

# Changes to the care and case management of Aboriginal children involved with Child Protection

Your role as a carer is extremely valuable and the Victorian Government is committed to providing you with the support, training and resources to deliver the best quality of care for the children you look after.

For Aboriginal children in out-of-home care, this means both you and the child have the opportunity to connect with their community and culture. This is important as all research shows that Aboriginal children who have culturally safe and connected cultural support have improved outcomes including greater health and wellbeing.

In line with this, the Victorian Government has implemented the Transitioning Aboriginal Children to

Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) program to gradually transfer the responsibility and case management for Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care from government and non-Aboriginal Community Service Organisations (CSOs), to ACCOs.

The work is part of the Victorian Government's commitment to advancing Aboriginal self-management and self-determination for Aboriginal people in Victoria. It empowers Aboriginal communities to make decisions and provide services that meet the best interests of their children, now and in the future.

## What is an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO)?

An Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO) is an organisation established and operated by the Aboriginal community to deliver holistic, comprehensive, and culturally appropriate services to the community. Each organisation is controlled through an elected Aboriginal Board of Management. There are ACCOs operating in all regions of Victoria.

## 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. At present most care and case management for Aboriginal children is provided by non-Aboriginal agencies. It is important that these children have access to culturally safe services and maintain a strong connection to culture.

By transferring responsibility for the case management and care of Aboriginal children to ACCOs, we can ensure

Aboriginal children in out-of-home care and their carers are receiving culturally-safe support.

The transition of services is an important step in achieving self-determination for Aboriginal communities and will provide better outcomes for vulnerable Aboriginal children and young people.

## What does this mean for me as a carer?

Caring for children is about supporting their best interests and ensuring they grow up in a culturally-safe environment. The transition of responsibility for Aboriginal children to ACCOs is designed to allow Aboriginal children to have a stronger connection to Aboriginal community and culture.

As this program is rolled out statewide, carers who provide home-based care for Aboriginal children and young people will be progressively provided with support from an ACCO. Throughout this process a range of skills

and support will be provided to carers to assist them in the transition.

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

## Will this affect my accreditation?

If you transition to an ACCO, your current accreditation will not change and you will not be required to undertake a reassessment.

Carers who transition will however be required to consent to their accreditation histories, reference checks and relevant caregiver histories being transferred from your current foster care agency to the ACCO to ensure you are provided with high level of care and support.

Over time, ACCOs will also provide carers with opportunities to develop a deeper understanding of

Aboriginal communities and culture that will help support their connection to Aboriginal culture, and ensure Aboriginal children are cared for in a culturally-safe environment.

Transitioning to an ACCO does not mean you must always care for Aboriginal children. You are able to return to your original agency or transfer to a non-Aboriginal agency when not caring for an Aboriginal child.

## When is this happening?

Although the timing for the transfer to an ACCO depends on agreements reached between the Department of Fairness, Families and Housing (the department), CSOs, ACCOs, children and families, the transition of services in metropolitan Melbourne began in the second half of 2017.

It is the objective that over time all carers of Aboriginal children will be supported by an ACCO. This includes both foster and kinship carers.

## What if I have a question?

If you have questions about transferring to an ACCO you are encouraged to discuss these with your agency. Your relevant ACCO would be pleased to meet you and discuss any questions you may have about their agency and the transition and how they will support you.

*The information contained in this factsheet is taken from a factsheet for carers, published by the former Department of Human Services (now Department of Families, Fairness and Housing) in 2017.*

## More information

For more information, please contact your agency or child protection worker. Alternatively the Foster Care Association of Victoria can be contacted on 03 9416 4292 or Kinship Carers Victoria on 0499 969 234.

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](mailto:transitioningaboriginalchildrensteam@dhhs.vic.gov.au)

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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.