

REVIEWING IMPLEMENTATION OF
THE ABORIGINAL AND
TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER
CHILD PLACEMENT
PRINCIPLE
VICTORIA
2019



SNAICC
National Voice for our Children

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1. Introduction

This report reviews the progress of the Victorian Government in implementing the full intent of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (ATSICPP). This review is conducted on the basis of the best practice approach set out in SNAICC, 2017, [*Understanding and Applying the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle – A Resource for Legislation, Policy, and Program Development*](#) and SNAICC, 2018, [*The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle: A Guide to Support Implementation*](#).

It considers changes in the implementation of the five elements of the ATSICPP – prevention, partnership, placement, participation and connection – described in the diagram below across five interrelated system elements, since the comprehensive baseline analysis SNAICC released in April 2018 ([2018 Baseline Analysis](#)).¹ These system elements are legislation, policy, programs, processes and practice. The current review therefore only considers ATSICPP implementation efforts over the past year (from 1 May 2018 – 30 April 2019).

It is important to note that the review is somewhat limited in scope. It has a particular focus on child safety, protection, and family support service systems, and the work of government departments with primary responsibility for those systems. For example, the prevention element of the ATSICPP covers a broad scope of systems and multiple departmental responsibilities for universal service provision in areas such as health, education, and disability; however, these broader support systems are largely outside the scope of this review.

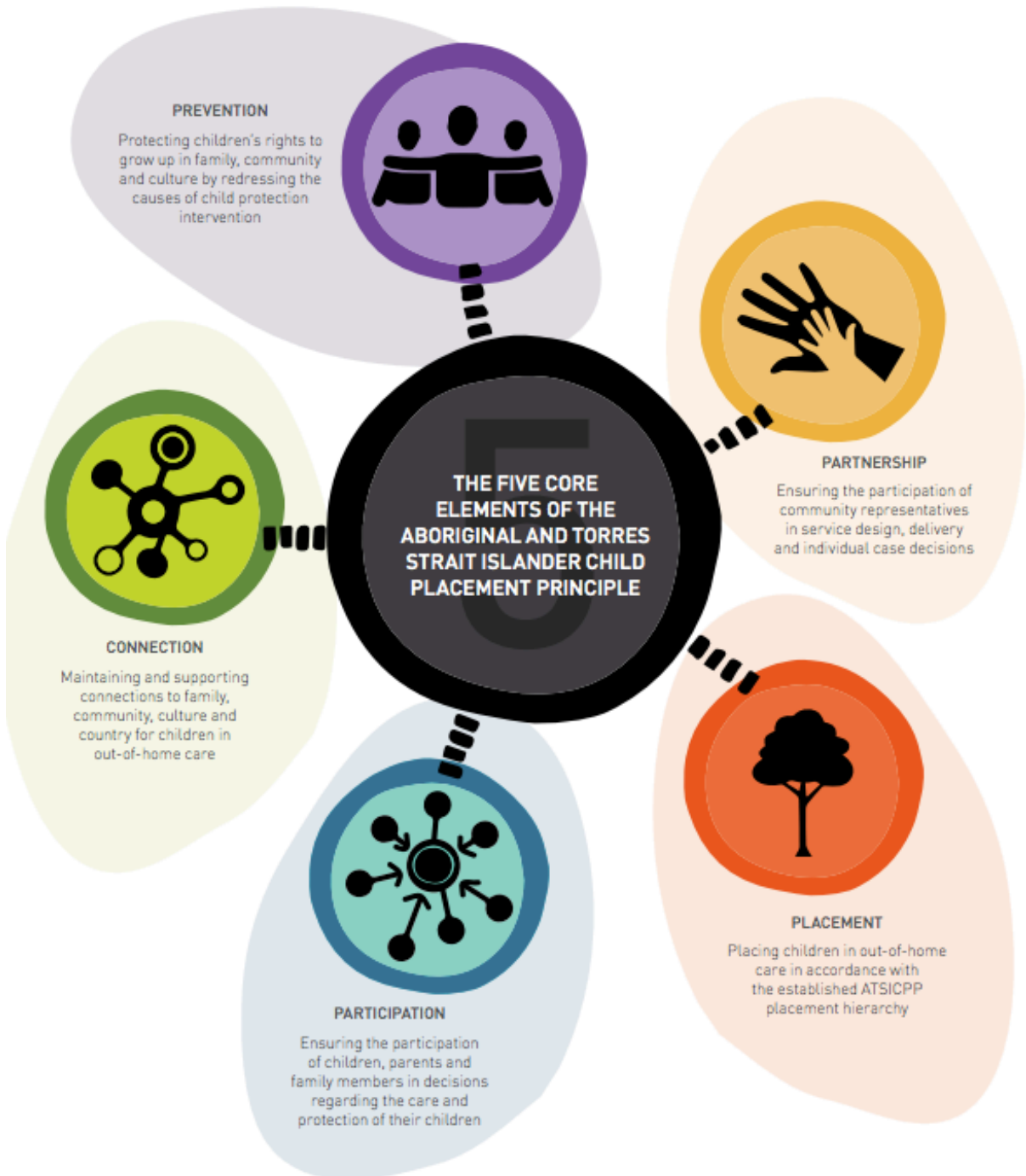
This review is based on available documentation gathered through a desktop review and input provided by the Victorian Government and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sector leaders.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Working Group for the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children has guided the development of this report and equivalent reviews for each state and territory jurisdiction. The Working Group is tasked with ensuring implementation of the ATSICPP in line with the agreement under the Fourth Action Plan to “uphold the five elements of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle to recognise the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to be raised in their own culture and the importance and value of their family, extended family, kinship networks, culture and community.”²

