

Delivering a pathway to a brighter future



Securing safety, stability and success
for children and families in NSW

November 2022



The NSW Government acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands where we work and live.

We celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters of NSW.

We pay our respects to Elders past and present.



Minister's message



Since I was appointed Minister for Families and Communities and Minister for Disability Services in December 2021, I have listened to young people, carers, caseworkers and sector leaders, and share their commitment to continuing to drive safe, just, inclusive and resilient communities in NSW.

NSW is a leading jurisdiction on key measures in child protection and out-of-home care (OOHC). I am grateful for the tireless work of caseworkers and our volunteer foster carers, who provide safety and love to the most vulnerable children in our community.

Maintaining NSW as a leader, requires targeted government investments and sustained sector leadership to co-ordinate services. That is why the government is investing \$3.1 billion in this year's budget. Also in this year's budget we announced a further \$400 million in funding for Closing the Gap initiatives to improve outcomes for vulnerable Aboriginal children and young people, who are more likely to be in OOHC.

The government also introduced legislative changes to the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998* in the upper house based on recommendations from the Family is Culture report. These changes require the department to take active steps for all children and young people to be supported safely with their families and avoid removals where it is safe to do so.

We are now announcing the Your Choice Your Future package, which will complement the targeted supports for care leavers that already exist to provide a safety net for all care leavers.

Finally, I acknowledge the many young people with lived experiences of OOHC. I value the opportunities to meet with young people from care and listen to their stories of the challenges they have faced.

I also heard from those who went on to succeed in diverse areas. From authoring children's story books to performing popular music, to giving back through mentoring other vulnerable children, or indeed becoming foster carers themselves for other children in care. These young people set an inspiring example to all of us that with the right supports, there is always a way to secure a brighter future.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Natasha Maclaren-Jones".

The Hon. Natasha Maclaren-Jones MLC

*Minister for Families and Communities
Minister for Disability Services*

Safe children, strong families, thriving communities

Every child deserves to grow up in a safe and nurturing environment where they are loved and supported.

The NSW Government is enabling services to work together to support everyone's right to access help for families, and strengthen the promotion of early intervention and inclusion, with benefits for the whole community.

In 2022-23 the NSW Government is investing a record \$3.1 billion to help children and families thrive.

We provide a range of targeted and preventative services to children, young people and their families aimed at minimising the risk of abuse and neglect, as well as supporting those children and young people who have already been harmed.

The range of factors that vulnerable families experience are complex, and the demand for services is increasing.

We're delivering a range of reforms across government to address these demands and to trial new approaches.

We are:

- resourcing flexible prevention and early intervention services that address the individual needs of families in crisis
- introducing more outcomes-focused and evidence-based responses
- continuing to improve long-term outcomes for children and stop cycles of abuse and neglect.





More children safe at home



Fewer children entering out-of-home care

NSW continues to lead the country in protecting children and is the highest-performing jurisdiction on key measures. The out-of-home care population is at its lowest in a decade and NSW has consistently had the lowest rate of entries into out-of-home care across all jurisdictions since 2017-18.

In June 2022, there were 15,223 children in care. This is the lowest the NSW OOHC population has been in a decade.

NSW has the lowest entries to OOHC in Australia in proportion to our population.

Better prevention and earlier intervention

We know that intervening early is more effective than a crisis response. In many cases, working with families early can stop risk factors escalating into problems.

A wide range of prevention and earlier intervention initiatives are available in NSW, and are designed to help children, young people and families with varying levels of vulnerability and need. Initiatives range from universal programs providing basic support to families, through to intensive and integrated programs for families dealing with complex issues.

From pregnancy all the way through to young adulthood, we are supporting families to stay safely together.

- An extra \$38.6 million will **expand Pregnancy Family Conferencing** for expectant parents where there are concerns about the safety and wellbeing of an unborn child. Pregnancy Family Conferencing helps parents to reduce the risks for their unborn baby and provide a safe and nurturing environment, with 74 per cent of the 92 families engaged in the program from 2015 to 2019 keeping their babies at birth.
- We are recruiting new **child protection caseworkers in correctional facilities**, improving support to mothers so children stay with families.

From parenting courses to community hubs or playgroups, **targeted earlier intervention** helps families navigate challenges, links them to opportunities to thrive and strengthens communities.

- We are investing \$172 million per year into Targeted Earlier Intervention (TEI) in grants.
- TEI services are being delivered by 481 service providers in 1,469 different locations across NSW, to over 100,000 individuals and more than 700,000 people attending groups and other support services.



Intensive support to keep families together

A loving family is foundational to a child's lifelong wellbeing, and care and belonging is crucial. That is why it is vital to keep children together with their families where it is safe and possible to do so.

