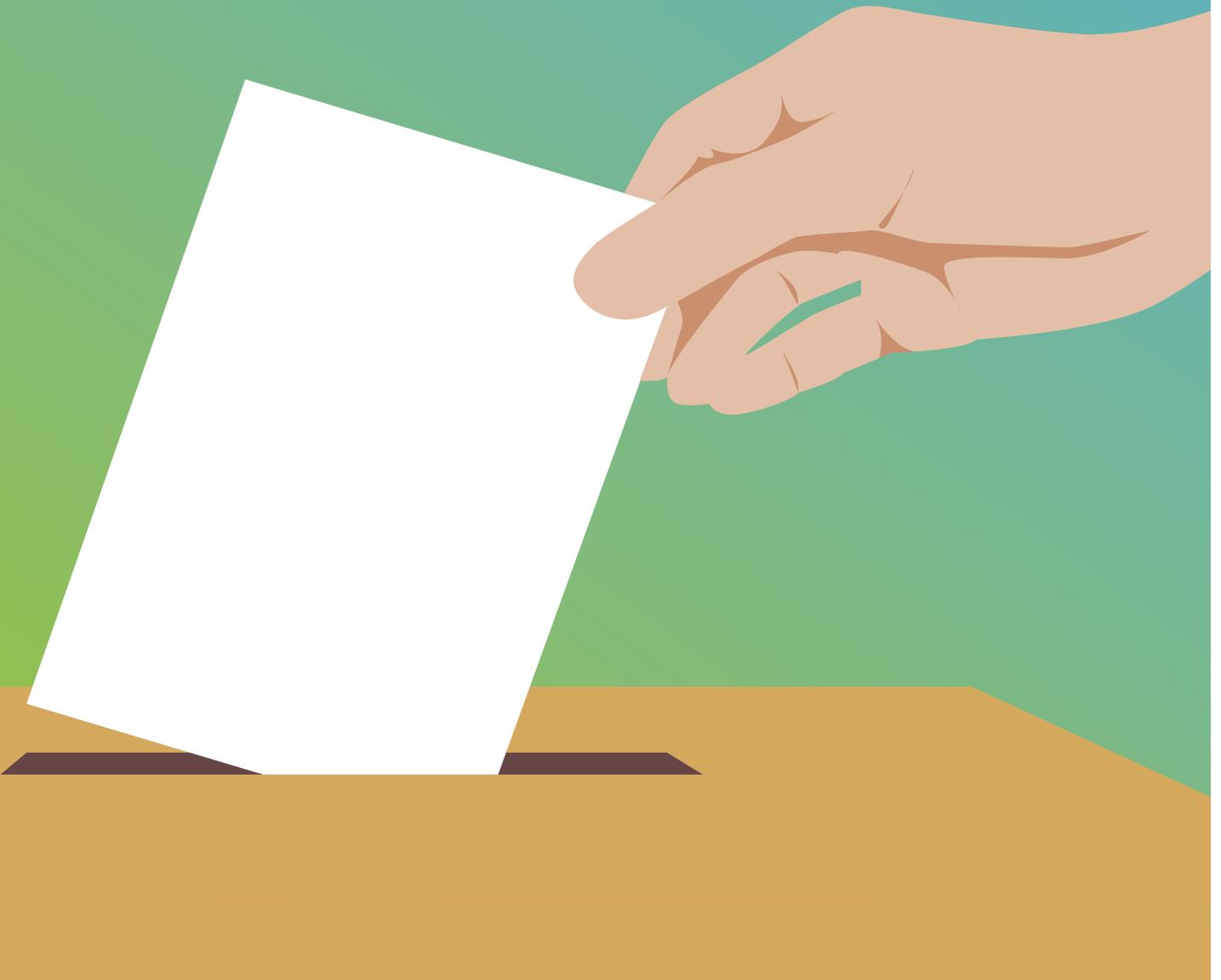


ACWA 2023 STATE ELECTION ADVOCACY PLATFORM



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Who we are

The Association of Children's Welfare Agencies (ACWA) is the NSW peak body representing the voice of non-government community organisations that deliver services to children, young people and families experiencing vulnerability.

For more than 60 years we have worked with our members, partners, government and non-government agencies, and other peak bodies, to bring about positive systemic reform that will deliver better outcomes to the lives of children and young people, including those living in out-of-home care.

