view>

2

Liddle C, Gray P, Burton J, Prideaux C, Solomon N, Cackett J, Jones M, Bhathal A, Corrales T, Parolini A, Tan WW, Tilbury C 2021, The Family Matters report 2021: Measuring trends to turn the tide on the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care in Australia, SNAICC – National Voice for our Children, Retrieved from <https://www.snaicc.org.au/our-work/child-and-family-wellbeing/family-matters/>



PURPOSE OF ENGAGEMENT

The authors of this paper have tried to remain true to the intentions and voice of stakeholders. We have included direct quotes from workshop participants and earlier versions of the paper have been presented to stakeholders to check whether it accurately represents them. We have also tried to acknowledge and capture the diversity of communities and views among individual stakeholders in the paper. This approach is consistent with the guiding principles of this engagement (see below). Importantly, the feedback will inform the strategic development of the AFP Framework and 2025-26 family preservation recommissioning.

There is a clear call from Aboriginal families and communities for a different approach to family preservation. They seek an approach that promotes the safety, welfare, and wellbeing of Aboriginal children and young people. They want greater value placed on identity and culture and working to preserve connections by strengthening family foundations. This approach reflects Aboriginal cultural frameworks that recognise the critically important role of parents, families, and communities, in keeping kids safe and raising them strong in culture and identity. **3**

Solutions are more likely to be effective if they are designed and administered by Aboriginal communities on a local scale. This is consistent with Aboriginal peoples' right to self-determination. **4**



3

4

Aboriginal Family Preservation and Restoration Model Guidelines June 2020, Retrieved from <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1-pcTxdME0wMSv4EgkL6QbGqUZIN2TN-Y/view>

ENGAGEMENT APPROACH

Between August and October 2022, the Aboriginal Family Preservation Framework project team, comprising staff from Strategy, Policy, and Commissioning (Child and Family Directorate of DCJ), and AbSec, held 38 'listen and learn' workshops with a range of Aboriginal stakeholders, non-Aboriginal ACCO staff, and Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal DCJ staff.

Most engagements were held in person and on Country, however some online sessions were held when that could not occur. In addition to face-to-face consultation, a digital survey was used to capture responses from stakeholders who were unable to attend. It was important to create culturally-safe spaces for storytelling and sharing.

We would like to acknowledge that each of the Aboriginal communities that were engaged are unique, individual and sovereign Nations. This process tried to adhere to cultural protocols and use methods that engaged representatives of communities who reflected diverse perspectives. It is, however, acknowledged that this was not always achieved and AbSec will continue to work on strategies for future engagements on this project.

AbSec also acknowledges that there were challenges associated with reaching some community and key stakeholder groups. AbSec will continue to work on engaging these groups throughout the development of the AFP Framework.

Both in the workshops and the survey, participants were asked about their experiences of family preservation and the child protection system. This included their views of services delivered by Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) and non-ACCO providers. They also shared their perspectives on what is needed to improve outcomes for Aboriginal children and families.

The following questions were explored:

- What does the term 'family' mean in the context of family preservation?
- What currently works and does not work in the family preservation service system?
- What does an ideal Aboriginal family preservation service system look like?

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

AbSec and DCJ developed the following guiding principles to underpin the engagement activities:

- **Acknowledge:** Aboriginal people are the experts in how to work with their own communities
- **Listen and share power:** Collective decision-making means Aboriginal people having a seat at the table
- **Respect knowledge:** Aboriginal people are the experts - they live, work and breathe this
- **Transparency:** Keep stakeholders informed of progress and how their input was, or will be, used
- **Accountability:** Address concerns by acting on them
- **Enhance and invest:** Enhance Aboriginal voices by support Aboriginal families and services

STAKEHOLDERS

AbSec met with stakeholders from the following groups:

- ACCOs, including those currently delivering family preservation services and those who are not (18 workshops)
- Aboriginal community groups, including individual community members, and representatives of advocacy groups and services (14 workshops)
- Aboriginal staff working for NGOs delivering child and family services (2 online workshops).

DCJ met with stakeholders from the following groups:

- Aboriginal Knowledge Circle and a Local Aboriginal Advisory Group (2 workshops)
- DCJ District executives from Commissioning and Planning and Community Services Centres (CSCs) (7 workshops)
- Aboriginal people working in DCJ (2 workshops)
- non-Aboriginal staff working in ACCOs (2 online workshops).

OVERVIEW OF THEMES – ABSEC WORKSHOPS

The following themes came up during the AbSec stakeholder workshops:

Systemic racism and barriers



Systemic racism in the child protection system



DCJ engagement and casework practice



Risk, safety and assessments



Flexibility



Whole-of-government approach



Investment and resource allocation

Aboriginal-led service and system design



Aboriginal-led family preservation



Holistic service delivery



Case work

OVERVIEW OF THEMES – ABSEC WORKSHOPS

The following themes came up during the AbSec stakeholder workshops:

Aboriginal self-determination and culture



Advocacy



Healing



Self-determination



Aboriginal families, kinship, and responsibility of care



Aboriginal governance



Cultural ways of working



Community development



Aboriginal data, evidence and evaluation



ABSEC STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

Systemic racism and barriers

1. Systemic racism in the child protection system

Stakeholders expressed that there is a critical need to challenge a racist child protection system. They see the system as one that unfairly and disproportionately disadvantages Aboriginal families and creates barriers to accessing culturally responsive and safe family preservation services at the right time.

Aboriginal stakeholders said that they have experienced racism in the child protection system and that it is not accessible or designed to support Aboriginal families to stay together. They noted the system unfairly places Aboriginal families at risk of having their children removed and is directly responsible for the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in OOHC.

On the topic of family preservation specifically, stakeholders said the experience of many Aboriginal communities is that family preservation services are geared towards child removal and entry into OOHC. This is, in part, because DCJ makes referrals when families are in crisis, but also because their needs are not met by the current family preservation service specifications. Some Aboriginal communities have no faith in the current family preservation system as defined by DCJ.

