



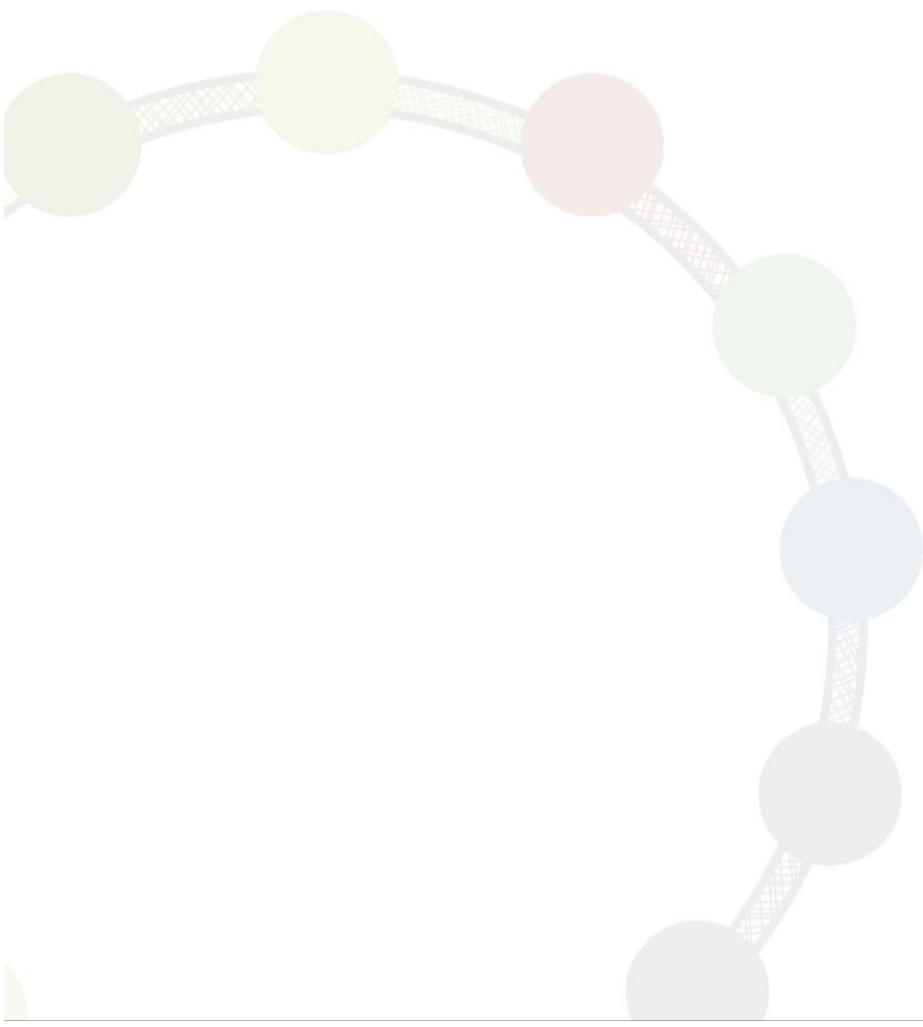
Victorian Aboriginal  
Children & Young  
People's Alliance

# A reform agenda for Aboriginal families, children, and young people in Victoria

Submission prepared by the Victorian Aboriginal Children and Young  
People's Alliance for the Victorian Premier and Minister for Child Protection

1 March 2023

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## Overarching Ask

### Local decision making by Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs)

- Support an ACCO-led Child Protection reform that results in the transfer of decision making, funding, and ways of working, to local ACCOs.

### Aboriginal care system based on community outcomes

- Resource and provide the time for ACCOs to build, design and deliver an Aboriginal family, child and young person care system and legislation based on community outcomes

### Needs-based funding

- Commit to ongoing rights-based funding that reflects demand, that is, the number and complexity of families and children supported by ACCOs, from early help through to statutory service delivery.

## This requires a shift in thinking

The Yoorrook Truth and Justice Commission is demonstrating it takes time to overcome more than 100 years of child protection policies and systems. Generational change for our Aboriginal families requires the following:

- The Aboriginal way is clear, heard, supported, and authorized
- The Government must fund the time and resources to develop and implement a new Aboriginal family, child and young person's care system
- Government must value and accept ACCO governance and their local expertise, capability, systems and infrastructure to support local families, children and young people
- Acknowledgement that local ACCOs are best placed to determine the risk with their families, children and young people
- Aboriginal organisations and communities must have oversight of, and be making decisions with, their families, children and young people
- Local ACCOs determine and have control over who they will partner with
- Government understands and accepts self-determination will produce improved outcomes but is not risk-free
- Funding is increased and proportionate to family, child and young people's needs, not historically-based