The purpose of this review, which will take place annually for all Australian states and territories, is to establish the current status of implementation of the ATSICPP in each state and territory in order to measure progress towards enhanced implementation.

¹ SNAICC – National Voice for our Children (2018). Baseline Analysis of Best Practice Implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle: Victoria. Available at <https://www.snaicc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/ATSICPP-Baseline-VIC-Final-April-2018.pdf>.

² Commonwealth of Australia (2018). Fourth Action Plan 2018-2020: Supporting Families, Communities and Organisations to Keep Children Safe. Available at https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/01_2019/dss-fourth-action-plan-v6-web-final.pdf.



2. Overview – Victoria

As the [2018 Baseline Analysis](#) noted, Victoria has one of the strongest legislative and policy frameworks in Australia for implementing the full intent of the ATSICPP. It has built on this in the reporting period with the continuation of a range of policy and program responses to the recommendations identified by the Commission for Children and Young People (Commission) in the [Always Was, Always Will Be Koori Children](#) and [In The Child's Best Interests](#) inquiries.³

This includes the launch of the seminal *Wungurilwil Gapgapduir: Aboriginal Children and Families Agreement*, developed in consultation with the Aboriginal community to ensure all Aboriginal children and young people have the opportunity to grow up culturally rich in strong Aboriginal families and community. It is premised upon self-determination and aims to resource and support Aboriginal organisations to care for children, family and communities. In a promising step, the 2018-19 Victorian Budget allocated \$53.3 million to support implementation of *Wungurilwil Gapgapduir* and the 2019-20 budget added an additional \$13.6 million to support this.

In relation to 'partnership', both the transfer of case management of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care (OOHC) to Aboriginal community controlled organisations (ACCOs) and the Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care (ACAC) commitment to delegate statutory functions under Section 18 of the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 for children under protection orders to ACCOs have also progressed during this period. As at June 2019, 46% (715) of Aboriginal children and young people on a contractible order in care are case managed by an ACCO and 72 Aboriginal children are authorised to an ACCO under ACAC. The ongoing oversight by Aboriginal leaders and organisations at the quarterly Aboriginal Children's Forum (Forum) is a critical mechanism of accountability alongside the role of the Victorian Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People. The Forum has a role to give practical effect to the implementation and monitoring of *Wungurilwil Gapgapduir: Aboriginal Children and Families Agreement*.

Victoria has continued to take a number of positive steps towards implementation of the 'placement' element of the ATSICPP. The most notable progress over the reporting period is the new model of kinship care, including the launch of an Aboriginal kinship finding service being delivered by VACCA with support from First Nations Legal and Research Services and Koorie Heritage Trust. Other changes focus on ACCOs developing a new culture and trauma-informed model of residential care, improvements to ACSASS, and setting Home Stretch targets for Aboriginal care leavers.