Considering this situation, stakeholders called for:

investment in an independent Aboriginal child and family system

resourcing of local Aboriginal governance mechanisms

the power to challenge the casual and blatant racism that is accepted, embedded and practiced throughout DCJ, including at leadership levels in districts

Aboriginal-led commissioning of child and family services that place local cultural authority and expertise at the centre

greater self-determination – empowering and enabling families to engage in family preservation services pre-ROSH and without DCJ intervention

investment in the ACCO sector

acknowledgment of the extreme power imbalance in the current child protection system, and of the violence and oppression perpetuated through the legal system and law enforcement.



ABSEC STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

Systemic racism and barriers

“The system is about ownership and control of Aboriginal people, the lawmakers and decision makers within this system ... can’t represent the views or experiences of Aboriginal people. The policy and implementation still reflect colonisation and Stolen Generations.”

– ACCO workshop participant

“Being part of this system won’t help our children, as long as babies keep being taken because they are black – there is no change and no trust.”

– ACCO workshop participant

“Ticking the box to say you are Aboriginal is dangerous for your kids.”

– Community workshop participant

“Sometimes I was scared to let my child go to school in case they are taken the way like I was, and I am still scared for Aboriginal children now [that] that will happen.”

– ACCO workshop participant

2. DCJ practice

AbSec stakeholders said they experience racism when coming into contact with the child protection system. They pointed out that current DCJ practices and tools are not culturally appropriate and disproportionately impact Aboriginal children and families.

Stakeholders identified several barriers to accessing support. They felt these are created by current DCJ practice and proposed some of the ways that they should be addressed in the current child protection system:

- **Cultural safety**
 - DCJ has little understanding of cultural safety when working with Aboriginal families and service providers. Non-Aboriginal DCJ workers need to face and sit with uncomfortable truths through cultural immersion and truth telling.
- **Deficit approach**
 - The language and outcomes that DCJ currently uses has a deficit approach. Family preservation language and outcomes need to be strengths-based. This means aligning with and building on a family’s strengths.



ABSEC STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

Systemic racism and barriers

- **Referrals**
 - Families are often referred into a family preservation program that is at the wrong end of the care continuum, when families are in crisis. Additionally, crucial information is either not supplied or perceived as tokenistic. Stakeholders called for an increase in community referrals.
- **Roles, responsibilities and understanding of programs**
 - DCJ is making referrals with little understanding of the program offered by ACCOs. The burden is placed on ACCOs to educate and support DCJ, however they are not resourced or supported to provide this service.
- **DCJ accountability**
 - DCJ faces little consequences when it does not meet commitments made to ACCOs or Aboriginal families. In contrast, DCJ has a punitive approach to ACCOs and Aboriginal families who do not meet DCJ's expectations.

Stakeholders called for several other changes to DCJ practice:

- **Communication**
 - DCJ needs to be **clear and transparent with families** about its expectations, and the consequences for a family if those expectations are not met.
- **Consistency**
 - DCJ should be consistent when working with families and Aboriginal service providers, making sure the agency tries to **keep the same caseworker with the family and commits to agreed plans.**
- **Aboriginality and family finding**
 - DCJ needs to **place more importance on finding family and apply standards to this practice**, including respecting local Aboriginal mechanisms and ACCOs' knowledge and recommendations.
- **Standard practice to improve relationship with DCJ**
 - Good outcomes shouldn't be reliant on personalities. **Building and maintaining relationships** should be fostered through a standard practice which includes **good communication, exchange of information** and cultural safety protocols.
- **Respect of cultural knowledge and local relationships**
 - DCJ staff should respect and trust the unique skillset and perspectives that ACCOs and Aboriginal staff in ACCO's, NGO's and the department have in working with and achieving outcomes for families.



ABSEC STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

Systemic racism and barriers

“When I hear a siren at night, I am hoping it isn’t for that woman or her children, who I have just had to turn away because she doesn’t meet the eligibility criteria and needs to be referred through DCJ.”

– ACCO workshop participant

“Aboriginal families are often set up for failure in the eyes of the system. The impact of the sense of failure is great and reaches far beyond their ability to meet DCJ’s expectations.”

– ACCO service provider

“They want to engage with families on what problems they have and not [their] strengths.”

– Community workshop participant

3. Risk, safety and assessments

Stakeholders said that the ways in which risk and safety are assessed by DCJ do not align with the views, customs and cultural practices of Aboriginal communities across NSW, which have natural protections that support the safety of children. They said that DCJ uses racially-biased assessment tools and practices, that are based on western culture, drive poor outcomes for Aboriginal families and undermine self-determination. The result is continued violence, trauma for Aboriginal people, a system that is not culturally safe, and ultimately, the disproportionate representation of Aboriginal families coming into contact with the child protection system.

It was the experience of both service providers and service users that children and families are not placed at the centre of tools and are not able to lead and drive outcomes for themselves. They felt that the voluntary nature of family preservation programs is often undermined by these tools and practices. Many stakeholders felt that the term ‘racially biased’ did not reflect accurately the intention of the tools. In their view, these tools – in particular the SDM tools – are racist in both their design and application. Most stakeholders agreed that the way current child protection tools are applied, particularly risk assessment tools, do not consider the risk of removal, and lead to poverty and intergenerational trauma being defined as neglect.



