

NATIONAL COALITION ON CHILD SAFETY AND WELLBEING

ANNUAL MEETING – 25 JUNE 2024

(Held via Microsoft Teams)

Summary

Approximately 70 members and stakeholders - representing approximately 20 organisations and research bodies - attended the annual meeting. The meeting was facilitated by Jamie Crosby, CEO Families Australia and Convenor of the National Coalition on Child Safety and Wellbeing (National Coalition).

A copy of the agenda is at **Attachment A**. A list of participating organisations is at **Attachment B**.

The keynote presenter was Ms Melissa Brown from AMR Consulting.

In addition to questions and answer discussion following each presentation, participants were encouraged to post comments and questions to the 'chat function' throughout the course of the meeting. A summary is at **Attachment C**.

***Editing note:** The text below represents a summary, rather than a direct translation of Annual meeting presentations and content. While every effort has been made to correctly capture the intent of speakers, please consult the original presenters prior to quoting any material from this report.*

Agenda Item 1: Acknowledgements and Overview (Jamie Crosby CEO, Families Australia, Convenor of the National Coalition Steering Group)

Mr Crosby commenced the meeting with an Acknowledgement of Country across the multiple Traditional Lands and Sea Countries on which members and stakeholders are located.

Agenda Item 2: Keynote presentation: Ngunngun baraayn ngundakang - Yesterday, today and tomorrow¹ (Presentation on Working together to support the growth of the ACCO Sector) by Melissa Brown of AMR Consulting.

Ms Brown commenced by acknowledging she was on the lands of the Dughutti people and that she is a Bundjalung woman who has spent about the last 25 years working across the sector in various roles for government and NGOs. Ms Brown's talk drew upon her recent experience of the NSW transition to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) process and the stronger ACCOs, stronger families project (DSS). She centred on the theme of partnerships in the context of what self-determination looks like for the ACCO sector.

Ms Brown contended that the way in which government are procuring services to be delivered to Aboriginal people is not working, given there is no self-determination in the current model. While sometimes First Nations peoples and communities are consulted, or provide advice to government, often they are not able to sit at decision-making tables to have a say in what services are needed for their communities - and who delivers them.

Ms Brown highlighted the harm caused by Western models in child protection, citing increased removal rates among Aboriginal children and advocating for the recognition and embedding of First Nations cultural practices and wisdom. She also pointed out that safety and risk assessment tools also have inherent

¹ Dughetti language, Macleay Valley NSW Ngunngun: Pronounced as "ngoon-ngoon" baraayn: Pronounced as "bah-rah-eeen", ngundakang: Pronounced as "ngoon-dah-kang"

cultural biases in them, so using those tools puts up a barrier for Aboriginal children and families to access support and increases the risk factor.

What's next for the ACCO sector?

Ms Brown discussed changes to government funding proposals for Indigenous organizations beyond 2026* and the respective roles of non-Indigenous NGOs and ACCOs in the transition of government funded services to the Aboriginal sector. The New South Wales government is currently redistributing funding to the Aboriginal community-controlled sector. The lack of transition planning and community-specific work is a concern for the Aboriginal sector in New South Wales.

**Mr Crosby noted varying dates for government funding proposals beyond 2026 and reassured the audience that the 2026 date is not a hard deadline for all services in all states.*

Ms Brown explained that both the non-indigenous NGO sector and the ACCO sector want to do something different, and the government now are engaging in conversations with both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people around what could this potentially look like as we move forward in the future. Noting that the ACCO sector, do not want to inherit a broken system with inbuilt the cultural biases and challenges. The sector is demanding changes to assessment tools and policies to better support Aboriginal families and communities. She pointed out the continued need for the non-Indigenous NGO sector to remain live, vibrant, skilled and professional and to have the same commitments under Closing the Gap. And for the non-Indigenous NGO sector to continue to have a strong Aboriginal workforce to allow for First Nations self-determination in service choice.

Why are the changes happening? Why is it so important for all of us to be committed to doing the work?

Ms Brown highlighted how government procurement processes favor non-Indigenous NGOs over Aboriginal community-controlled ones, leading to unequal funding and support. First nations peoples need to embed and recognize cultural practices and wisdom at all levels of both government and the non-government sector.

Ms Brown explained that the ACCO sector aims to implement cultural practice and wisdom by listening to cultural ways and understand the ways that keep Aboriginal communities and their kids safe. They also want to start to document and create an evidence base for how their models are working.