What do we want?

ACWA and other sector members want the next NSW Government to prioritise investment in a child and family system with a focus on providing early intervention and prevention services. It is only by providing parents and children with the supports and resources they need to thrive that we will reduce the number of children entering the care system.

We also call on the next government to invest more in streamlining out-of-home care system contracts and processes so that providers can focus on working directly with children and families to support their needs. This particularly includes improved investment in developing effective data systems and reducing administrative complexity to drive a more efficient service system.



OUR 10 PRIORITIES

As part of our pre-election advocacy platform, ACWA is asking all NSW members of parliament to commit to **10 priorities** that will make a difference to children, families, and communities, as well as assisting our workforce and services. These priorities recognise the need to ensure the targeted use of current investment to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of existing services, while further investing in community-focussed solutions.

A real commitment to make a real difference

We seek commitment to the following measures:



1 Invest in creating a more holistic, collaborative and responsive service system that builds connections between existing services to meet the diverse needs of vulnerable children and families.

We believe this can be achieved by:

- ✓ Increasing investment in Family Preservation and evidence-based Targeted Earlier Intervention services by at least 25% (around \$43 million);
- ✓ Developing and funding targeted culturally and linguistically diverse community messaging about what's needed to keep children safe;
- ✓ Investing in and supporting further development of integrated child and family hubs across the state to improve equitable access to critical protective supports such as health, education, and social services through a location-based and family-centred approach;
- ✓ Funding 100 key workers and navigators across the state to drive collaboration on integrated hubs that provide multi-agency support, provide opportunities to build parental capacity and help families to create social connections during a child's first 2000 days;
- ✓ Incentivising collaborative localised planning, as opposed to a competitive tendering approach to service provision.



2 Improve NSW's progress in addressing the disproportionate response in relation to Aboriginal children and young people in the child protection system.

We believe this can be achieved by:

- ✓ Strengthening accountability and oversight through the establishment of an independent statutory role with responsibility for ensuring effective delivery of Aboriginal-led service responses for families and communities;
- ✓ Taking a more culturally considerate decision-making approach to Risk of Significant Harm (RoSH) reports including multi-service triaging that involves Aboriginal child protection services;
- ✓ Mandating ongoing cultural awareness training for all departmental child protection and out-of-home care workers;
- ✓ Increasing investment and practical support to Aboriginal-specific family preservation services, including investment in wraparound supports such as drug and alcohol, domestic violence and homelessness services.



3 Implement the recommendations of the Family is Culture Report by prioritising investment in the sustainable growth of Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations (ACCOs).

We believe this can be achieved by:

- ✓ Increasing funding for ACCOs to deliver the early support needed to keep families together;
- ✓ Resourcing ACCOs to provide care in culture and community for all Aboriginal children to live safely in their community;
- ✓ Embedding the Aboriginal Case Management Policy and Practice Guidance - including the establishment of Aboriginal Community Controlled Mechanisms, Community Facilitators and Aboriginal Family-Led Decision-Making.

4 Strengthen the sustainability of the social sector workforce in NSW.

We believe this can be achieved by:

- ✓ Investing in enhanced recruitment and training initiatives to attract and retain skilled workers;
- ✓ Extending the length of standard contract grants in the social services sector, particularly for services in rural and remote areas where it's hard to maintain a stable workforce;
- ✓ Introducing portability of entitlements, providing an incentive for experienced staff to remain in the sector;
- ✓ Investing in capacity-building for the delivery of hybrid and virtual models of care that complement place-based services, offer client choice and increase accessibility of support services.



5 Stop the cut to funding for Semi-Independent Living (SIL) and Therapeutic Semi-Independent Living (TSIL) services to support our most vulnerable young people.

This is critical because young people exiting Intensive Therapeutic Care or other forms of residential out-of-home care usually need ongoing support to live independently in the community.

We believe this can be achieved by:

- ✓ Stopping the proposed cut to case management support for young people over 18 which is due to be implemented on 1st July 2023;
- ✓ Applying the same principles of care and support that underpin the NSW Government's extension of foster care from 18 to 21 to those in Intensive Therapeutic Care or other forms of residential care;
- ✓ Seeking alignment of timelines for applications for Federal Government-funded supports e.g. NDIS packages, with timelines for leaving care planning;
- ✓ Pursuing a bi-lateral agreement between State and Commonwealth governments that responsibility for providing adequate support for over-18s who have been in out-of-home care should be shared.