ABSEC STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

Systemic racism and barriers

Stakeholders gave feedback about specific assessment tools, practices and definitions used by DCJ relating to risk and safety:

- **Structured Decision Making (SDM) tools**
 - SDM tools include the Safety and Risk Assessment (SARA), which unfairly identifies Aboriginal families as being at risk of needing intervention or removal. SARA tools rely too heavily on historical involvement with child protection, targeting descendants of Stolen Generations. These tools are not holistic, are deficit based and only work within the DCJ terminology, language and definition of risk.
 - SDM tools are vulnerable to bias and influenced by stereotyping, values and beliefs of the person using them.
 - These tools should be replaced with tools that have been developed by Aboriginal people and reflect their lived experiences.
- **Family Action Plans (FAPs)**
 - FAPs are not led by families and do not embody self-determination.
 - FAPs only address risks as determined by DCJ. They are unrealistic and do not include goals identified by the family.
 - FAPs are not consistent and DCJ often shifts the goal posts. There is little transparency and accountability.
 - FAPs lack cultural safety and are not accessible to families.
 - FAPs are not strengths-based and need to be translated by ACCOs to ensure a family is receiving the appropriate support.
 - FAPs do not recognise and embody the cultural knowledge and skills of ACCOs and local connections.
- **Case closure**
 - DCJ should close cases once an ACCO determines that the appropriate amount of information has been provided. A shared assessment of risk informed by the information should determine case closure. There is a preference to close cases as soon as possible to reduce the pressure placed on families by DCJ being involved.
- **Cultural differences**
 - Understanding risk and safety is very different from a cultural perspective. Natural protections within Aboriginal families and communities like shared living or shared parental responsibility are positioned as risks in the current child protection system.



ABSEC STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

Systemic racism and barriers

- **ACCO and Aboriginal community assessment of risk**
 - ACCOs and decision makers in Aboriginal communities need to be included in decisions concerning the outcomes of SARAs. The prospect of losing connection to culture is not currently considered in these assessments and needs to be done so by people in the community that have local and cultural perspectives and knowledge (e.g. Elders and ACCO staff).
 - A child's experience, the context of the harm, the family's strengths, and available resources should all be considered when assessing risk.
- **Distinction between poverty and neglect**
 - ACCOs and Aboriginal communities said DCJ does not distinguish between poverty and neglect.
 - The lack of understanding leads to SARAs that disproportionately impact Aboriginal families.

“Risk tools portray parents as criminals who have harmed their children, these tools need a complete overhaul.”

– ACCO service provider

“The tools that are used by DCJ are racist, they are not culturally based. There is a difference.”

– ACCO workshop participant

“Risk assessment tools target Stolen Generations survivors and their descendants and take away our right to rebuild family structures that have been cruelly taken from us.”

– Community workshop participant



ABSEC STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

Systemic racism and barriers

4. Flexibility

Stakeholders said that the current service system does not provide any flexibility in service delivery. This reflects a lack of ability to respond to the priorities of families. Workshop participants highlighted a need for flexibility in service duration and intensity to enable self-determination and sustainability for families who are engaged with family preservation services. Furthermore, it was noted that brokerage does not allow investment in a family for foundational and immediate needs. This has specific implications for Aboriginal families who are often vulnerable to higher socioeconomic disadvantage and need greater support with particular cultural protocols, for example, around sorry business.

- **Service delivery**

- Service provision needs to be responsive to families and their needs.
- Therapeutic support needs to include alternative and culturally responsive options.
- There needs to be the ability to increase or decrease service delivery, either frequency of visits or case worker allocation, to effectively support large families and/or their networks.

- **Service duration and intensity**

- There was no consensus regarding preferred duration or frequency of service. However, AbSec stakeholders said there was a need for flexibility and consistency – particularly when exiting family preservation services. They suggested either stepping down to Targeted Earlier Intervention (TEI) or in the event of child removal, including:
 - the ability for ACCOs to provide support for families from TEI through to restoration (with a focus on family preservation services)
 - additional funding to deliver such services, including for implementation and operational infrastructure support.

- **Brokerage**

- Where ACCO-delivered family preservation services are not available or resources are exhausted, brokerage provided by emerging ACCOs should be used. A flexible approach to brokerage can provide family-led and culturally-responsive support and can build a sustainable service system.



ABSEC STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

Systemic racism and barriers

• Holistic service delivery

- The Aboriginal approach to child welfare is holistic and includes support across the continuum of care (TEI, family preservation, OOHC and restoration).
- ACCOs need to be able to deliver the right supports at the right time, as determined by the family.
- There is a need to increase funding for TEI services. Access to early intervention services will have a direct impact on family preservation outcomes for Aboriginal families and their communities.
- Community referral, or soft entry, builds and reinforces strong relationships with ACCO service providers. It diverts Aboriginal families away from the statutory system and ROSH thresholds.
- Restoration needs to be included in family preservation service models. ACCOs need the ability to address restoration immediately following a removal and access family preservation services at the same time for the one family.
- ACCOs and Aboriginal families said the current system (TEI, family preservation, OOHC, restoration) is too siloed. ACCOs are not funded to meet the needs of families who are coming into contact at every stage.

“We took care of our kids for thousands of years without being told how.”

– Community member

“Family preservation doesn’t belong in the child protection system. We don’t want to be child protection workers.”

– ACCO service provider



ABSEC STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

Systemic racism and barriers

5. Whole-of-government approach

AbSec stakeholders consistently pointed to a lack of whole of government approach to addressing the disproportionate representation of Aboriginal children and families who come into contact with the child protection system. Although they note that the main risks identified by DCJ are associated with housing security and health and education outcomes. They called for a coordinated strategy to provide holistic supports to families and reduce the escalation of families into the child protection system due to poor access to basic needs like housing. A coordinated strategy would include:



Department of
Housing



Department of
Justice



Department of
Education



Department of
Health

“DCJ is housing, they are courts and locking kids and parents up, why don’t they talk to each other to help people?”

– Community workshop participant

“The left hand doesn’t talk to the right in this system and our babies and families suffer because of it.”

– Community workshop participant

“Housing is the greatest risk and issue for family preservation. In a lot of situations we can’t even get them into a refuge because they are already full.”

– ACCO workshop participant



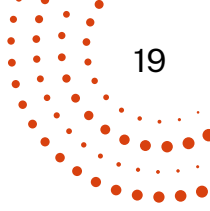
ABSEC STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

Systemic racism and barriers

6. Investment and resource allocation

Stakeholders said that there are many inadequacies in funding for the family preservation service system, including funding silos and barriers to ACCO service delivery. They put forward a range of strategies to address the current situation, including the following.

