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| **Aboriginal Children’s Forum** |

# Communique December 2021

# Purpose

The 22nd Aboriginal Children’s Forum (ACF) was held virtually on Wednesday 8 December and Thursday 9 December 2021, hosted by the Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative and the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing. The Minister for Child Protection and Family Services, the Hon. Anthony Carbines gave a welcome speech on day two. This document contains key findings and discussion topics from the event.

Wungurilwil Gapgapduir: Objective One

The theme of the forum was how to ensure all Aboriginal children and families are strong in culture and proud of their unique identity, with a strong focus on early help and preventing contact with the child protection system.

There are many challenges and opportunities to prevent Aboriginal children and families from entering the child protection system and linking a strength-based approach ensuring all Aboriginal people are strong and proud of their culture is vital in this step. Members of the forum discussed how the sector defines early help and innovate and create ways of working with Aboriginal families as early as possible to prevent entry into the child protection system.

‘It is my goal to keep more children safe and families strong. This means meeting our Closing the Gap targets while addressing the over-representation of Aboriginal children in Alternative care.  I am rapidly learning of the enormous volume of work that has led the sector to get us to this point and am aware there is so much more to be done.

Hon. Anthony Carbines MP, Minister for Child Protection and Family Services

Visual explanation of the ACF caucus group discussions.
Main headline: Caucus group discussions.
Colum one: ACOs 
Early help can happen at any point.
Gaps with flexibility and soft entry
Increase focus on leading the conversation

Colum two: Govt
Create a holistic definition
It’s a busy space
Place based 
Join up funding
Increase focus on listening to ACCOs 
Increase focus on Aboriginal - led

Colum three: CSOs
Basics: what do families need?
Definition needs to add prevention.
Join up? Both ways 
Connect community!

# Early help

Representatives from Aboriginal community-controlled organisations (ACCOs), community service organisations and government discussed what an agreed definition of early help for the sector means, reflected on the current early help funding allocations and how ACCOs can be involved with their community at the earliest possible moment to ensure that Aboriginal children and families receive the early help they need in a culturally safe and support way.

“Early help requires flexible funding models that allow for rapid responses, strength based and placed based, Aboriginal community-led, social and emotional wellbeing initiatives. This will enable truth telling and healing processes for our community. This is true self-determination.”

Felicia Dean, CEO from the rumbalara aboriginal co-operative

# Celebrating success

The forum was the final for 2021, so members took the opportunity to reflect on and show appreciation for the year that was. Members acknowledged their efforts have:

* worked to maintain visibility and engagement with clients and reached out to their community to meet their needs in a way that is inspiring;
* found creative strategies to connect and increase contact with clients at risk, such as food drops, online gatherings and a strenuous drive to rollout the vaccine to protect their community;
* shifted to new ways of flexible and remote working, developing innovative responses across teams and sharing information to improve service responses for clients;
* dealt with the challenges of staff wellbeing, self-care and fatigue in a highly-complex environment; and
* navigated an unstable planning environment, while embedding the new normal across organisations and teams.

# Background

The Aboriginal Children’s Forum gives practical effect to the implementation and monitoring of [*Wungurilwil Gapgapduir: Aboriginal Children and Families Agreement*](https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/publications/wungurilwil-gapgapduir-aboriginal-children-and-families-agreement) <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/publications/wungurilwil-gapgapduir-aboriginal-children-and-families-agreement> to promote the safety, health and resilience of Aboriginal children and young people, so they thrive and live in culturally rich and strong Aboriginal families and communities.

*Wungurilwil Gapgapduir* supports the government’s commitment to increase Aboriginal self-determination for Aboriginal people and is the foundation on how this government and the children and families sector will address the over-representation of Aboriginal children involved within the child protection system.

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