A review of the Aboriginal Family-Led Decision Making (AFLDM) program has led to updated AFLDM Program Guidelines to include procedures that enable accessible, timely and informed family participation. These are promising but, with their release due by the end of 2019, it is too soon to comment on their impact on the ATSICPP. Without data on the number of AFLDM meetings held or their outcomes, any improvement in the poor compliance with AFLDM meeting convening reported in the 2018 Baseline Analysis is also unknown.

'Connection' has also been a focus this period, with the 2018-19 State budget allocating \$11.9 million over four years to continue the new model of cultural planning as an ongoing program. Further, cultural plan templates and Cultural Planning Practice Guidelines are in development to enable better recording of information in accordance with the outcomes of a recent independent evaluation. Once again, practice appears to be lagging behind, however, with only 26% of Aboriginal children in OOHC having a cultural plan approved and signed off by the CEO of the local ACCO, as at December 2018 and 34% as at June 2019.

³ Commission for Children and Young People, Victoria, (2016). 'Always was, always will be Koori children': *Systemic inquiry into services provided to Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care in Victoria*, available at <https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/assets/Publications-inquiries/always-was-always-will-be-koori-children-inquiry-report-oct16.pdf>; Commission for Children and Young People, Victoria, (2016). *In the Child's Best Interests: Inquiry into Compliance with the Intent of the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle in Victoria*. Available at <https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/assets/Publications-inquiries/In-the-childs-best-interests-inquiry-report.pdf>.

In 2017-18, there were 345 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children subject to a permanent care order.⁴ Of these, 203 (59%) children were with a relative/kinship carer and 138 (40%) were with a relative/kinship or other carer who identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.⁵ Sector leaders have conveyed concerns about permanency planning and, in a context where rates of reunification are low, it is important to focus on providing family supports for children to be safely reunified rather than on solutions that could risk permanently severing children's connection to their families and cultures. In 2017-18, for every 10 Aboriginal children who entered care, just 3.5 children were reunified with their birth parents.⁶

Despite the Department's ongoing commitment to address implementation gaps of the ATSICPP, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Victoria are now 16.4 times more likely to be placed in OOHC than a non-Indigenous child.⁷ This represents a significant increase from the previous year (15.8 times more likely in 2016-17), positioning Victoria as the state with the second-highest rate of over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in OOHC across Australia. While reform initiatives are long-term and will take time to have impact, this suggests a disconnect between legislation, policy, programs and processes on the one hand and practice on the other. Targeted attention on ensuring staff, particularly child protection staff, are capable and equipped to implement the ATSICPP through the reform agenda is critical. This includes ensuring staff understand the full intent and holistic nature of the ATSICPP, as well as the fact that the principle must be embedded across all areas and stages of practice.

In 2017-18, 78% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were placed with family, kin or other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers, compared to 67% in 2014, reflecting the highest rate in the country, well above the national average of 64.5%.⁸ However, only 46.5% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were placed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers.⁹ This is a slight decrease from 48.3% in 2016-2017.

⁴ *The Family Matters Report 2019*, p. 37. Available at https://www.familymatters.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/1097_F.M-2019_LR.%C6%92.pdf.

⁵ *The Family Matters Report 2019*, p. 37. Available at https://www.familymatters.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/1097_F.M-2019_LR.%C6%92.pdf.

⁶ *The Family Matters Report 2019*, p. 33. Available https://www.familymatters.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/1097_F.M-2019_LR.%C6%92.pdf.

⁷ Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, Productivity Commission, Report on Government Services – Chapter 16 – Child Protection, 2019, Table 16A.9.

⁸ *The Family Matters Report 2019*, p. 37. Available at https://www.familymatters.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/1097_F.M-2019_LR.%C6%92.pdf.

⁹ *The Family Matters Report 2019*, p. 37. Available at https://www.familymatters.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/1097_F.M-2019_LR.%C6%92.pdf.

3. Prevention

There have been no changes to the relevant child safety, protection and wellbeing legislation, the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* (Vic) (the Act), since the 2018 Baseline Analysis.

