



Transitioning to an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO)

October 2024

Information for caseworkers

This factsheet is for caseworkers and practitioners (including, but not limited to, NGO staff, therapeutic clinicians, cultural planners and behavioural support planners) who support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in out-of-home care and their carers.

How can I support carers and children in care through this transition?

Children will likely have many questions about what the transition means for them and what will change. It is important to provide them with the opportunity and safe space to voice their opinions and ask questions.

To be a champion for change, it is important to listen, be supportive and actively involved in planning to facilitate a smooth transition.

It is important to let the child know exactly what will change and what will stay the same. For example, when they transition to an ACCO, they will work with a new caseworker.

Developing a good relationship with the ACCO staff to work in partnership is key to a smooth transition. We encourage you to work with the ACCO to arrange joint home visits, join the child on a tour of the ACCO premises and introduce them to the new people who will be part of their life in the near future.

There are also many practical ways to support children to understand the changes and assist with planning a case management transfer. These include:

- **Social stories**, developed at an age-appropriate level to explain the changes clearly and sensitively.
- **Preparing a clearly defined transition plan** for the child, which outlines the key supports, milestones and roles and responsibilities of each organisation (NGO, ACCO, DCJ). This plan should be developed with the child, in partnership with the NGO caseworker, the ACCO caseworker, carer and any other important services or adults in the child's life.
- **A case plan or case plan review meeting** with the child present where the transition process is discussed. It may be an option to include the new ACCO caseworker for a portion of that meeting.

If there are issues or questions you do not have the answer to, you can ask your supervisor, your local ACCO, or the DCJ unit with secondary case management (CFDU or CSC).

The child has other strong cultural connections and heritage. How will their cultural care be managed by an ACCO?

All out-of-home care providers have a responsibility to ensure a child's cultural background is an integral part of case planning. During the case management transfer process, it is important to share all cultural plans (Aboriginal and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse) to ensure the ACCO understands the child's individual cultural connections, practices and needs.

Carers are concerned that an ACCO will not accept their transition if they are non-Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. Is this true?

No. A key focus of this project is to embed culturally appropriate case management and care for children/young people living with non-Aboriginal carers.

Non-Aboriginal carers are concerned they will receive a different service to Aboriginal carers at an ACCO? Is this true?

No. Transitioned non-Aboriginal carers will experience the same professionalism and services as transitioned Aboriginal carers. Their move to an Aboriginal agency demonstrates a commitment to providing the child in care with an enriched and ongoing lived experience of their culture.

Please ensure you inform the ACCO staff of services and supports you currently assist the child/carer with. This will allow the ACCO to plan around how they can mirror those supports/services.

Carers are concerned that ACCOs won't be provided with all the essential background information on their child's care journey?

As the current caseworker, it is essential that you have a comprehensive handover with the incoming caseworker, so they are best placed to continue to support the carer, children and household. This includes sharing information about ongoing supports, needs and routines.

I've heard mixed messaging from my agency about the transition being optional.

It is a NSW government priority that all Aboriginal children and their carers are case managed by ACCOs, and there is an expectation that all NGOs will support this.

Our priority is to facilitate a transition as smoothly and as sensitively as possible, in a way that best supports each individual carer and child's situation and wellbeing.

If you feel that your child or their carer are not ready to transition, it is necessary that the NGO:

- Contacts the local ACCO to seek further ideas/advice to support the carer to transition.
- Actions these recommendations accordingly.
- Clearly documents evidence of their efforts and actions to support the child/ren and carer to transition to an ACCO.
- Report to DCJ by updating relevant tracking information.

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Please consult your supervisor or the DCJ unit with secondary case management (CFDU or CSC) about your concerns. They will be able to work with you to develop and navigate a transition plan.

It is highly recommended that you consult with your local ACCO around navigating any transition difficulties or questions. You may like to prepare a list of the top priorities for the household in question and request a meeting with the local ACCO to work through and address any questions or concerns.

Can an Aboriginal child be exempt from the OOHC Transition?

No. There are no policies or frameworks in place that allow for an Aboriginal child in OOHC to be exempt from transitioning to an ACCO. Every Aboriginal child in OOHC has the right to the cultural safety and connections that come with being case managed by an ACCO.