When trauma and other challenges put children's safety and wellbeing at risk, family preservation programs are a crucial way to help families reduce this risk.

- More than 20,000 children and young people participate in family preservation, with more than a third being Aboriginal children.
- More than \$130 million this year has been invested in family preservation programs.

- We are delivering more **evidence-based, in-home therapeutic treatment** to address trauma, and give intensive support to families to reduce risks of abuse and neglect and support parents to care for their kids and respond to their needs.
- This includes services like Multi-systemic Therapy for Child Abuse and Neglect (MST-CAN), and Family Functioning Therapy – Child Welfare (FFT-CW).

By building lasting change before a child is placed into care, we can turn around the life trajectory of children, enabling them to grow up in safe and stable homes.

Securing permanency and stability for children

NSW is leading the country in permanency outcomes

Having a stable, permanent home with people who provide love and care is critical for all children. More people than ever are putting up their hands to make a safe and permanent home a reality for vulnerable kids.

- NSW leads the country with the **largest percentage of exits from care** into guardianship and the largest number of open adoptions from care in Australia.
- In April 2021, the NSW Government invested \$12 million to **establish the Permanency Taskforce** to make it easier for children to exit care through adoption and guardianship.
- The number of **children who have found permanent homes through non-government partners** has increased by around 6 per cent.

More guardians providing permanent homes

- In NSW, there are 3,470 children and young people on **guardianship orders**.
- There were 375 children who achieved permanency via a guardianship order in 2020-21. This represents an increase of 59 per cent from 2016-17.
- The new Permanency Taskforce has assisted the department and providers to progress 57 **new guardianship orders**.
- The **Aboriginal Guardianship Support Model**, co-designed with Absec, is giving culturally-appropriate support to Aboriginal guardians after an order has been made. This pilot project provides support to new guardians of Aboriginal children to help meet their needs and keep them connected with culture.





More open adoptions from care for non-Aboriginal children

- Last year, there were 89 **adoptions from out-of-home care** and NSW has the highest rate of exits from care to adoption in Australia.
- We funded a **public campaign** to increase awareness on the life-changing benefits of providing a forever home to kids who need it most.

Of course, this is not how we work with Aboriginal families. Staying at home safely with family, with kin and in community is our number one goal for Aboriginal children and young people.

A focus on restoration as the first goal for children who enter care

Once a child is placed in care, we work to have all children returned home, if it is safe to do so.

Restoration is complex and specialised work. We are improving how restoration goals are set and how we can most effectively support parents and families to address issues that affect their ability to safely parent their children.

The government funds the highly successful Newpin therapeutic restoration program. Over 18 months, Newpin centres offer participating parents the opportunity to address personal issues, improve attachment with their children and develop positive parenting skills.

The program has achieved an overall restoration rate of 63 per cent for participating families (this is compared to 20 per cent for other families).

Investing to address Aboriginal over-representation

The NSW Government is committed to addressing the over-representation of Aboriginal children in partnership with Aboriginal communities. While there has been an overall 22 per cent reduction in Aboriginal children entering out-of-home care since 2017, it is not acceptable that Aboriginal children and young people now make up almost half of all kids in care in NSW.

To change this, we are making investments to meet our Closing the Gap targets to reduce the number of Aboriginal children entering care in the first place, and restoring more Aboriginal children back to family where it is safe to do so.

Aboriginal people know what works best for their communities

That is why we are spending an additional \$23.3 million over four years to support sustainable, community-led projects to develop:

- an **Aboriginal-led commissioning model** that involves Aboriginal communities in the design, delivery and monitoring of programs and services for Aboriginal families
- stronger **local community-determined consultation mechanisms** that give advice and community oversight across NSW
- an **Aboriginal-run legal advocacy hotline** for families at risk of having their children removed.

We are committed to a different way of working with Aboriginal families and communities, and these initiatives will ensure greater cultural safety and effectiveness of our work with Aboriginal children and young people, and their families.

We are piloting the Aboriginal-designed Aboriginal Case Management Policy in the Hunter/Central Coast region, which closely involves Aboriginal families and communities in the safety and welfare of vulnerable Aboriginal children.



The NSW Government is commissioning more Aboriginal-led services than ever

Effective child protection cannot be achieved without the leadership and participation of Aboriginal people and communities in decision-making about matters that affect them.

- We are transitioning \$11 million for Permanency Support Program **family preservation** over the next two years to Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, so that an extra 300 Aboriginal children each year will be supported to stay safe with their families.
- We are providing an additional \$98.7 million to:
 - set up six new Aboriginal Child and Family Centres
 - expand the nine centres we already have to provide culturally-safe, integrated health and early childhood services.