The Victorian Government's 2016 *Roadmap for Reform* (Roadmap) – the strategy for the reform of children, youth and families services system – continued over the reporting period.¹⁰ The roadmap prioritises prevention and early intervention, and commits to working with Aboriginal communities to develop strategies regarding earlier and more culturally competent services, including the co-design of universal services. The Department released the *Roadmap for Reform Progress and Directions 2018* paper in the reporting period to outline the achievements of the strategy and to identify next steps.¹¹ It noted that to continue progress achieved to date, a “pathways approach” will be a crucial system-wide change. The paper states that, “the pathways approach looks at how all parts of the child and family system (The Orange Door, child and family services, Child Protection, care services, including Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care) connect to work with vulnerable children and families, as well as how the system is connected to other service platforms.” It proposes three pathways for support and a move away from the traditional tiered primary, secondary and tertiary structure of the current system. The pathways are early help for children and families with emerging needs, targeted and specialist support for children and families with increasing risks, and continuing care for children in enduring care arrangements. The paper recognises that, “while many Aboriginal children are thriving, the pathways will prioritise self-management and increase opportunities for Aboriginal communities to lead the healing and recovery of their children, young people and families.” It states that systematic reforms are being developed to enable the system and workforce to apply the pathways approach.

The Department reports that it has commenced a project to fully implement the remaining ATSI CPP recommendations outlined in the Commission's 2016 inquiries. This includes recommendations to encourage a greater understanding of the ATSI CPP and to develop practice models to comply with its intent. No further information on this project is publicly available.

The proportion of Victorian spending on intensive family support services and family support services in relation to total child protection spending rose very slightly from 25.7% in 2016-17 to 27.1% in 2017-18.¹² This is well above the national average of 17.1%. In 2017-18, 3,836 children attended an intensive family support service, of which 19.1% (735) were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander – a sharp increase from 6.35% in 2015-16.¹³ 9.5% (2578) of the 27,217 children commencing a non-intensive family support service were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.

Despite a concerted focus on increase early intervention and prevention in the roadmap, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Victoria are now 16.4 times more likely to be placed in OOHC than a non-Indigenous child.¹⁴ This represents a significant increase from the previous year (15.8 times more likely in 2016-17). Victoria has the second-highest rate of over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in OOHC in Australia.

¹⁰ Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Victoria (2016). *Roadmap for Reform*. Available at <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/201905/Roadmap-for-reform-28-4-2016.pdf>

¹¹ DHHS (2018). *Roadmap for Reform Progress and Directions 2018*. Available at <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/201905/Roadmap-for-Reform-children-and-families-May-2018.pdf>

¹² Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, Productivity Commission, Report on Government Services – Chapter 16 – Child Protection, 2019, Table 16A.7.

¹³ Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, Productivity Commission, Report on Government Services – Chapter 16 – Child Protection, 2019, Table 16A.31

¹⁴ Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, Productivity Commission, Report on Government Services – Chapter 16 – Child Protection, 2019, Table 16A.9

4. Partnership

The *Wungurilwil Gaggapduir: Aboriginal Children and Families Agreement (Wungurilwil Gaggapduir)*¹⁵, signed by the Victorian Government, Victorian Aboriginal communities, families and children (represented by the child and family ACCOs) and the child and family services sector on 26 April 2018, outlines a strategic direction to reduce the number of Aboriginal children in OOHC by building their connection to culture, country and community. The 2018-19 Victorian Budget allocated \$53.3 million to support implementation of *Wungurilwil Gaggapduir* and the 2019-20 budget provided an additional \$13.6 million.¹⁶ The agreement represents significant progress towards implementation of the partnership element of the ATSICPP.

Wungurilwil Gaggapduir, which means ‘strong families’ in Latji Latji, was developed in consultation with the Aboriginal community and co-designed with Aboriginal services and key mainstream child service organisations. It is the first tripartite agreement between ACCOs, community service organisations and government to improve outcomes for Aboriginal children and families. It seeks to reduce the number of Aboriginal children in OOHC in Victoria through a number of strategies, including, in particular, by firstly resourcing and supporting ACCOs to care for their children, families and communities, and, secondly, by increasing the cultural competence and accessibility of mainstream services under Aboriginal leadership.