- **PSP packages**
 - Current packages require greater flexibility to enable providers to work with large families, and families where there is shared responsibility for the child across households and family members.
 - It is important to ACCO, workforce and community development to retain unspent funds.
 - The current funding model places pressure on families, workers and organisations to work harder and be more resourceful. Block funding or alternative funding structures would be preferred.
- **Regional considerations**
 - Regional services need additional support to recruit and retain staff.
 - Regional services are often operating in a 'services desert' with limited referral options to support the needs of a family. Additional resourcing is required to not only address physical isolation but additional considerations required to support a family, for example, travel to appointments that can only be accessed in another town or city.
- **Capacity**
 - There is a need for increased investment to create a strong ACCO sector that provides the community with culturally safe choices.
 - There is a need for greater investment in a strong and skilled Aboriginal workforce, connected and accountable to the communities it serves.
 - Caseloads should be realistic and reflect cultural ways of working.
 - Wellbeing support should be provided to service staff. Such support would acknowledge the challenges that they face in both living and working in an Aboriginal community as an Aboriginal person. It would also support them working in a sector that both historically and currently is a source of intergenerational trauma for Aboriginal communities and individuals.
 - There is a need for staff training that is meaningful and relevant to working practically with a family's needs.
 - Staff should be supported to undergo training similar to CDP training that enhances understanding of DCJ processes.
 - Resources must be provided to DCJ and non-Aboriginal organisations for ongoing cultural supervision and support.



ABSEC STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

Systemic racism and barriers

“Family strengthening is a process that can span the lifetime of a family through various services and community support.”

– ACCO workshop participant

“Small ACCOs working to strengthen the community and keep kids out of care are ignored by the department and made to jump through hoops to get funding that can’t even sustain any employment for programs.”

– Community workshop participant

“Why are we paying other people and paying for hotels to traumatise children when we can put money into families and communities to be strong? Out-of-home care costs more money, blood, sweat and tears than any other approach.”

– Community workshop participant

“What we do through community groups and providing a safe space for young ones keeps families together and kids at home.”

– Community workshop participant





ABSEC STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

Aboriginal-led service and system design

7. Aboriginal-led family preservation

Stakeholders said that family preservation needs to be genuinely led by Aboriginal people, from system design through to service delivery and implementation. Locally-led Aboriginal responses are the only way to reflect self-determination and agency for families and children to remain safe, strong, and together. Stakeholders identified the following necessary elements of an Aboriginal-led family preservation system.

- **Co-designed with local Aboriginal communities**
 - Aboriginal family preservation services need to be driven by the needs of their community and delivered by ACCOs.
- **Centering Aboriginal perspectives, experiences, and practices**
 - Greater value must be placed on lived experience, cultural knowledge and authority in service and system design.
- **Self-determination**
 - Outcomes and goals need to be determined by Aboriginal children and families, and their communities.
- **Stolen generation survivors' and Elders' voice**
 - There must be a dedicated space for meaningful contributions in service and system design from people with lived experience of the child protection system and Stolen Generations survivors.
- **Freedom to innovate**
 - The investment in ACCO service providers is still in its infancy. Stakeholders expressed the need for freedom to make mistakes, learn from them, and improve without punitive measures.

"We don't want a seat at the table anymore, we want to decide who is at the table for ourselves."

– Community workshop participant

"Families carry all of the consequences of when these programs don't work but their voices are not included or heard."

– Community workshop participant

"I am sick and tired of consultation. We are saying the same thing as 30 years ago, as the Bringing Them Home report, let us make the decisions and watch what will happen."

– Community workshop participant



ABSEC STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

Aboriginal-led service and system design

8. Holistic service delivery

Stakeholders pointed out there is no support for holistic service delivery through the current family preservation service system. This leads to services working outside scope and funding to provide families with family-led, culturally-responsive supports and achieve outcomes for families. A holistic service delivery approach encompasses a whole-of-family approach that works across the continuum of care through wraparound services. Families are confronted by multiple and complex needs that are interdependent with their overall sustainable success. Stakeholders called for the following.

- **A whole-of-family approach:** including who a family identify as part of their support network.
- **Holistic needs assessment:** current DCJ tools have limitations when it comes to holistic approaches.
- **Wraparound service delivery:** families need support in all aspects of wellbeing which includes cultural determinants of health and healing.
- **Multidisciplinary service provision**, which may include, but is not limited to:
 - youth workers
 - domestic violence support (for both men and women)
 - mens' business support
 - womens' business support
 - psychologists/counsellors
 - occupational therapists
 - pediatricians.
- **Advocacy and rights education:** there is a need to create culturally safe spaces that provide a hub of support services to families who encounter the child protection system. This may include but is not limited to:
 - legal and justice system advice
 - training and education services
 - social welfare support
 - mothers' groups
 - men's and women's groups
 - cultural activities
 - community events.
- A focus on healing through culture and addressing intergenerational trauma throughout the family and kinship network, because of colonisation, Stolen Generations and multigenerational removals.



ABSEC STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

Aboriginal-led service and system design

- The ability to **connect children and families to country and community** across districts and multiple agencies.
- **In-home support** available to families and opportunities for skills' development that reflects the families' priorities.

"Families should be given time and support to understand their rights and tell DCJ that's not what we want."
– **Community workshop participant**

"I will continue to speak, and I won't be silenced. I miss my grannies, I want them back and I want them to listen to us Aboriginal women."
– **Community workshop participant**

"There always needs to be advocates available to families in community, including during crisis."
– **Community workshop participant**

9. Casework

Good casework is an important element of support for children and families in family preservation. Casework that aligns with the Aboriginal Case Management Policy (ACMP),⁵ and provides cultural safety, responsiveness, and consistency, was highlighted as important to a family's engagement and overall experience of family preservation.