It is, however, recognised there may be circumstances that prevent a child and their carer from transitioning to an ACCO. This may be due to a number of scenarios, such as imminent finalisation of a permanency case plan goal, or an ACCO is not able to accept a referral at this time due to capacity or criteria (for example, a conflict of interest).

These matters are considered to be “point in time” situations preventing current transfer; they do not automatically exclude an Aboriginal child from being referred to an ACCO. Situations can change over time and so can eligibility.

When these matters arise, it is critical that they are discussed and worked through in consultation with the child’s local ACCO (or an ACCO based close to the child’s community of origin). ACCOs can lead decision making in the best interest of children, through culturally appropriate advice that is based on extensive knowledge of a child’s cultural and familial context.

Local DCJ Aboriginal consultation mechanisms (for example, Aboriginal led care and placement panels) may be referred to for additional guidance to support decision making that is always Aboriginal led and in the best interest of children.

If ACCO consultation has occurred and a matter is currently unable to transition, the ACCO (and potentially a DCJ led cultural consultation team/panel) may recommend that a matter is to be placed on hold, with either:

1. A plan in place for the NGO to address any issues or concerns that may be preventing the transition going ahead (for example, carer consent which may be managed via greater levels of education and support).
2. A view to re-refer to an ACCO at a future time (if, and when, circumstances change).

What if the carer wants dual authorisation for their household?

Dual authorisation is possible but may not always be the most realistic or preferred option for Permanency Support Program (PSP) providers, or in the child’s best interests.

It is important to ensure that the carer has carefully considered how dual authorisation might impact their household, as they will be required to work with two PSP providers, who will separately deliver home visits, carer reviews and other services and support.

Dual authorisation involves an agreement between all parties, strong relationships, clear communication and a clear plan between the two providers and the carer.

As the caseworker, you will need to put in place clear terms of agreement with the other provider, including setting clear expectations, responsibilities, and obligations. The communication plan between all parties should outline how any issues will be

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managed, how additional placements/respite are agreed to and how placement matching will occur.

Will there be any changes to family time arrangements or visiting siblings and family after transitioning?

All foster care agencies regularly review family time arrangements. Discussing current formal and informal family time arrangements will be a key task for both the current and future agency in the case management transfer (CMT) meeting.

There are no ACCOs providing foster care in the area, or the ACCO is still in its early stages of expansion. Will they be able to support the child and household?

There may not be an ACCO currently ready to go in the area where the child or young person lives with their carer. Until an ACCO is ready within that local area, you will continue to provide ongoing case management support and prepare the child and carer for any future transfer to an ACCO.

What happens if the carer doesn't wish to transfer to an ACCO?

If a carer does not wish to transfer, it's important to listen to their concerns.

Each carer will have questions and thoughts about how any life changes may impact their specific household support needs. It is essential that the individual needs of every carer, and the children they care for, are considered in the transition planning with the ACCO.

Many carers will want reassurance that when they transition to an ACCO, they will continue to be provided with the same level of support.

Your role as the caseworker is to contact the ACCO to discuss the household needs and supports currently in place, and to reassure the carer that the ACCO will be given all the necessary information to ensure those supports continue.

When working with carers who are unwilling to transition, seek further advice and direction from your internal practice and cultural leads, the local ACCO, and the DCJ unit with secondary case management responsibility.

Is ACCO accreditation different from other NGOs?

No. ACCOs undergo the same rigorous accreditation processes and requirements as NGOs.

In NSW, all agencies must be accredited by the Office of the Children's Guardian (OCG) before they can provide out-of-home care services. This includes the Department of Communities and Justice, NGOs and ACCOs.

As per the OCG Accreditation Process Information for Carers: *"all out-of-home care agencies are required to be accredited and must show that they are compliant with the 23 mandatory standards. All agencies, regardless of their size or whether they are government providers, non-government organisations or Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations must be able to show how the services they provide meet the standards."*

The OCG work with all ACCOs, particularly emerging ACCOs, to ensure that their transition planning and practice has been carefully considered so that they have the capacity to manage their growth and support new placements appropriately.



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Where can I find information on the transition project?

For general information you can visit the [ACWA Transition Hub](#) and the [AbSec Transition App website](#) where there are resources and information tailored to carers, young people, and NGO practitioners.

Visit the [DCJ ACCO transition webpage](#) or the [OCG website](#) for more information.

You can also call or email the DCJ unit with secondary case management responsibility (CFDU or CSC) with your queries.