ABORIGINAL CHILD AND FAMILY CENTRES

The Aboriginal Child and Family Centre Program Guidelines may be updated, as required, by the Department of Family and Community Services (FACS) in consultation with funded service providers.
1. Legislative framework

Community Services is a division of the Department of Family and Community Services (FACS). The primary legislation that underpins FACS’ provision of funding to non-government organisations through the Aboriginal Child and Family Centre Program is the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 and the Community Welfare Act 1987 and the regulations associated with these acts.

Other legislation that impacts on FACS management of its funded programs includes the Public Finance & Audit Act 1983, the Privacy & Personal Information Protection Act 1998 and the Public Sector Employment and Management Amendment (Procurement of Goods and Services) Act 2012.

2. Policy directions and commitments

The vision of the Department of Family and Community Services (FACS) is that all people are empowered to live fulfilling lives and achieve their potential in inclusive communities. This vision underpins the ways in which we deliver effective services across the whole spectrum of the agency, contributing to Goal 13 of the state plan NSW 2021, to:

- Better protect the most vulnerable members of our community and break the cycle of disadvantage.

FACS is the leading provider of community services in NSW and the largest child protection agency in Australia. The Aboriginal Child and Family Centres provide a single point of access to a range of services, supports and information for Aboriginal families and children who are overrepresented in the child protection system. This contributes to the FACS objective, that Aboriginal people, families and communities have better outcomes.

The Centres also broker and coordinate a range of integrated services, responsive to local needs and priorities which is consistent with the FACS Strategic Statement and the FACS Aboriginal strategy 2013-2015 Better Outcomes for Aboriginal People and Communities.

Aboriginal Child and Family Centre results will contribute to Goal 13, 15 and 26 of the state plan: NSW 2021, and is consistent with the NSW Government’s plan for Aboriginal Affairs: OCHRE: opportunity, choice, healing, responsibility, empowerment.

Cultural issues in the provision of FACS funded services

As a FACS funded organisation, Aboriginal Child and Family Centre service providers are responsible for ensuring that the services provided are ‘culturally capable’. This means that funded organisations will take account of cultural, linguistic and religious issues in the design and delivery of Aboriginal Child and Family Centre services so that services are appropriate to the characteristics and circumstances of Aboriginal children and their families. Some practical aspects of culturally capability include:

- The employees of the service reflect the cultural diversity of the Service’s target population.
- The service has clear policies and strategies in place for working with families from culturally diverse backgrounds.
• Employees are able to provide information to clients and to use resources that are linguistically and culturally appropriate.

• Training is provided for service staff in culturally reflective casework practices that are appropriate for communities.

If required, funded organisations will source interpreter services independent of FACS. They are also required to report on their use of interpreter services through the annual FACS acquittal/accountability process.

3. Aboriginal Child and Family Centre program description

Aboriginal Child and Family Centre program overview

The Aboriginal Child and Family Centre Program was funded under the Indigenous Early Childhood Development National Partnership Agreement as a Closing the Gap initiative, over the period 2008-2014. The National Partnership Agreement expired on 30 June 2014. Funding for the Centres has been extended for up to two years to June 2016 using residual funds provided by the Commonwealth under the National Partnership Agreement. This extension of funds will support the immediate continuation of services and allow for Districts to work with the Aboriginal Child and Family Centres towards developing a sustainable model according to local priorities.

The Centres coordinate a mix of culturally safe services and supports, responsive to community needs, including early childhood education and care, parent and family support and maternal and child health.

Aboriginal Child and Family Centre funding will be provided to non Government service providers in six FACS Districts to coordinate supports and services and provide early childhood education and care which address the needs of and improve the outcomes for Aboriginal children and their families.

The client results and program objectives are articulated in the Service Activity Description at Appendix 2 and will be measured by:

• Increase the proportion of Aboriginal children participating in quality early childhood education and care
• Increase the number of Aboriginal people accessing parent and family support services
• Increase integration of services delivered through the centre by partner organisations
• Ensuring Aboriginal children’s health checks and vaccinations are delivered through the Centres.

Service models and core components

Aboriginal Child and Family Centre service providers will, in collaboration with local FACS District staff, develop a sustainable locally responsive service model that is consistent with a community hub model and delivers early childhood education and care. The community hub model is where formal links are established between service providers to support a wide range of service provision from a central point or the ‘hub’ to the wider community. In this way, smaller services and providers can link to a larger network of services and
resources with shared benefits. The integration of existing services in each community will be a core component of the service model.

**Service delivery arrangements**

Local flexibility is encouraged in the development of Aboriginal Child and Family Centre service models, which will be informed by the following key principles:

- **Sustainability** – Aboriginal Child and Family Centres contributing to higher order results with the most cost-effective use of resources through innovation and responsiveness. This might be achieved through the integration of existing services, attracting funding through government and non-government sources external to the time-limited funds provided under the ACFC program.
- **Person centred service delivery approaches** – where Aboriginal children and their families directly participate in decision making about the types of services delivered at and through the Aboriginal Child and Family Centres.
- **Recognition of the importance of early childhood education and care for the development of children**
- **Place-based approaches** - focusing on social and physical environments and integration of existing services.
- **Respect for diversity and cultural factors**
- **Building on the strengths of children and their families** and using these strengths to build parenting capacity sufficient to provide for the safety and wellbeing of the child/young person.