- Characteristics of **best practice case work** were explored and include but are not limited to the following:
 - strengths-based approach and empowering families to succeed long term
 - case planning shaped through family-led decision making
 - support for the entire support network, as identified by the family
 - support staff using consistent, trauma-informed approaches to build trust and prevent retraumatising children and families
 - transparent and honest communication
 - cultural ways of working to provide holistic and flexible support to Aboriginal children and families
 - collaborative approach fostering relationships with all services and agencies working with a family.



ABSEC STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

Aboriginal-led service and system design

- Casework should involve **Aboriginal workers** who have local **cultural knowledge**, know the community and what is happening in the community. For example, workers who know sorry business are accepted in that community, and can connect with other culturally-safe services and community supports.
- Aboriginal caseworkers have deep understanding of the Aboriginal **experience of colonisation practices**, including removal, separation, assimilation and the impact of intergenerational trauma.
- A best-practice engagement approach is phased and takes time. This is often not supported by the timeframes that are prescribed.

“Living in community you know what challenges are facing the community and individual families. It is a great strength that is ignored by the current system.”

– ACCO workshop participant

“Engagement needs to be consistent and transparent and working towards what the family say they want for themselves.”

– ACCO workshop participant





ABSEC STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

Aboriginal self-determination and culture

10. Advocacy

Stakeholders spoke at length across the workshops about the place of advocacy, particularly at the early end of the spectrum of family preservation. Advocacy has always played, and will continue to play, an important role for children and families in family preservation and the sector more broadly. There was a clear call for structured support across a wide spectrum of advocacy needs in this space, including the following:

- **community advocates** who are critical to the development of culturally-appropriate and locally-responsive services need to be **supported with training and remuneration**
- **families** need to be provided with training and support so they can **advocate for themselves** and drive decisions that affect them
- an Aboriginal family preservation framework needs to be delivered by ACCOs and include Aboriginal governance mechanisms to ensure shared decision making and respect for the cultural expertise of Aboriginal people.

“As Aboriginal people we know what the system has done to us – we care because we live it.”

– ACCO workshop participant

“Families have complex trauma. The only way to break through is relationships that are built on predictability, consistency and follow-through.”

– ACCO workshop participant



ABSEC STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

Aboriginal self-determination and culture

11. Healing

Stakeholders identified a large gap in the way overseas models are designed and implemented in addressing healing. Healing intergenerational trauma and the traumas caused by the Stolen Generations and subsequent policies and practices was widely viewed as an integral part of supporting families. Stakeholders thought that DCJ largely ignores the importance of this kind of healing for strengthening individual people and family structures. There was also some reflection on what healing means in the context of culture and the important part that cultural ways of working and connection play in healing for Aboriginal children and families. Stakeholders identified that family preservation services need to include the following:

- **strengthening family structures** through healing and cultural connection
- working across family structures and multiple generations to support healing
- recognising the role of cultural practices and traditions in providing accessible methods for families to engage and lead, for example storytelling and art.

“What is happening now is another stolen generation of kids. Help families start to heal from all of this together in their own communities.”
– **Community workshop participant**

“Let me rebuild my family structures that were taken from me when I was taken from my own family.”
– **Community workshop participant**

12. Self-determination

Self-determination was recognised as a cornerstone for strengths-based, successful approaches to family preservation. Workshop discussions explored not only self-determination of the individual but collective self-determination for a community. Stakeholders felt that self-determination needed to be better put into practice. They noted it was often neglected by DCJ’s response to families in crisis and families who seek support outside of the service system. Stakeholders called for:

- **self-determination** to be embedded in family preservation service delivery, which includes empowering families to identify their own goals and make decisions
- **a strength-based approach** – moving away from deficit-based approaches
- **family preservation that is responsive to families** – improving processes and service delivery to best support families on their own terms, when and where they need



ABSEC STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

Aboriginal self-determination and culture

- **measures to ensure that families can advocate for themselves** – making informed decisions and articulating feelings of cultural safety and protocols (including language, disabilities, trauma, and lack of trust in government systems) in order to receive appropriate support
- **power imbalances to be corrected** – including through family-led decision making and acknowledging families as experts best placed to make decisions
- **a whole-of-family approach** – working with the whole family and their support networks as identified by the family
- **meaningful and effective complaint mechanisms** for families to make complaints.

“Self-determination for families and communities needs to be in practice not just talked about.”

– Community workshop participant

13. Aboriginal families, kinship, and responsibility of care

There was an obvious need to acknowledge and work in a way that is inclusive of Aboriginal views of what family is. Within the current family preservation system, the broad networks that provide natural protections and cultural safety to Aboriginal children and parents are often ignored and not correctly used to enhance family preservation. The system does not recognise, and actively undermines, the approach to ‘responsibility’ for parenting a child and shared care. In practice, this also means that goal setting excludes the networks in which the family will work towards strengthening. Stakeholders said the following.

- **Responsibility for the child’s safety** and reduced risk doesn’t have to be with the parents. Preservation can be a whole of network approach and change at different points in time as needed, with the opportunity for the child to remain with parents prioritised.
- DCJ should acknowledge that **successful family preservation is self-determined by the family** and includes instances where **children have remained within an extended family or support structure.**
- **Shared-care** models build parental capacity through **role modelling and cultural support.**



ABSEC STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

Aboriginal self-determination and culture

- Aboriginal children's safety and family support is **everybody's business** in the community. Everybody has a responsibility and a role to play. Kinship and paternity are not the only indication of responsibility for a child in an Aboriginal community setting.
- **Family and community members** that **support parents** engaged in family preservation services through temporary care outside of the statutory system need access to services and financial support.

"Children are the whole community's business. If one is removed we all cry."

– Community workshop participant

"There won't be a time that an Aboriginal child will not have someone close to the family willing to take responsibility for them...but they need proper support to do it."

– Community workshop participant

14. Aboriginal governance

Stakeholders highlighted Aboriginal governance practices as an important element to successful local responses. This includes:

- **placed-based Aboriginal governance and strong cultural authority** embedded in family preservation program design and delivery
- ensuring Aboriginal governance mechanisms are enabled to make decisions and support families at a local level.