## Our Priorities

### *New Legislation*

1. A standalone Aboriginal Families, Children and Youth Care Act is in place by 2026

### *Peak body for ACCOs providing family, child and youth services*

2. The Victorian Aboriginal Children and Young People's Alliance is recognised and funded as the peak body for member ACCOs engaged in the families, children, and young people's sector

### *Keeping families together and out of the statutory systems*

3. Every Aboriginal family seeking support can access what they need directly from their local ACCO
4. Every Aboriginal child has access to the same local Aboriginal early years and youth programs and support whether they live in metropolitan or regional Victoria
5. Increase early help / prevention funds allocated to care for Aboriginal families, children and young people and re-allocate investment for child protection from Government and CSOs to local ACCOs.
6. Self-determined policies, programs and expanded funding criteria enables ACCOs to support families, children and young people to fully engage in community life

### *Self-determination through the statutory system*

7. Local ACCOs make the decisions about who will deliver elements of statutory powers in their community (either the ACCO themselves or a local partner of its choice), provide the oversights, and barriers to transitioning statutory powers are eliminated
8. Aboriginal children stay in their communities through alternative arrangements when carers are not available so connection to family and friends are maintained and disruption to daily lives are minimised

### *Carer equity*

9. Carers of Aboriginal children and young people, whether voluntary, kinship, kith or foster care, receive equitable support based on the child or young person's complexity and the needs of the carer

### *Workforce and operating costs*

10. Equitable sustained workforce investment, including sector wage parity, to meet the escalating operational costs, and the additional cultural and other responsibilities, particularly for smaller, and rural and regional, ACCOs

### *Infrastructure*

11. Infrastructure is funded to match local ACCO's service delivery commitments, demand and growth



# Implementation actions

## *New Legislation*

### **1. A standalone Aboriginal Families, Children and Young People's Care Act is in place by 2026**

- 1.1 The ACCO peak is funded to commission the drafting of a new Aboriginal Families, Children, Young Person's Care Act
- 1.2 Immediate expansion of Marram-Ngala Ganbu across Victoria to ensure Aboriginal families are directly involved in the decision making.
- 1.3 Resource and support a Koori Court Model within the Act

## *Peak body for ACCOs providing family, child and youth services*

### **2. The Victorian Aboriginal Children and Young People's Alliance is recognised and funded as a peak body for ACCOs engaged in the children, youth and family sector**

- 2.1 Government and mainstream have an appropriate place to engage regarding the family, child, and youth sector reform
- 2.2 The peak body is resourced to provide oversight of every facet of the Aboriginal family, child and youth reform and its ongoing implementation
- 2.3 The peak leads and supports Aboriginal practice-based research that elevates the excellence of ACCOs to improve the lives of Aboriginal families, children and young people
- 2.4 The peak supports the ACCO sector with Aboriginal child and family service workforce development and organisational sustainability
- 2.5 The peak body supports ACCOs to develop local service models and supports the sharing and implementation of these
- 2.6 The Victorian Government funds and resources the peak to establish itself and achieve the key objectives for its members
- 2.7 Resources and funding for regional governance models are transferred to the peak so it is truly reflective of its self-determining local members
- 2.8 The secretariat for the Aboriginal Children's Forum is funded and led by ACCOs

## *Keeping families together and out of the statutory systems*

### **3. Every Aboriginal family seeking support can access what they need directly from their local ACCO**

- 3.1 Policies are changed to remove the barriers Aboriginal families face to access services and support when they need help, and to a level that meets their needs so that:
  - Any Aboriginal person is eligible for services and is able to self-refer directly to an ACCO
  - Referrals from Community and individuals can come straight to ACCOs, and are not required to triage through child protection, The Orange Door or other organisations
  - Rights-based funding is introduced and increased to:
    - Wrap services around families quickly, and to scale up and down intensive, coordinated support to meet changing family needs



- Support inter-generational trauma and complex needs over time (not limited by hours)
- Enable cultural support and connection to be embedded into supporting families, children and young people.

#### **4. Every Aboriginal child and young person has access to the same local Aboriginal early years and youth programs and support whether they live in metropolitan or regional Victoria**

- 4.1 ACCOs deliver or partner with other providers to support culturally rich services for Aboriginal children and families through:
- Culture, Ceremony, Connection – yarning circles, programs, activities and events
  - Engagement – strengths-based services focused on prevention and early help including: early childhood education and care; school readiness; playgroups
  - Preservation – Enhanced maternal and child health services; family support services
  - Care Services – statutory interventions
- 4.2 Early help rights-based flexible funding enables ACCOs to support a broad range of community strengthening approaches, such as:
- Cultural connection and host events, activities and programs
  - Transportation to and from early learning, healthy eating education and options
  - Lunches
  - Mother’s groups; Father’s groups; Family groups
  - Parenting programs and support

#### **5. Increase early help / prevention funds allocated to care for Aboriginal families, children and young people and re-allocate investment for child protection from Government and CSOs to local ACCOs**