The Department reports the following highlights from year one of *Wungurilwil Gaggapduir* in relation to partnership:

- \$6 million over four years in the 2018-19 state budget for an innovation and learning fund to provide Aboriginal organisations with opportunities to build a body of evidence, embed existing innovations into practice, grow innovative practices across the system and support ACCOs to explore new and culturally informed ways of working to improve outcomes for Aboriginal children and families. Ten of 14 ACCOs shared \$1.7 million for innovation and learning grants in 2018–19 to undertake activities that include an evaluation project, a cultural connection and mentoring program, an alternative foster care model and a cultural strengthening program.
- The establishment of Aboriginal advisory groups at four out of five of the new Orange Door locations, Victoria’s family violence and family support service coordination access hubs.
- The launch of a new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Safety Framework.¹⁷ The framework has been developed to help the department and mainstream Victorian health, human and community services to create culturally safe environments, services and workplaces.

The Department has continued to progress its commitment to transfer case management of all Aboriginal children in OOHC to ACCOs by the end of 2021. As at June 2019, the Department confirms that 46% (715) of Aboriginal children and young people on a contractible order in care were managed by an ACCO. This is an increase of 250% since August 2017. \$13.6 million was also allocated in the 2019-20 budget to enable a further 200 Aboriginal children in kinship care to transition to ACCOs, working towards the 2021 target.¹⁸

In terms of program development, the Department reports finalisation of revised program requirements for ACSASS in August 2018 to incorporate recommendations from the Commission’s 2016 inquiries. These are not yet available on the Department website. The revised program

¹⁵ DHHS (2018). *The Wungurilwil Gaggapduir: Aboriginal Children and Families Agreement*. Available at https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/201804/Aboriginal%20Children%20and%20Families%20Agreement%202018_1.pdf.

¹⁶ Government of Victoria (26 April 2018). *Media Release – Building A Strong future For Aboriginal Children*. Available at <https://www.premier.vic.gov.au/building-a-strong-future-for-aboriginal-children/>.

¹⁷ DHHS (2019). *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Safety Framework*. Available at <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/publications/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-cultural-safety-framework>.

¹⁸ Government of Victoria (27 May 2019). *Media Release – Strengthening Aboriginal Self Determination*. Available at <https://www.premier.vic.gov.au/strengthening-aboriginal-self-determination/>.

requirements contain new data collection and reporting requirements, which aim to provide more useful and detailed information about the ACSASS program to better inform policy and service design decisions. The Department also indicates that it implemented the recommendation to source local ACSASS providers for local community, resulting in Njernda Aboriginal Corporation (NAC) and Bendigo & District Aboriginal Corporation (BDAC) commencing ACSASS in the Loddon area. Recent Client Relationship Information System (CRIS) enhancements have also occurred to allow recording of ACSASS referrals between ACCOs and the Department. This places a higher level of accountability on complying with the mandatory requirement to involve ACSASS.

As part of the *Roadmap for Reform*, the Department indicates that the *Aboriginal Maternal Child Health Initiative* will also extend the operation of maternal and child health services in ACCOs, involving the co-design of a Maternal Child Health service delivery model to deliver more culturally responsive and high-quality services through both ACCOs and current service providers.

Implementation of the section 18 – Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care (ACAC) program, transferring the Secretary’s functions and powers for Aboriginal children on protection orders to ACCOs, also continued, with 108 funded children for ACAC. After the successful ‘as if’ ACAC pilot in January 2019, BDAC has been fully authorised, with 36 children and a fully operational program focusing on family reunification. VACCA has also launched a second ACAC team. During the BDAC pilot, 100% of Aboriginal children were placed with kin and 50% of those children returned home. The Victorian Aboriginal Children and Young People’s Alliance indicates that, as at February 2019, 55 Aboriginal children were being cared for by VACCA and BDAC. It also reports that pre-authorisation and program development has begun with the Ballarat and District Aboriginal Co-operative (BADAC) and NAC to establish ACAC programs within the next 12 months. According to sector leaders, ACAC has helped develop an Aboriginal approach to child protection that is creating a greater connection to family and culture for Aboriginal children and greater rates of returning home.

In terms of practice, the quarterly Aboriginal Children’s Forum (Forum) continues to be an important site for ACCOs to demand accountability and participate in, and lead, policy and program development. A review of the Forum in early 2019 resulted in its new function of giving practical effect to the priorities and actions outlined in *Wungurilwil Gapgapduir*.