"Our ways of working are different to the Western ways. We need to have the right to make decisions and the ability to make those decisions within our own governance structure that exist[s] within our different communities."

– ACCO workshop participant

"Let families and their communities have their rights like everyone else in this country has and it will make a change."

– Community workshop participant



ABSEC STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

Aboriginal self-determination and culture

15. Cultural ways of working

Stakeholders reflected on the many cultural ways in which people are working across the state. Unfortunately, these ways of working do not appear to be supported through current models or funding structures. Cultural ways of working are specific to Aboriginal people that live and work in their own communities, and include the following:

- **cultural activities** that address the wide range of needs and aspirations of a family, recognising natural protections, supports, and the ability to heal through culture
- **a workforce that understands Aboriginal culture** and Aboriginal ways of being
- **connection to community, culture, identity, and Country**, embedded in service delivery
- **recognition that women and men are equally entitled to support and working with men and women** through mens' business and womens' business.
- **ensuring that families remain connected to culture** – instilling and maintaining a sense of belonging during crisis [while] working within a Western framework.

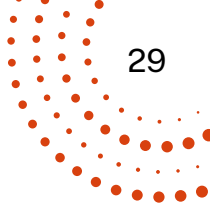
“Culture is everything and when our families come back to culture we find healing, connection and happiness.”

– Community workshop participant

16. Community development

The need for community to be involved in and contribute to family preservation solutions was explored during the engagements. Stakeholders said that community requires development and resourcing to contribute to and provide a wraparound support network to families and family preservation outcomes. There should be:

- skill and capacity building through community initiatives and activities, including:
 - men's and women's groups
 - yarning circles
 - cultural camps and on-Country activities
 - youth programs
 - parenting groups
- training and development opportunities for community members aimed at building their advocacy skillset, understanding the child protection system, and building governance capacity.



ABSEC STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

Aboriginal self-determination and culture

“The system boxes you in so you can’t fight on your own. You need a strong community around you to help your voice be heard.”

– Community workshop participant

“Happy families and kids make happy communities. Everyone living in a community or connected to community should have the right to help our families stay out of the system. And families should have the right to go to community for help.”

– Community workshop participant

17. Aboriginal data, evidence, and evaluation

Data, evidence, and evaluation, all remain a crucial element in family preservation. The way in which personal data is identified and collected still makes it difficult to engage with families. And overall, it does not always contribute to building an evidence base that reflects families’ experiences. There was also a consistent pattern of providers and community members identifying a lack of transparency from the department around data, and minimal or no access to accurate data, in a timely manner. Many ACCO stakeholders said they had never taken part in an evaluation of their programs and those that had felt their evaluations were under-resourced. Stakeholders said that it is important for funders and evaluators (most commonly DCJ or chosen by DCJ) to do the following:

uphold principles of Indigenous Data Sovereignty (IDS) and include them in Human Services Agreements (HSAs)

obtain and use data in a culturally-safe and respectful way, using tools that reflect IDS principles

explore engaging in data, evidence, and evaluation, in alternative ways through Aboriginal customs of storytelling and art

ensure that data reflects the outcomes and outputs that are meaningful to Aboriginal families

provide funding for thorough and independent evaluation – this is key but is never included in funding allocation or is not adequately resourced.

shift data capture practices to ensure that lived experience and cultural knowledge form a greater extent of the evidence base than the data currently being captured by DCJ

recognise that Aboriginal programs see outcomes for families all the time – these outcomes are simply not measured or captured by the system

create greater transparency around existing data by sharing it with both service providers and the community on a regular basis



ABSEC STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

Aboriginal self-determination and culture

“Tell us where our kids are going into care and what organisations have them. They don’t want us to know the true numbers because they are shameful.”

– Community workshop participant

“We need live data but are getting data that is outdated and has taken months to come to us, by which time it is no longer accurate.”

– ACCO workshop participant



OVERVIEW OF THEMES – DCJ WORKSHOPS

The following themes came up across the DCJ stakeholder workshops.

Service design



Family-led decision making



Holistic



Culturally embedded



Aboriginal and community led



Strong DCJ and ACCO relationship

System enablers



System flexibility



Responsive and accessible



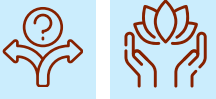
Sector investment and regional considerations



Training and support



A whole-of-government approach



DCJ STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

Service design

1. Family-led decision making

During the workshops, DCJ stakeholders called for a consultative, child and family focused approach to service design that empower and promote their views through family-led decision making. This includes the following elements:

- **child and family focused** – focusing on families' goals, strengths and aspirations as opposed to an issues and deficit focus
- **empowering Aboriginal families** – recognising there is strength in families
- **family-led decision making** – working with the whole family, where they are at and on their terms
- **consultative service delivery, assessment and review** – informed by the family's needs and views (family-led plans, solutions and strategies to improve their lives)
- **advocacy support** – ensuring families know their rights and available supports for informed and family-led decision making.

“Giving family the opportunity to develop and create their own plans, idea[s] and strategies to improve their lives.”

– Aboriginal person working at DCJ

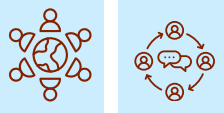
2. Holistic approach

Stakeholders described a holistic approach to service design encompassing:

- **a whole-of-family approach** – looking at all members of the family to address their needs (including working with men)
- **wraparound service support** – services collaboratively combining skills and expertise to support a family in identifying what is required to keep children safe at home
- **a multidisciplinary team approach** – a suite of services offering a variety of therapeutic and practical supports, that families can access when they need. This may include, for example, a specialist family support team of psychologist, counsellor, speech therapist, occupational therapist, family therapist, cultural support, mentor, and so on.

“A more holistic approach should be taken to keep family together.”

