

## NSW Ombudsman report:

### *Aboriginal Outcomes Strategy focus area 2 (out-of-home care) – were the targets achieved?*

The NSW Ombudsman, Paul Miller, has today tabled a report assessing the extent to which the State's child protection department achieved its five-year strategy to reduce overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care (OOHC).

The NSW Department of Communities & Justice's *Aboriginal Outcomes Strategy 2017-2021* (AOS) set an over-arching goal of reducing the over-representation of Aboriginal children in OOHC, together with four specific targets directed toward that goal.

"Our concern has been the failure of DCJ itself to report transparently on what it did to implement the strategy, and its failure to publicly report on the outcomes of the AOS, including whether and the extent to which the OOHC goal and its four associated targets were achieved" Mr Miller said.

In the absence of such reporting by the department itself, the NSW Ombudsman's office set out to independently assess and report on what was done to implement the AOS, whether its goal of reducing Aboriginal over-representation in OOHC was achieved, and the extent to which its targets were met.

DCJ's plan to implement the AOS had included commitments for executive level monitoring, tailored plans in each district, a three-stage evaluation program, ongoing consultation with Aboriginal communities and stakeholders, and public reporting on progress towards the targets.

"We found that much of what was planned did not occur. Executive monitoring and quarterly progress reports ceased in mid-2019, well before the end of the strategy. Less than half the districts put in place required local plans, while some other districts did not know about the requirement. Two of three planned evaluations of the AOS were not done," Mr Miller said.

"It was apparent to us that at some point within its five-year timeframe, DCJ effectively abandoned the AOS. DCJ did not report on what had been achieved by the AOS in the time it was operating, and nor did it announce that the strategy was being abandoned or why."

The Ombudsman's report shows that the AOS did not achieve its goal of reducing Aboriginal over-representation in OOHC.

Between 2017 and 2022, the proportion of children in OOHC who are Aboriginal has increased, from 38.4% in June 2017 to 43.8% in June 2022.

There was some reduction in the rate of Aboriginal children in OOHC (from 62.0 to 53.7 per 1,000 Aboriginal children). However, there was a disproportionately greater reduction in the rate of non-Aboriginal children in OOHC (from 6.7 to 5.2 per 1,000 non-Aboriginal children).

In 2017, Aboriginal children were 9.3 times more likely to be in OOHC than non-Aboriginal children. By 2022, Aboriginal children were 11 times more likely to be in OOHC.

### **Individual AOS targets:**

1. 10% reduction in the number of Aboriginal children in OOHC by 30 June 2020.
2. Over 5 years, reduce the number of Aboriginal children entering OOHC by 20%.
3. Over 5 years, transition 1200 Aboriginal children from OOHC to guardianship orders.
4. Over 5 years, restore 1500 Aboriginal children from OOHC to their families.

### **Target results**

None of the targets were achieved. There was some progress toward each target, and DCJ came close to achieving Target No.2:

1. the number of Aboriginal children in OOHC on 30 June 2020 was 2.2% lower than the number of Aboriginal children in OOHC three years earlier, far short of the 10% target
2. the number of entries of Aboriginal children into OOHC declined by 18.5% from June 2017 to June 2022, close to the 20% target
3. a total of 704 Aboriginal children in OOHC exited to guardianship in the five years to 30 June 2022, this is 59% of the AOS target
4. 999 Aboriginal children were restored to their families from 2017-18 to 2021-22, this is 66.6% of the AOS target.

[Read full report.](#)