5. Placement

The most significant development in relation to the placement element during this period has been the development of a new model for kinship care. The Aboriginal Kinship Family Finding Service is part of this new model that seeks to identify kinship carers earlier, strengthen Aboriginal community connections, and better support kinship carers. VACCA, in partnership with the First Nations Legal Research Service and Koorie Heritage Trust, will provide the new program.

The new model of kinship care consists of the following components:

1. Kinship teams, made up of a total of 36 full-time equivalent staff, supporting the early identification of kinship networks and the provision of ongoing and flexible support to kinship carers.
2. Aboriginal placement identification and support, including a new genealogical database and specialised searching expertise to support early kinship carer identification.
3. First Supports Program delivered by community service organisations and ACCOs to support new kinship placements.
4. Connection to community and culture for Aboriginal children through reunification support packages. The 39 packages, consisting of 200 hours of family services support, were allocated across two ACCOs.¹⁹

Some other highlights from year one of *Wungurilwil Gagapduir* are also relevant, namely:

- the development of a culture and trauma-informed model of residential care by the VACCA and the Mallee District Aboriginal Service
- setting at least 13% of Home Stretch targets for Aboriginal care leavers, proportionate to the number of Aboriginal young people leaving care. Home Stretch is the new \$11.6 million service response that gives young people leaving out-of-home care the option to continue living with their carer(s) until the age of 21.²⁰

Reforms to the ACSASS program to strengthen its impact (see 'partnership') should enhance implementation of the placement element, with, for example, establishment of two ACCOs as local ACSASS providers in the Loddon area.

The Commission's 2016 inquiry into Victoria's compliance with the ATSICPP²¹ recommended a focus on documentation of decision-making processes on hierarchy compliance. The Department reports amendments to the CRIS to better enable increased compliance with the ATSICPP, which will come into effect in mid-2019. These amendments mean that the practitioner must record placement decisions based on the ATSICPP hierarchy, the kinship relation of the primary carer, demographic information of the carer and the decision rationale.

In 2017-18, 78% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were placed with family, kin or other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers, compared to 67% in 2014, and well above the national average of 64.5%.²² In 2017-18, however, only 46.5% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were placed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers.²³ This is a slight decrease from 48.3% in 2016-2017.

¹⁹ DHHS (2018). *Annual Report 2017-18*. Available at

<https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/201812/DHHS-annual-report-2017-18.pdf>.

²⁰ Government of Victoria (25 September 2018). *Media Release – Helping Vulnerable Young People on The Home Stretch*, available at <https://www.premier.vic.gov.au/helping-vulnerable-young-people-on-the-home-stretch/>.

²¹ Ibid.

²² *The Family Matters Report 2019*, p. 37. Available https://www.familymatters.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/1097_F.M-2019_LR.%C6%92.pdf.

²³ Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, Productivity Commission, Report on Government Services – Chapter 16 – Child Protection, 2019, Table 16A.20.

On a positive note, 73.2% (653) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children admitted to out-of-home care in 2017-18 were placed with relatives/kin or other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers.²⁴

²⁴ *The Family Matters Report 2019*, p. 75. Available https://www.familymatters.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/1097_F.M-2019_LR.%C6%92.pdf.

6. Participation

The Department completed a review of the Aboriginal family-led decision-making (AFLDM) program in the reporting period to address serious concerns raised in the Commission's 2016 inquiry into compliance with the ATSICPP.²⁵ The review advisory group included representatives from the funded ACCOs, the Department, the Office of Professional Practice, Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing, and the Commission. The review is not publicly available; however, the Department informs that it recognised how valued the AFLDM program is to both the Department and ACCOs and the important role of convenors. It also indicated the need to strengthen aspects of the program and incorporate recommendations from the 2016 Commission inquiries. The Department reports that the AFLDM Program Guidelines were updated as an outcome of the review to include procedures that enable accessible, timely and informed family participation. They are due to be released by the end of 2019.

The Department advises that the updated Guidelines include guidance regarding referral to AFLDM, cultural safety, the attendance of support persons, participation of Elders at the parents' discretion, preparation, family engagement and the meeting process. The Department also informs that the Guidelines note the need for an assessment of the appropriateness of the child's attendance and strengthen the requirement to have an AFLDM meeting post substantiation. The 2018 Baseline Analysis noted that the AFLDM guidelines state that an ACCO co-convened AFLDM is the "preferred practice for Aboriginal children" rather than mandatory. It is not yet known if this has been amended.

