

Aboriginal Case Management Policy

Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation's role in the implementation of the ACMP

ACMP Overview

The Aboriginal Case Management Policy (ACMP) is designed for all practitioners working with Aboriginal children and families. The ACMP was developed by AbSec in collaboration with Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) through an extensive engagement process involving Aboriginal communities and key stakeholders. The ACMP is designed to achieve safety and wellbeing for vulnerable Aboriginal children by keeping them with or returning them to family and connected to community, culture and country. It is holistic, culturally responsive and embeds the values and perspectives of Aboriginal people.

The ACMP applies across the entire support continuum, from Aboriginal Community Response (Early Intervention) and Aboriginal Family Strengthening (Family Preservation) to Aboriginal Child Safety (Out-of-Home Care). It applies to the delivery of programs and services by a range of stakeholders including DCJ caseworkers, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) and non-Aboriginal service providers.

ACCO Overview

AbSec is committed to ensuring all Aboriginal children, families and communities in NSW have access to the services and supports they need to keep Aboriginal children safe and families strong and provide them the best possible opportunities to fulfil their potential within a culturally enriched framework offered by ACCOs.

Within the child, family and community care sector, AbSec defines an ACCO by the criteria outlined below, which will also be reflected in an ACCO's constitution.

- Is an independent, not-for-profit organisation that is incorporated as an Aboriginal organisation.
- Has been initiated by, and is controlled and operated by Aboriginal people, thereby acknowledging the right of Aboriginal peoples to self-determination.

- Is based in a local Aboriginal community, or communities.
- Is governed by an Aboriginal Board which is elected by members of the local Aboriginal community or communities where it is based and decision making of the Board is determined by Aboriginal Board members.
- Delivers services that build strength and empowerment in Aboriginal people and their communities.

Outside of the above there is large variance in size, operation, function, roles and structure between different ACCOs. This is due to contextual, cultural, community and geographical factors that may affect the configuration of an ACCO. AbSec maintains a list of relevant ACCOs in NSW, which is available on AbSec's website absec.org.au/our-sector.

Local Aboriginal governance processes are a central element of an ACCO, providing a clear mechanism for Aboriginal self-determination. This includes empowering Aboriginal communities to participate directly in the design and delivery of services within their community, defining priorities, outcomes and approaches from an Aboriginal community perspective, as well as ensuring service delivery is directly accountable to the Aboriginal community or communities served.

ACCOs are therefore distinct from other organisations, including those that may be Aboriginal owned or controlled yet do not include a community governance process. AbSec is supportive of other Aboriginal owned enterprises and acknowledges their potential to contribute across the service system. However, it is important that decisions about the design and delivery of local services are determined by local governance processes and for this reason AbSec prioritises the role of ACCOs within local service systems.

ACCOs that provide out-of-home care services to children and young people in NSW are accredited by the NSW Office of the Children's Guardian (OCG).

ACMP and the role of ACCOs

Within the child, family and community care sector ACCOs play an essential role in the ACMP by providing not only practical supports to Aboriginal children, families and communities but also cultural experience and knowledge. They support Aboriginal children in care, as well as focusing on early intervention, prevention, and restoration casework with the aim of reducing the numbers of Aboriginal children coming into or staying in care long term. They work with the district, local organisations and other key stakeholders to ensure the ACMP is implemented in the most effective and culturally appropriate way, with a focus on meeting the needs of the Aboriginal communities in the area.

ACCOs also play an important role as a point of engagement for non-Aboriginal organisations that are funded to provide services to Aboriginal children, families and communities. These engagements are an important facet of the ACMP at all stages of the entire support continuum, from Aboriginal Community Response (Early Intervention) and Aboriginal Family Strengthening (Family Preservation) to Aboriginal Child Safety (Out-of-Home Care).

Aboriginal Organisations in the NSW Child Protection System

Aboriginal self-determination is a central principle of NSW Government policy, which is reflected in the NSW Government Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsibility and Empowerment (OCHRE) strategy, which is the NSW Government's Plan for Aboriginal Affairs: Education, Employment and Accountability, as well as DCJ specific policies including 'organisations run by and for Aboriginal people have the greatest promise of providing the best possible outcomes for vulnerable Aboriginal children, individuals, families and communities'.¹

Such policies emphasise the importance of Aboriginal organisations demonstrating a connection to the communities they serve, reflecting the principle of self-determination and community empowerment. In AbSec's view, the best way to demonstrate connection to community is through an ACCOs local governance processes, providing a clear and transparent mechanism

to represent the voice of Aboriginal people in service design, delivery and accountability to the local community.

The *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998* emphasises the importance of Aboriginal self-determination in the care and protection of Aboriginal children, empowering communities to collectively determine the policies, programs and practices that impact on Aboriginal children and families. Specifically, the Act provides for Aboriginal 'representative organisations' to be given the opportunity to participate in all significant decisions made under the Act concerning their children.

ACCOs in Practice

In order to further enhance Aboriginal self-determination within the NSW child and family sector, it is essential for practitioners to recognise the importance of ACCOs and how they can support the delivery of child and family services in a local community. This can be achieved through recognising the:

- significance of ACCOs and prioritising their role within the local service system
- importance of involving ACCOs in the consultation process across the continuum of care
- capacity and capabilities of ACCOs to participate fully in the child and family sector.

ACCOs can provide the following:

- Support practitioners with making valid and appropriate cultural assessments, including recognising Aboriginal family structures, environments and child rearing practices.
- Providing child and family support services.
- Support in case planning.
- Developing cultural support plans.
- Family finding and genealogy advice.
- Advocacy and support with Aboriginal Family-led Decision Making processes.
- Participation in Aboriginal Community Controlled Mechanisms (ACCMs).

¹ FACS (2015) Services For and By Aboriginal People: Identifying Aboriginal Organisations.



This factsheet was developed by AbSec, and commissioned by DCJ, to support the implementation of the ACMP. It is intended as a living document and will continue to be updated as necessary to effectively support the implementation of the ACMP and improve outcomes for Aboriginal children, families and communities.