Reforming child protection laws to support Aboriginal children to stay with family and community

Following consultation with stakeholders and community, the government has introduced new landmark legislation, the Family is Culture Bill, into the NSW Parliament. Under these reforms, caseworkers will be required to take ‘active efforts’ to reduce the entry of all children and young people into care. Additionally, where a child has been removed, caseworkers will seek to restore them safely to parents and family as soon as possible.

The Bill also improves how restoration and permanency decisions are made by the Children’s Court of NSW and how evidence of risks to children are presented in Court.

Better outcomes for children in care

The 2022-23 budget includes \$1.6 billion to support the safety, welfare and wellbeing of vulnerable children in out-of-home care. The quality of care has dramatically improved throughout the past decade of reform.

- NSW's **placement stability rate** of 91.1 per cent is the second highest in Australia.
- We are supporting more children to live in a home environment with 93.6 per cent of children in care in NSW in a **home-based placement**.
- Around 98 per cent of children and young people were in care services that met the **minimum standards**. This compares to less than 25 per cent in 2011.

Wide-ranging support for young people leaving care

Turning 18 is an important milestone for any young person as they transition to adulthood. For young people in long-term (statutory) care, this milestone can be all the more daunting.

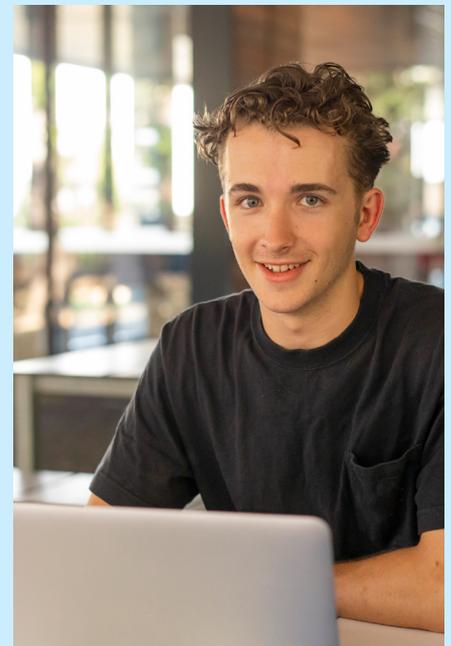
Each year about 800 young people turn 18 and legally leave statutory care in NSW.

Young people may need multiple overlapping services as they leave care so they can successfully transition to independence. The NSW Government's leaving and aftercare programs provide these young people with individualised responses to meet their needs to age 25, and sometimes beyond.

There is a whole suite of targeted programs to support young people during this life transition with:

- **housing** – Supported Independent Living placements, Foyer Central and the Premier's Youth Initiative
- **education and employment** – Smart and Skilled fee-free courses, targeted traineeships and scholarships
- **independence and identity** – leaving care planning, Transition to Independent Living Allowance, driving courses and life story support.

We want young people to make their own decisions, and these supports can be tailored to meet a young person's individual goals and needs.



Your Choice Your Future

\$100 million in extra support
for young people who leave
care from early 2023

From February 2023, the NSW Government will be offering additional leaving care support for young people transitioning from care until they reach the age of 21. This package includes:

- **creating a new 'staying on' carer allowance** from 18 years to 21 years for those 'staying on' living with their carer. Carers will receive \$544 per fortnight for the first year (age 18), stepping down to \$400 when age 19 and then \$250 per fortnight until they reach 21 years of age
- **creating a new independent living aftercare allowance** at \$250 per fortnight for any young person up to the age of 21 moving from their carer's home, or residential care, to independent living
- **increasing the capacity of the Specialist Aftercare Program** to provide support for young people with complex needs, including new elements such as mentoring and **additional caseworkers** to assist care leavers to access Your Choice, Your Future.



Case study: Alex



Alex, 19, was raised in foster care, but now lives independently.

He's currently focused on building up the skills to realise his dream career – working in the music industry.

“At about 17, I got very clear on what I wanted and I enrolled in TAFE to study, and I moved out from living with my carers,” Alex said.

“While in care, I had the chance to travel to Scotland, and this was an opportunity to travel as part of my education.

“For me, my foster parents and I are close, like a mum and dad to me, and I call them by their first names. I feel fortunate to have had the option to stay at home after turning 18, but I chose to look for other housing accommodation.”

Today, Alex is a sales manager, artist manager and tour organiser on the side. This is all while continuing his studies.

As far as hobbies go, music is Alex's main passion, while he also loves travelling, adventuring, skating and surfing.

The NSW Government's new aftercare supports will help more young people like Alex to build independent lives.

While Alex had the option to live at home with his foster carers, care leavers will be able to explore their dream careers, further education, aspirations, or whatever, without the pressure of being forced out of home.