"We know if we can get our service delivery to Aboriginal communities right, that every vulnerable community will benefit from that."

Ms Brown stated that First Nations peoples are calling on the government for self-determination at the highest levels of government by having Aboriginal oversight all the way through (from service design and procurement to delivery). This also needs to occur in partnership with the sector.

Key challenges

Ms Brown noted that quite often she hears people suggest that ACCOs don't always have the right governance structures, processes and systems in place. She argued this is not true. ACCOs may operate, contextualize work, or talk in a different way but they are still delivering services and are still accountable. In fact, she suggested, ACCOs are more accountable than the average organization in the sector, because not only are they accountable to our funding bodies, but as aboriginal organisations, they are actually held accountable by the community.

Ms Brown further noted that the definition of an Aboriginal community-controlled organization is unclear, with different interpretations among government departments and legislation. Further work needs to be undertaken to clarify the definition.

Partnerships built on integrity, trust, and listening are key to successful collaboration between non-Indigenous NGOs and Aboriginal communities

As sector funding profile transition, what's the role for not for profits and the NGOs to help transition that space? Ms Brown stated that, moving forward, there will be a role for both non-Indigenous NGOs and the ACCO sector to work together. She discussed some of the key features that allow scope for genuine, authentic partnerships built on integrity, deep trust, listening, noting:

1. The purpose of the partnership needs to be clearly defined;
2. Aboriginal staff working for non-Indigenous NGOs have an important role to play in leading partnership work;
3. Senior staff in non-Indigenous NGOs need to be committed to the process if partnerships are to be successful;
4. Time and space is required to develop the relationships necessary for partnerships;
5. Delegated authority from most senior staff is crucial for successful partnerships and transition plans;
6. Aboriginal staff are key within the NGO sector. However, there are challenges in establishing networks and staff in rural Aboriginal communities for service delivery (in both ACCOs and non-Indigenous NGOs);
7. Partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations need to have a focus on decision-making and cultural authority;

Ms Brown and Jamie Crosby also discussed how each First Nations community must be allowed space for self-determination. While partnerships can be an important step in the transition process, partnerships are not always the right model for all communities. The noted that some First Nations communities may want a service run by their mob, and others may want a service that's not run by their mob, that's self-determination in action.

A note on Terminology: Ms Brown pointed out that she does not use the term "capacity building" in relation to ACCOs, she noted "we have the resources and the capability. What we don't have is the funding and participation at the decision-making tables in order to self-determine and self-design our models of service which will work for our communities.

Agenda Item 3: Reflections on the Changing the Balance project

Noting the wealth of information that everyone has been exposed to and feeling that it was valuable to continue those conversations, Jamie announced that he had decided to hold an additional briefing in a few weeks' time specifically on the Changing the Balance project, rather than provide a rushed presentation, which would not allow for an adequate feedback loop. He apologized to anyone whose main interest in attending the 2024 AGM was to hear an update on the Changing the Balance project.

Agenda Item 4 Update on Safe and Supported: The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021-2031

Karl Williamson, Representative of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership Group

Mr Williamson introduced himself as a Wiradjuri man from Western New South Wales and acknowledged that he was calling in from Jugun-Yawuru country in beautiful Broome in Western Australia. He thanked government partners and Mr Crosby and the National Coalition members for their work on Safe & Supported and the ongoing support during the implementation of the action plans and their commitment to meaningful partnerships.

Mr Williamson provided an update on the progress of Safe & Supported's first Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Action Plan from the perspective of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership Group. He highlighted the achievement of setting minimum requirements for an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Commissioner and promoting delegated authority.

Mr Williamson noted that work is currently being undertaken towards implementing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child placement principles in day-to-day work and policy development.

Mr Williamson emphasised the importance of partnership and support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership in improving children's lives.