“ We call on the next government to invest more in streamlining contracts so that providers can focus on working directly with children and families to support their needs. ”





6 Further invest in efforts to increase high-quality home-based care options for children and young people in out-of-home care.

We believe this can be achieved by:

- ✓ Increasing funding for family finding and assessment of relative / kinship carers;
- ✓ Increasing funding for contemporary care models;
- ✓ Increasing the allowance to relative/ kinship and foster carers by 20% to address cost of living and housing affordability pressures on carers;
- ✓ Delivering enhanced community messaging in relation to the importance of permanency for children and young people, and the range of caring options available.



7 A hotel is not a home - prevent children and young people from falling through the 'service gap' and entering Alternative Care Arrangements (ACAs).

We believe this can be achieved by:

- ✓ Funding providers with a demonstrated history of providing high-quality, child-focused services to deliver early wraparound supports to children when they enter care;
- ✓ Allowing greater flexibility within the core Permanency Support Program (PSP) for experienced providers to care for children and young people whose needs may sit outside the parameters of a particular contract;
- ✓ Reducing the level of funding of unaccredited and 'for-profit' services to that of accredited, contracted service providers. This would reduce placements of children in hotel / motel accommodation with unqualified and transient workers;
- ✓ Reducing 'red tape' and simplifying the business rules around the various contract types, particularly in relation to eligibility criteria such as age of the child and CAT score, to enable placements to be made on the basis of children's needs.

8 Ensure access to secure and affordable housing, which is critical for the wellbeing and stability of children, young people and families.

We believe this can be achieved by:

- ✓ Extending priority access to available housing stock for vulnerable cohorts including:
 - young people transitioning to independence from out-of-home care;
 - families providing relative / kinship care, where housing support is needed;
 - families where children have been restored from care;
 - families escaping domestic and family violence;
- ✓ Releasing government housing stock for use by residential and disability care providers.



“ ACWA and other sector members want the next NSW Government to prioritise investment in a child and family system with a focus on providing early intervention and prevention services. ”





9 Reduce the unacceptable levels of educational disadvantage currently experienced by children and young people in the child protection and out-of-home care system in NSW.

We believe this can be achieved by:

- ✔ Strengthening links between schools and NGO service providers through the expansion of the OOHC Education pathways program;
- ✔ Funding NGO service providers to deliver tailored educational supports aimed at primary to secondary transitions and maintaining or rebuilding children and young people's engagement with mainstream schooling;
- ✔ Prioritising Brighter Beginnings for vulnerable children known to child protection and out-of-home care services;
- ✔ Expanding the targeted tutoring program set up to assist children for all children in OOHC;
- ✔ Supporting early intervention and prevention for children with early onset disruptive behaviours in the pre-school years to support transition to school;
- ✔ Investing in evidence-based programs to build the workforce capacity of teachers in the management of children with disruptive behaviours e.g. Teacher Child Interaction Therapy (TCIT).



10 More investment and transparency in the collection and use of accurate outcomes and evaluation data to measure success for children and families in the Permanency Support Program.

We believe this can be achieved by:

- ✔ Delivering on the NSW Government's 2015 commitment to a comprehensive B2B technology solution that efficiently links out-of-home care data across NGO service provider and Government data systems. *(This initiative has been promised for over five years, with no resolution. Its implementation is critical to increase efficiency in the data system so that we can spend time with children, rather than double-entries of data);*
- ✔ Releasing the results of the PSP Evaluation Report undertaken by the Centre for Evidence and Implementation, and taking steps to implement recommendations to improve the system.



STRONG PEAKS CAN DELIVER BETTER OUTCOMES

NSW is fortunate to have a strong network of Peak organisations whose focus is on advocating for a robust and sustainable social sector that delivers better outcomes for the whole community.

ACWA works closely with AbSec, FAMS, NCOSS, Youth Action, YFoundations, Domestic Violence NSW and CREATE to support NGO providers across the continuum of care, and we are pleased to be able to endorse a number of joint election statements calling for increased investment in early intervention and prevention services, delivery on the recommendations of the Family is Culture Report, improved consideration of issues that affect young people and measures to address the intersection between domestic and family violence and child protection.

To discuss these suggested measures further, contact:

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