**Roles and responsibilities**

1. **FACS**

**Communities, Prevention and Early Intervention**

FACS Communities, Prevention and Early Intervention is the state-wide program manager responsible for setting strategic directions, establishing and ensuring ongoing performance monitoring, providing program level advice to senior management and the Minister, for designing and implementing the associated procedures and templates, and supporting District colleagues with briefings, training and advice.

**Districts – Funding and Contracting**

FACS District funding and contracting staff have responsibility for undertaking detailed contract governance activities, including developing and updating Program Level Agreements and monitoring the performance of funded service providers and undertaking measures to address poor performance as required. FACS District staff also support service providers through briefings and advice as necessary.

**Districts – Operations**

The role of FACS, Community Services Directors is to ensure that appropriate Community Services Operations staff are familiar with key policies and procedures related to Aboriginal Child and Family Centres.
2. Service Providers

Aboriginal Child and Family Centre Service providers are the key program partners with FACS and are responsible for coordinating services to Aboriginal children and their families in accord with their agreed local Aboriginal Child and Family Centre service models.

Service providers are responsible for overall coordination of services and supports and delivery of early childhood education and care with Aboriginal children and their families.

Service providers will be required to work with the Department towards assessing whether there is a sustainable service delivery model for the Centres beyond 2016.

Service providers are responsible for ongoing data-gathering and quarterly reporting on performance in line with FACS data monitoring templates and participation in the Aboriginal Child and Family Centre Evaluation.

Service providers will participate and play a key role in local governance groups and attend other relevant meetings and forums with FACS District staff as required.

Service providers are required to address potential impacts and connections with key reform areas including:
- child protection reforms, as part of Safe Home For Life
- homelessness reforms, including Going Home Staying Home
- localisation, including the requirement to participate in district plans
- domestic violence reforms, including It Stops Here
- developments in other programs.

4. Program scope and boundary

Aboriginal Child and Family Centres are located in the following locations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Suburb</th>
<th>Centre</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Western Sydney</td>
<td>Mt Druitt</td>
<td>Yenu Allowah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Sydney</td>
<td>Doonside</td>
<td>Ngallu Wal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Sydney</td>
<td>Minto</td>
<td>WaranWarin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunter New England</td>
<td>Gunnedah</td>
<td>Winanga-Li</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunter New England</td>
<td>Toronto</td>
<td>Nikinpa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western NSW</td>
<td>Brewarrina</td>
<td>Dhirraway Dhaarun Bawu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western NSW</td>
<td>Lightning Ridge</td>
<td>Warranbaa Dhurrali</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illawarra/Shoalhaven</td>
<td>Nowra</td>
<td>Cullunghutti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern NSW</td>
<td>Ballina</td>
<td>Ballina</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Families from the client group will not be excluded on the basis of living outside the Local Government Area.
5. Program Results and Outcomes

The Aboriginal Child and Family Centre Program Logic has been developed to illustrate the expected results from the program (Appendix 1).

The overarching higher order results sought from Aboriginal Child and Family Centres are:

- Aboriginal children are born and remain healthy
- Aboriginal children have the same health outcomes as non-Aboriginal children
- Aboriginal children acquire the skills for life and learning; and
- Aboriginal families have ready access to suitable and culturally inclusive early childhood and family support services.

These are articulated in the Service Activity Description at Appendix 2.

6. Service Group Objectives

In the FACS, Community Services’ funded programs system, the Aboriginal Child and Family Centre program forms part of a group of Prevention and Early Intervention programs delivered as a universal service, geared toward the targeted service group of Aboriginal children and families. The shared, broad, objective of these programs is to prevent the further escalation of issues that led to these vulnerabilities whilst directly addressing the issues.

The table below illustrates where this program is located within the Community Services funded programs continuum of services.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Universal</th>
<th>Targeted</th>
<th>Statutory Intervention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prevention and Early Intervention</td>
<td>Child Protection</td>
<td>OOHC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Builders</td>
<td>Aboriginal Child Youth &amp; Family Strategy</td>
<td>Youth Hope</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Families NSW</td>
<td>Aboriginal Child &amp; Family Centres</td>
<td>Brighter Futures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrated Domestic &amp; Family Violence Services Program</td>
<td>Staying Home Leaving Violence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>StayInChild, Youth &amp; Family Support</td>
<td>Getting It Together</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Protection</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OOHC Casework</td>
<td>OOHC Reforms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The Aboriginal Child and Family Centre program will contribute to the following priorities:

**NSW 2021**

- Goal 13: Better protect the most vulnerable members of our community and break the cycle of disadvantage.
- Goal 15: Improve education and learning outcomes for all students. Target – all children in NSW have access to a quality early childhood education program in the 12 months prior to formal schooling
- Goal 26: Fostering opportunity and partnership with Aboriginal people. Target – Increase the number of Aboriginal communities the state government is partnering with to improve local outcomes.