Tarja Saastamoinen, Group Manager, Families Department of Social Services

Ms Saastamoinen commenced by acknowledging traditional owners and paying respects to elders past, present and future. She then provided an update on Safe and Supported: The National Framework for Protecting Australia's children 2021-31. She reported that the governance arrangements for Safe and Supported involve shared decision making between government actors, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership Group and the National Coalition. All work together to address issues affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

She reported that:

- In the 2024-25 Federal budget the government has agreed to establish a fully legislated National Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. In developing the proposal, DSS had hosted a couple of workshops that involved the Leadership Group, members from the early childhood care and development policy partnership, states and territories, the National Coalition and other Commonwealth agencies such as the National Indigenous Australians agency and Attorney General's Department.
- The National Child and Family Investment Strategy is being developed by SNAICC and partners and is expected to be completed in the second half of this calendar year.
- The monitoring and evaluation strategy for Safe and Supported is being worked on by Urbis, with feedback from workshop participants and submissions being collated and provided to participants.
- DSS recently executed three new project Schedules under our Memorandum of Understanding with AIFS, to support the following Safe and Supported actions:
 - Reviewing the Transition to Independent Living Allowance (TILA)
 - Refreshing the National Out-of-Home Care Standards
 - A review of supports available for carers

The next steps for the above projects will involve the creation of project governance in partnership with the relevant working groups.

Agenda Item 5 National Coalition member updates

As with item 3, given the richness of discussion, Mr Crosby stated there was insufficient time for National Coalition member updates. He suggested that updates could be included at the end of the National Coalition briefing on the Changing the Balance project.

National Coalition members will also be kept up to date on Safe and Supported developments and upcoming meetings through upcoming [National Coalition e-bulletins](#).

The meeting closed at: 13:03 pm

ANNUAL MEETING
National Coalition on Child Safety and Wellbeing
25 June 2024
1:30 - 3:00pm AEST

Meeting via Microsoft Teams: [Join the meeting now](#)

Timing	Item	Topic	Lead
1:30 – 1:40	1	Acknowledgements and overview	Jamie Crosby, CEO, Families Australia
1:40 – 2:10	2	Keynote presentation: <i>Ngunngun baraayn ngundakang</i> - Yesterday, today and tomorrow ² (Presentation on Working together to support the growth of the ACCO Sector) Followed by Q & A discussion	<i>Ms Brown Brown, AMR Consulting</i>
2:10 – 2:20	3	Reflections on the Changing the Balance project	Jamie Crosby
2:20 – 2:40	4	<i>Update on Safe and Supported: The National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children 2021- 2031</i>	Safe & Supported Governance partners
2:40 – 2:45	5	<i>A short break</i>	
2:45 – 3:00	6	National Coalition member updates	Jamie Crosby, CEO, Families Australia
3:00	7	CLOSE	

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National Coalition on Child Safety and Wellbeing Annual Meeting 1 June 2023

Participating Organisations

- Act for Kids
- Adopt Change
- Anglicare
- Bravehearts Australia
- CentreCare
- Child and Family Focus SA
- Family and Relationship Services Australia
- Foster and Kinship Carers Association of Australia
- Griffith University
- Health Justice Australia
- Key Assets
- Lumenia Consulting
- Mission Australia
- Multicultural Australia
- Not-for-Profit & Charity Consultants
- Parenting Research Council
- Salvation Army
- South Australian Government
- SNAICC
- The Municipal association of Victoria

Summary of questions and comments provided through the MS Teams chat function

[Editorial note: To respect the privacy of workshop participants, questions and comments have been depersonalised]

Selected comments & Questions

What do you define as the ACCO registered body. Is that ORIC or where?

Really appreciate this presentation - thank you for sharing. At the recent AbSec Quarterly forum there was a lot of discussion about how CP/OOHC procurement could better empower Aboriginal people in NSW through ensuring Aboriginal leadership in the design of tenders/programs, alongside the ACCO targets you've mentioned. In your experience, are there good examples of this to enable self-determination?

Just a huge thank you for such a balanced lens on such an important change process. Also as Aboriginal Nonprofit Charities ORIC is extremely harmful especially for the 90% of volunteer ACCOs

Thank you so much for this valuable discussion

AMAZING

100% AGREED! Like at Volunteering Victoria really appreciate us! but @ council absolutely disrespectful & under-appreciated!

THIS IS GREAT WELLDONE TEAM

Will carer support review include kinship and grandparent carers? "Yes that will be part of the review.

DSS can provide more information as we develop the project plans and approach in partnership with all parties.

Acknowledge the ongoing challenges. But still a shout out from me to Karl Williamson and Jamie Crosby for your ongoing commitment to working with the department.

Thank you to all presenters- especially to Karl for calling out those realities- and to Jamie and Bianca for all of the organisation that has gone into enabling this important cross-jurisdictional dialogue.