

Aboriginal Children's Summit

Communique - 13-14 August 2015



An historic two-day summit was held with key Aboriginal leaders, Government, and community sector agencies to address the unacceptable overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in out of home care. Our focus was shaping an ongoing Aboriginal Children's Forum for Victoria that will meet on a quarterly basis. The Summit was convened by the Hon Jenny Mikakos MP, Minister for Families and Children, and reflected the importance of taking a partnership approach to the big issues impacting on Aboriginal children, young people and their families. The Minister said the issue of overrepresentation of Aboriginal children is a priority for her.

The summit reflects a strong commitment from Government to working with Victoria's Aboriginal leaders and communities to enact the key principles of Aboriginal self-determination. We expect the Forum will strengthen the participation of Aboriginal people in the development of policies, strategies and practices to drive the safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal children and young people in, or at risk of, coming into out of home care.

As part of the proceedings, Summit Co-chair, Professor Muriel Bamblett, CEO, Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency, provided her observations about the out of home care system in Victoria and outlined the key elements of [Koori Kids: Growing Strong in their culture Plan](#). Participants also received an update from the Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People, Mr Andrew Jackomos, on the progress and actions arising from Taskforce 1000.

Chair of the Alliance for Aboriginal Children and Young People, Ms Karen Heap, said "the new Forum would provide for a positive approach and strong Aboriginal voice for children in out of home care across our diverse sectors". We also recognise the crucial role Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, community service organisations and the Department play in looking after Aboriginal children in out of home care".

We re-affirmed the importance of building on the resilience of the vast majority of Aboriginal families that are thriving. We agreed that sharing ideas about strategies that are working well will be key to moving forward. The CEO of the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, Deb Tsorbaris, said "this is a great opportunity to work together to bring about sustainable improvement for Aboriginal children and young people".

All participants agreed a clear way forward, including a terms of reference and priority issues, for the ongoing Aboriginal Children's Forum. In summary these include:

- Establish a Victorian Aboriginal Child Forum (ACF), comprising community and government, to develop a partnership agreement between community, government and agencies to provide policy direction, program development and monitor the implementation and accountability of outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people in out of home care.
- Develop a comprehensive outcomes framework that is inclusive of cultural needs and rights of Aboriginal children and young people in out of home care.
- Build the life skills and cultural identity of Aboriginal children and young people in out of home care and in readiness for reunification, leaving care and ensuring successful transition to adulthood.

- With commitment across and within departments and the community sector, build the capacity of Aboriginal families, communities, ACCOs and the sector to care for their children and young people to reduce the number of Aboriginal children in out of home care.
- Place all Aboriginal children and young people in out of home care under the authority, care and case management of an ACCO.
- Ensure every Aboriginal child and family, regardless of where they live in Victoria, has full access to a continuum of prevention, early intervention and placement services delivered through the ACCO sector.
- Better support Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal carers to provide culturally competent placements and maintain and grow the pool of Aboriginal carers.
- Ensure compliance with the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 as it relates to Aboriginal children and young people and make recommendations to strengthen the Act.
- Ensure Aboriginal families and children have access to an accountable universal service system that supports the unique needs of Koorie kids in out of home care.