- 5.1 ACCOs are determining which services will be delivered for their communities, and how the funding will be allocated to reflect workforce and community need
- 5.2 Early support and family services funding is collectively evaluated based on common outcomes, with simplified reporting
- 5.3 Local governance models are established to manage conflicts of interest around local policy, program and funding decisions

#### **6. Self-determined policies and expanded funding criteria enables ACCOs to support families, children and young people to fully engage in community life**

- 6.1 Local ACCOs are supported to be the meeting place in their local communities to foster relationships
- 6.2 Brokerage is sufficient and flexible to enable ACCOs to use their discretion to support children, young people and their families
- 6.3 Increased investment for local programs developed by and for Aboriginal young people



## *Self-determination through the statutory system*

- 7. Local ACCOs make the decisions about who will deliver statutory services in their community (either the ACCO themselves or a partner of its choice), provide the oversights, and eliminate barriers to transitioning**
  - 7.1 Transition of statutory services post-intake to ACCOs (ACAC, Community Protecting Boorais, ACSASS, AFLDMs, Family Finding), including funding and support at a pace that is set by each local ACCO
  - 7.2 For those local ACCOs seeking to take on ACAC, Community Protecting Boorais or ACSASS:
    - Establish or transition the service to the ACCO, at a pace set by the ACCO
    - Support the transition of the remaining statutory services to a partnership led by the local ACCO with their agreed partner
  - 7.3 ACCOs receive and determine the best use of funds to keep children and families safe and start early help
  - 7.4 ACCOs are resourced to support one another to build capability in delivering statutory services, particularly ACAC
  - 7.5 Funding is sufficient to enable ACAC to be undertaken by ACCOs for every Aboriginal child and young person in child protection (post-intake)
- 8. Aboriginal children stay in their communities through alterative arrangements when carers are not available so connection to family and friends are maintained and disruption to daily lives are minimised**
  - 8.1 Alternative Aboriginal home environments to residential care for Aboriginal children and young people funded, researched and established by ACCOs for those who cannot live with a carer
  - 8.2 Local Aboriginal family group homes are available where no carer is immediately available when a child or young person is removed from their family

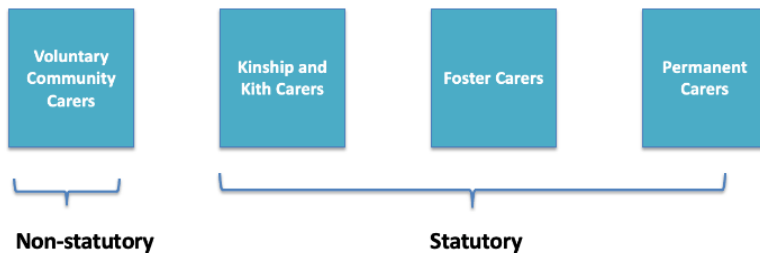
## *Carer equity*

- 9. Carers of Aboriginal children and young people, whether voluntary, kinship, kith or foster care, receive equitable support based on the child or young person's complexity and the needs of the carer**
  - 9.1 Policies, programs, training and funding are the same for kinship, kith, foster and permanent carers of Aboriginal children and young people
  - 9.2 The assessment of all carers is equitable and applied in a way that does not traumatise the prospective carer
  - 9.3 Regardless of care type, the same process is applied to assess an Aboriginal child or young person's complexity and to determine the level of carer payment
  - 9.4 All Aboriginal children and young people are case managed (contracted or ACAC) by a local ACCO, and the ACCO is making decisions for each child or young person
  - 9.5 Brokerage funds are increased and made flexible to:



- Meet the basic needs of children and young people, and carers, to fully engage in school, sport, culture (implementation of cultural plans) and community life
- Address health, trauma, and the social and emotional needs of children and their carers

- 9.6 Brokerage at the outset is sufficient to establish a stable and functional placement
- 9.7 Each metropolitan and regional ACCO is funded to sustain local carer networks
- 9.8 ACCOs are able to support the many Voluntary Community Carers that care for Aboriginal children and young people who aren't engaged with the care system, and their role is acknowledged, valued and financially supported where required



- 9.9 A shift in policy supports the introduction of professional carers

### *Workforce and operating costs*

#### **10. Equitable sustained workforce investment, including sector wage parity, to meet the escalating operational costs, and the additional cultural and other responsibilities, particularly for smaller rural and regional ACCOs**

- 10.1 Funding for all services is based on wage parity with the Victorian Public Service Award and includes dedicated funding for professional development
- 10.2 An ACCO child and family service workforce strategy is created and funded to support Aboriginal self-determination and demand

### *Infrastructure*

#### **11. Infrastructure is funded to match local ACCO's service delivery commitments, demand and growth**

- 1.1 ACCO business infrastructure development and sustainability (facilities, land, people and technology) are funded separately from program delivery