The Department reports that the new AFLDM guidelines strengthen the existing program requirement to have regular ongoing training for child protection practitioners in the convening of meetings, the cultural needs of children and the operation of CRIS. Amendments to CRIS in relation to AFLDM have also been made. This includes automating AFLDM meeting referrals which will become a worklist item for Department AFLDM convenors and having an AFLDM note type.

There was no update from the Department or otherwise on the number of AFLDM meetings held over the reporting period nor on the impact of these meetings.

²⁵ Ibid.

7. Connection

In July 2018, the Victorian Government announced its decision not to progress legislative amendments to permanency “at this time” despite recommendations for legislative reform made by the Victorian Commission and Young People.²⁶ As recommended by the Commission, the Victorian Government is committing to a longitudinal study to “ensure there are no unintended consequences of this legislation”. Discussions are underway about who may be best placed to conduct this study. In 2017-18, there were 345 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children subject to a permanent care order.²⁷ Of these, 203 (59%) children were with a relative/kinship carer and 138 (40%) were with a relative/kinship or other carer who identified at Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.²⁸ Sector leaders have conveyed concerns about permanency planning and, in a context where rates of reunification are low, it is important to focus on providing family supports for children to be safely reunified rather than on solutions that could risk permanently severing children’s connection to their families and cultures. In 2017-18, for every 10 Aboriginal children who entered care, just 3.5 children were reunified with their birth parents.²⁹

The Department reports that an independent evaluation was conducted on the new model for cultural plans implemented in 2017. The evaluation is not publicly available; however, the Department informs that it confirmed broad support for the new model. It also promoted additional guidelines for practitioners and revised templates for cultural plans. The 2018-19 State Budget allocated \$11.9 million over four years to continue the new model of cultural planning as an ongoing program.³⁰ The Department indicates that cultural plan templates are in development to record information about the child’s identification, cultural heritage, cultural connections to family and mob, reflections of their own cultural history and cultural aspirations. A draft Cultural Planning practice guideline is also under development and plans are in place for cultural plan referrals through the Client Relationship Information System for Service Providers (CRISSP)/CRIS systems to be piloted in one region in 2019.

While these represent positive progress in implementation of the connection element of the ATSICPP, Aboriginal sector leaders note that there is more required to comply with legislation concerning cultural planning. According to the Victorian Aboriginal Children and Young People’s Alliance, as at December 2018, only 26% of Aboriginal children in OOHC had a cultural plan approved and signed off by the CEO of the local ACCO – a requirement introduced as part of the new model for cultural plans (see the 2018 Baseline Analysis for further information).³¹ The Department states that current data collection for cultural planning needs to be reviewed and that there will be the opportunity to workshop a consistent status report on cultural planning that fits across all regions. It did not state when this is likely to occur.

As reported in the 2018 Baseline Analysis, Targeted Care Packages were introduced in 2015 to assist children in OOHC including residential care to return home, move to a foster or kinship placement, or transition to independent living. As at 30 June 2018, over 575 Targeted Care Packages had been allocated. According to the Department, this has assisted over 365 children and young people to transition out of residential care and prevented over 215 children and young people from entering residential care.³²

²⁶ DHHS (2018). *Safe And Wanted - An Inquiry Into the Implementation of Permanency Arrangements*. Available at <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/publications/safe-and-wanted-inquiry-implementation-permanency-arrangements>

²⁷ *The Family Matters Report 2019*, p. 37. Available at https://www.familymatters.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/1097_F.M-2019_LR.%C6%92.pdf.

²⁸ *The Family Matters Report 2019*, p. 37. Available at https://www.familymatters.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/1097_F.M-2019_LR.%C6%92.pdf.

²⁹ *The Family Matters Report 2019*, p. 33. Available at https://www.familymatters.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/1097_F.M-2019_LR.%C6%92.pdf.

³⁰ DHHS (2018). *Victorian Data and Written Response*. Available at <https://www.familymatters.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Victoria-Data-and-Written-Response.pdf>

³¹ Feedback provided by sector leaders.

³² DHHS (2018). *Annual Report 2017-18*. Available at <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/201812/DHHS-annual-report-2017-18.pdf>.