**FACS Strategic Statement**

- Aboriginal people, families and communities have better outcomes
- Children and young people are protected from abuse and neglect
- People are assisted to participate in social and economic life.

**Aboriginal Affairs – OCHRE: opportunity, choice, healing, responsibility, empowerment**

- Strengthening the role of Aboriginal people in local decision making and strengthening support for Aboriginal language and culture.

**7. Evidence base**

The Aboriginal Child and Family Centre service model is based on the evidence of the importance of providing a coordinated system of supports and services for children and families from prenatal to school entry so as to remove the burden on parents of identifying and seeking out different programs and to integrate the early childhood assets of a community.\(^1\)

There is often a lack of continuity of care, for example, between maternity services, and the child and family health services that operate in the community. The Aboriginal Child and Family Centre service model bridges this gap through the integration of existing services in the community, delivering better outcomes for families and children. This builds on a strong evidence base to suggest that a combined (or family) approach to intervention is effective.\(^2\)

While there are examples of high quality, innovative service provision in Australia in some locations, early years services are fragmented and access to some services, particularly for allied health and specialist services, can be limited.

The Aboriginal Child and Family Centres have been the focus of two evaluations at a national and state-wide level. The national evaluation, conducted by Urbis found that:

- Services provided through Centres are integrated and coordinated

\(^1\) McCain, M, Mustard, F and Shanker, S (2007) Early Years Study 2 Putting Science into Action, Council for Early Child Development

• There are demonstrated effective partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous early childhood and related service providers
• There is an increased supply of early childhood workers
• Early childhood services are perceived to be culturally secure
• The local community is engaged in the design and delivery of services
• Indigenous women report fewer barriers to accessing services
• Engagement lead to more relevant service design, higher levels of trust and higher service usage when supported by an overarching strategy.3

8. Target group

The target client groups for this program are:
• Aboriginal children aged 0-8 years
• Parents of Aboriginal children aged 0-8 years
• Service providers to parents of Aboriginal children aged 0-8
• Service providers to Aboriginal children aged 0-8
• Their communities.

9. Service types/activities to be funded

Aboriginal Child and Family Centre service providers will deliver early childhood education and care service coordinate the delivery of a range of other integrated services and interventions that accord with the local service system. These are further detailed in the Service Activity Description at Appendix 2 and are categorised into the following activity types:

• Early childhood education and care (delivered)
• Parent and family support (coordinated)
• Maternal and child health (coordinated)
• Other relevant early childhood support services (coordinated).

10. Performance measures

The Aboriginal Child and Family Centre program performance measures will establish whether the program is achieving the intended program results. The performance measures will help inform how well the individual service models are performing in each trial site and will form part of the minimal data set for reporting purposes. These are outlined in the Service Activity Description at Appendix 2 and are consistent with a Results Based Accountability framework measuring performance across three domains:

• How much?
• How well?
• Is anyone better off?

11. Data collection and reporting

Aboriginal Child and Family Centre service providers are required to report to FACS quarterly using an online data collection process so that FACS can effectively monitor service provision. This means measuring the number of activities provided through the

Centre, the numbers of families using the Centre services, the quality of activities and service provided, and the percentage of services and activities overall that contributed to achieving the program results.

Service providers are also required to provide updates to Family and Community Services as required and participate in evaluation activity.

Service providers must ensure that adequate financial and operational records are kept and maintained whilst carrying out the Aboriginal Child and Family Centre Program, and that these records are made available to FACS upon request. These include but are not limited to:

- Financial records
- Program level performance records
- Records of workflow.

12. Partnership framework

Aboriginal Child and Family Centre program governance

State wide program management responsibility for Aboriginal Child and Family Centre lies with the Communities, Prevention and Early Intervention branch in FACS, Community Services. Management of projects locally is through District policy and operational staff.

Aboriginal Child and Family Centre Local Reference Groups were established in each Centre location at the commencement of the Aboriginal Child and Family Centre Program to guide the development of the Centres. Local Reference Groups or similar community governing groups will continue to provide direction and advice on the overall operation of the Centre. Community governing groups are responsible for ensuring that the expectations, needs and aspirations of the local Aboriginal community are reflected in the operations and activities of the Centre. Membership of the community governing groups should reflect the local community and local service providers as well as the diversity of the local Aboriginal community.

The Centre Manager will convene the community governing board and be advised by it. The Centre Manager is responsible for providing relevant support and training to the community governing board as appropriate or requested by the board.

FACS District policy and operational staff will work closely with the Local Reference Group/community governing group and the Centre Manager to support the operation of the Aboriginal Child and Family Centre.