– Aboriginal person working at DCJ



DCJ STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

Service design

3. Culturally-embedded program or model

Stakeholders said there is a need for family preservation to be culturally informed by embedding culture in the program or model and investing in the development of culturally-appropriate assessment tools, including:

- **a cultural lens to defining ‘family’**
- **a culture-embedded program or model** – embedding connection to community, culture, identity and healing throughout
- **culturally-appropriate services** – staff, training, tools, and language (including employing community members to model and share positive experiences of culture and relationships)
- **investment in Aboriginal-informed assessment tools and evaluation** that are culturally safe for Aboriginal families, measure Aboriginal-led outcomes and celebrate strengths and achievements. In the meantime, a focus on exploring a cultural support or lens for overseas models.

“Western systems, tools, and policies exclude Aboriginal people's ways of parenting.”

- Aboriginal person working at DCJ

4. Aboriginal and community-led solutions

Stakeholders said there needs to be recognition of Aboriginal-led solutions and unique local experiences through the development of local AFP models by communities and ACCOs, including:

- **an Aboriginal and community-led, culturally-embedded model** uniquely designed by community, driven by community and delivered by ACCOs
- **Aboriginal and community-led outcomes** and service design
- an Aboriginal family preservation service system developed for NSW, in consultation with Aboriginal people, enshrined in NSW legislation.

“[DCJ] need to have trust in the community for model delivery and acknowledge that a lot of ACCOs are delivering programs and working in their own cultural way.”

- Aboriginal Knowledge Circle member



DCJ STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

Service design

5. Strong DCJ and ACCO relationship

Stakeholders said they wanted to see a collaborative working partnership between DCJ and ACCOs, built on strong communication to ensure everyone is working towards the same outcomes for families, rather than an 'us' and 'them' approach. They wanted to overcome challenges in the relationship between DCJ and providers. This includes the lack of exchange of information or updates, and lack of clarity and understanding of each other's roles, responsibilities, and programs. There are also challenges around different perspectives on risk and safety (and the barriers these create) and when DCJ should remain involved or close a case. They suggested the following actions to overcome such challenges:

- **working in genuine partnership on** programs where DCJ are part of the early engagement or have to remain involved. This includes, for example, drafting action plans together, joint visits and reviews, joint decision making, and communicating with families about risks to be addressed together
- **building and maintaining relationships between DCJ** (more specifically CSCs) **and providers**, including putting in place mechanisms for checking in with each other regularly
- **good communication and exchange of information** – a commitment to regular updates, reviews and exchange of information to better support families
- **good understanding of roles, responsibilities and programs** – providers having a strong understanding of how DCJ work with families, DCJ having a good understanding of the family preservation programs and what they offer. Both parties have a shared understanding of safety and risk.

“Strong and transparent partnership/relationship between DCJ and NGO/ACCO is really crucial – need collaboration throughout family preservation intervention, even where things are close to removal...it sets the tone.”
- **Non-Aboriginal staff in ACCO or DCJ**





DCJ STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

System enablers

6. Flexibility

Stakeholders called for a system that ensures the development of Aboriginal-led and responsive AFP models, and one that balances the need for flexibility in service delivery while providing structure, to meet the changing needs of families.

Stakeholders wanted to overcome concerns about the lack of flexibility of the family preservation service system, but also service delivery and entry (packages, referrals timeframes and brokerage). They also wanted to address the systemic silos across family preservation, TEI and OOHC through:

- **flexible service delivery**
 - **flexible programs** that focus on family needs rather than family program fit. Flexibility means:
 - offering on-call and after-hours support
 - using creative ways to provide support
 - offering evidence-based or therapeutic programs as well as practical support and case management programs for families, particularly given that evidence-based programs aren't available statewide and require a significant investment
 - **flexible packages** acknowledging that large families, and families where children are living with or supported by extended family across multiple households, may require multiple packages or workers for effective support
 - **flexible timeframes** – a considerable preference for flexibility in timeframes of between 6–18 months to 2 years (similar to PSP and supported in the ACMP), as families need different timeframes of support, and quality engagement takes time
 - **flexible brokerage** that is led by the families' current and future needs to set them up in the best way.

“What works is flexibility within the program to allow providers to shape what service delivery and supports look like to better meet the needs of the family.”

– Aboriginal person working at DCJ

“If we're going to be supporting Aboriginal families, there needs to be more time allocated... the Aboriginal Case Management Policy clearly highlights the investment of time needed.”

– DCJ executive and staff



DCJ STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

System enablers

- **continuum of care**
 - **flexibility to work across low- and high-intensity circumstances** and a 'step-down' approach. There is a considerable preference for all ACCOs, and potentially the broader family preservation service system, to work across low (family preservation) and high (intensive family preservation) needs that respond effectively to changes in family needs. This would require investment in ACCO skill development to work across the continuum. It would include a phased 'step-down' approach to provide support after a program has finished or after a child's removal for a short period of time.
 - **greater inclusion of restoration in family preservation** – being able to go from supporting preservation to restoration (noting that some programs include restoration, but not all do)
 - **better connection between TEI, family preservation, and OOHC** – while recognising the systemic challenge of joining up these separate streams, there is a need to better align these services so that providers can support families across the continuum of care.
- **flexible referral and eligibility**
 - **greater flexibility in referral pathways to meet demands** – a considerable preference for community or self-referrals in programs where this is restricted to DCJ referrals only, and, or a higher quota of community referrals (currently 90% DCJ referrals)
 - **some flexibility in eligibility criteria** – some of the broader eligibility criteria create a barrier to accessing support when it's needed. For example, when young people have self-placed back with their parents, they are ineligible for family preservation. The complexities of eligibility criteria for some of the evidence-based programs also present a barrier to accessing support, for example, the presence of domestic violence in the home makes people ineligible, effectively excluding a lot of families.



DCJ STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

System enablers

7. Responsive and accessible system

Stakeholders said the family preservation should be an accessible and responsive system that ensures timely support when it's needed and offers a choice of providers.

There should be **choice for Aboriginal families to engage with an ACCO or non-Aboriginal provider**. The current system doesn't offer choice of providers for families, which has a stronger impact in regional areas.

