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| Changes to the care and case management of Aboriginal children |
| Fact sheet for Community Service Organisations |

The Victorian Government, in partnership with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) and non-Aboriginal Community Service Organisations (CSOs) is committed to advancing Aboriginal self-management and self-determination for Aboriginal people in Victoria. This includes a commitment to gradually transition the care and case management of Aboriginal children from government and non-Aboriginal organisations to ACCOs.

The transition is underpinned by evidence that shows that Aboriginal children and young people receiving services from ACCOs have better outcomes, including greater health, wellbeing and cultural engagement[[1]](#footnote-1).

For Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care, this means empowering Aboriginal communities to make decisions and provide services that meet the best interests of Aboriginal children, now and in the future.

This change is an important step in achieving self-determination for Aboriginal communities and aims to provide better outcomes for all Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care, by engaging culturally safe and connected supports.

# Why is the case management and care of Aboriginal children being transitioned to ACCOs?

Aboriginal children represent 20 per cent of all children in state care despite Aboriginal people representing only 1.6% of the total population in Victoria. It is important that these children have access to culturally-safe services and maintain a strong connection to culture.

The Victorian Government, in partnership with ACCOs and CSOs have agreed that ACCOs should be empowered to take on a greater role in the care and case management of Aboriginal children and young people in out-home-care. Currently, most children and young people are case managed or cared for by non-Aboriginal organisations

By transferring responsibility for the case management and care of Aboriginal children to ACCOs, we aim to improve the cultural safety and support provided to Aboriginal children in out-of-home care and their carers.

The transition project is designed to meet the best interests of Aboriginal children so they grow strong and connected in their culture. It supports self-determination for Aboriginal people and will assist to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care.

Who will manage the transition?

The Transitioning Aboriginal Children’s Team has been established within the Department of Health and Human Services (the department) and will work to support the gradual transfer of case management and out-of-home care services for Aboriginal children and young people to ACCOs.

This commitment is in line with priorities of the Aboriginal Children’s Forum which is to:

* Build the capacity of Aboriginal families, the community and ACCOs to care for their children and young people (priority 4), and
* Place all Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care under the authority, care and case management of ACCOs (priority 5).

The Transitioning Aboriginal Children’s Team will work closely with ACCOs, CSOs and the department to ensure a transparent and sustainable state-wide framework is developed and delivered.

How will this affect carers of Aboriginal children?

As this project is rolled-out statewide, carers who provide home-based care for Aboriginal children and young people will be gradually provided with support from an ACCO.

Carers who provide consecutive or periodic care to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children will be supported by either an ACCO or a CSO depending on the child they are caring for. It is not in the child’s or the carer’s best interests to be supported by two agencies simultaneously.

Where a sibling group is placed together in home-based care consisting of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal siblings, it is expected that the ACCO will supervise the placement of each of the siblings.

It is the intention of the department that the transition will be managed in accordance with the best interests of the child. The department, CSOs and ACCOs will work in partnership to ensure the aim of the transition is well understood and that ongoing communication and support is provided to carers to support the transition to an ACCO.

When will the transition happen?

The Victorian Government has committed to the gradual transition of case management and care services to ACCOs ready to take on this work. The timing of the transition across the state will depend on a number of factors including ACCOs’ willingness and readiness to deliver services, as well as agreements reached between non-Aboriginal services and ACCOs about the transfer of existing services to ACCOs. It is expected that the first carers will transition in the second half of 2017.

More information about timing of transfer will be provided as the transition process is confirmed.

How will this affect your organisation?

It is important that carers of Aboriginal children know about transition work and are supported to understand the rationale for the program and their own role in making the transition as smooth as possible for the Aboriginal children in their care.

CSOs will continue to play an important role in caring for Aboriginal children and to partner with ACCOs. It is acknowledged that this support will continue as the transfer of case management move across to ACCOs.

The Transitioning Aboriginal Children’s Team has commenced and will continue consultation with all relevant ACCOs and CSOs to develop the necessary policies and procedures to ensure the transfer is managed consistently and according to departmental requirements.

ACCOs will need to consider which services for Aboriginal children they wish to undertake and how to best prepare their agency for the transition. ACCOs need to engage with their local Aboriginal transition governance group and divisions to develop plans for the transition subject to their organisation’s aspirations and readiness.

# How will information be exchanged between organisations?

Arrangements that support the exchange of information between the department and agencies regarding children in out-of-home care is not expected to change when care or case management arrangements are transitioned.

The department will provide ACCOs with necessary information and support to provide contracted case management or care of children and young people consistent with current arrangements.

Any information about volunteer carers, including their accreditation and carer histories, will only be transferred between agencies with the consent of the carer.

The Transitioning Aboriginal Children’s Team will develop procedures in consultation with CSOs and ACCOs and peak agencies to ensure the transfer of carers is managed in accordance with their specific needs.

# More information

CSOs and ACCOs are encouraged to speak with their divisional Local Connection Teams or contact the Transitioning Aboriginal Children’s Team at transitioningaboriginalchildrensteam@dhhs.vic.gov.au.

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| To receive this publication in an accessible format phone 1300 650 172, using the National Relay Service 13 36 77 if required, or email transitioningaboriginalchildrensteam@dhhs.vic.gov.au  Authorised and published by the Victorian Government, 1 Treasury Place, Melbourne.  © State of Victoria, Department of Health and Human Services March 2017.  Where the term ‘Aboriginal’ is used it refers to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Indigenous is retained when it is part of the title of a report, program or quotation. |

1. “Always was, always will be Koori children”, *Systemic Inquiry into services provided to Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home-care in Victoria*, pg. 55-57, October 2016 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)