The system should be **responsive and timely**, by providing:

- **availability of and access to** family preservation when needed
- **supports early on** rather than at the point of removal
- **referrals to high intensity, therapeutic early supports**.

8. Sector investment and regional considerations

Sector investment

Stakeholders called for a system that is responsive rather than reactive. They wanted to overcome current concerns around limited funding, program places and resources. They thought this could be achieved through strategic investment in family preservation, particularly ACCOs. Specific suggestions included:

- **more places to support more families** at ROSH as the last stop before OOHC
- **more package or brokerage investment to provide increased and flexible support**, including additional packages for larger families and families with more complex needs, similar to PSP funding
- **lower caseloads to support families more effectively** and address complex needs, not just token visits

“When referrals from DCJ are a last straw before removal, with [a] tight timeframe [it] makes it very hard to do good work.”
– **Non-Aboriginal staff in ACCO or DCJ**

“We need economies of scale, and this is a challenge for ACCOs...We may need to consider additional investment to address this.”
– **DCJ Executive**



DCJ STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

System enablers

- **Aboriginal-led service delivery through significant investment in ACCOS** to empower them to grow and lead this work in their communities
- **cultural support and, or mentor roles** to support non-Aboriginal staff working with Aboriginal families.

Regional considerations

Stakeholders also called for a system that acknowledges the additional pressure, challenges and impacts on regional services, especially ACCOs. In response, they called for the system to be resourced appropriately. Specific suggestions include:

- **accounting for the complexities faced by regional providers** in program guidelines and providing appropriate funding and resourcing to meet the challenges of location, local relationships, allocation, engagement, cost and time for travel, and staffing and recruitment
- **greater investment in ACCOs**, particularly in regional areas
- **recognising the limited choice** of providers in regional areas.

9. Training and support

Stakeholders said the family preservation system needs to recognise the complexity of the work by investing in workforce skill development and providing support, including appropriate caseloads, to work with families' complex needs in a culturally-responsive way. Stakeholders want to overcome current concerns around a lack of minimum standards in family preservation provided in evidence-based and therapeutic programs only. They note providers are refusing referrals due to the need for highly-skilled staff to manage and address complex needs or risk in intensive family preservation. Stakeholders also expressed concern about ongoing cultural training and worker recruitment and retention, especially in remote or regional areas. They referred to the following requirements:

“Families want providers from the community supporting them and the challenge with that is making sure they have the correct skills because it is challenging and complex.”

– DCJ Executive



DCJ STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

System enablers

- **training and development for ACCOs**
 - early engagement and working with resistant families
 - having difficult conversations
 - managing risk and safety concerns (building confidence and ability)
 - DCJ-assessment processes (particularly Safety and Risk Assessments)
 - trauma-informed care
 - working with young people and those experiencing domestic and family violence
 - a 'communities-of-practice approach'.
- **training and development for DCJ**
 - improving understanding of family preservation programs in their area (guidelines and services)
 - ongoing cultural training and supervision – understanding Aboriginal families, culture and connection is an ongoing experience and takes time
 - challenging practitioner bias and the impacts of power imbalances (non-Aboriginal staff).
- **support**
 - support for caseworkers – caseworker safety and wellbeing is extremely important. Aboriginal caseworkers face the challenge of providing support in their own communities
 - realistic caseloads – having all families at very high risk is very challenging for staff in DCJ and providers in intensive family preservation
 - investment in ACCOs who are expected to provide services without investment in learning and development. Small ACCOs cannot deliver the same training as larger NGOs. The possibility of providing ACCOs with access to clinical specialist support should be explored
 - cultural supervision and, or mentoring for non-Aboriginal staff
 - exploring what support might look like from peaks to upskill staff.



DCJ STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

System enablers

10. Whole-of-government approach

Stakeholders wanted to see a holistic, whole-of-government approach that acknowledges that families require support across many agencies at any given time. This involves acknowledging that family preservation work occurs in isolation because the **current system is siloed** and recognising this as an opportunity to remove silos. It also involves **aiming for a holistic, multiple-agency approach across all agencies** (for example including education, health, justice).

“What doesn’t work is often systemic... different government departments not working together cohesively.”

– Non-Aboriginal staff in ACCO or DCJ



REFLECTIONS

This paper has presented ‘what we heard’ during a series of ‘listen and learn’ workshops to better understand Aboriginal families, communities, and service providers and their experiences of family preservation in NSW. The engagements with the two sets of stakeholders brought a wealth of insights from lived experience and practice into the areas of family preservation, which are not working for Aboriginal families and providers. Though there are similar themes highlighted across AbSec and DCJ stakeholders, the lived experience and context of their experiences influence the meaning significantly.

There is a clear need for locally-developed and Aboriginal-led models that put Aboriginal children and families at the centre of both design and delivery.

Stakeholders demonstrated frustration with not only elements of the family preservation service system but the child protection system more broadly. Stakeholders engaged by AbSec in particular, continue to feel oppressed by what they see as a colonial system, highlighting systemic racism, biased assessment tools and a failure to support Aboriginal families to keep children at home. This is reflected in the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care and its projected increase by 2024.⁵

Recommissioning in 2025-26 presents an opportunity to address some of the issues that have been raised during these engagements. However, recommissioning alone cannot bring about the significant changes that are urgently required for the child protection system as a whole.

The [NSW Implementation Plan for Closing the Gap](#) includes a number of initiatives and associated projects that will enhance Aboriginal family preservation services, which reflect themes raised in the AFP engagements.

The feedback that has been collected in this paper will continue to be shaped by ongoing engagement with stakeholders. AbSec will present the feedback to communities and service providers to identify next steps.

DCJ and AbSec will continue to work together to ensure this feedback is reflected in the recommissioning of family preservation services in 2025-26, and in shaping reform in the child protection system.

5

Report on Government Services 2022, Retrieved from <https://www.pc.gov.au/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2022/community-services/child-protection>

