



Family &
Community
Services

Protecting Aboriginal Children Together (PACT) Program guidelines



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1. Purpose

The purpose of these guidelines is to provide stakeholders with an overview of the Protecting Aboriginal Children Together (PACT) program and inform service users, service providers and the community about what is being funded under this program.

2. Legislative framework

The Department of Family and Community Services (FACS) delivers services to some of the most disadvantaged individuals, families and communities in NSW. FACS enables or assists vulnerable people to participate fully in social and economic life and build stronger, more sustainable inclusive communities.

FACS is the largest child protection agency in Australia. It has an important role in keeping children and young people safe from harm, helping families stay together and arranging care for children and young people who cannot live at home. FACS assists children and young people by providing direct support and care to them, their families and communities. Protecting children is its core work.

It operates within the legal framework set by the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998*, the *Community Welfare Act 1987* and the *Adoptions Act 2000* and the regulations associated with these acts.

FACS also works to promote the safety and wellbeing of children and young people and to build stronger families and communities. In particular, FACS helps those who are vulnerable and most in need. It works closely with other government departments, non-government organisations (NGOs) and the community to achieve this.

Although the following provisions are aimed at out-of home care (OOHC) providers, it is recommended that this be applied to any service provider that provides services to vulnerable children, young people and their families.

3. Policy directions and commitments

Family and Community Services (FACS) is in the process of implementing significant reforms in the delivery of services to children, young people and their families in need. This process, including the expansion of the role of non-government organisations (NGOs) in service delivery, must be driven and supported by a system that is both robust and flexible.

3.1 NSW State Plan, NSW 2021

The NSW Government's State Plan, NSW 2021, aims to deliver quality services across the priority areas of child wellbeing, homelessness and disabilities. The focus is on collaboration across portfolio areas and with the NGO sector to design and deliver innovative support services where needed.

The Department of Family and Community Services (FACS), under the State Government, is responsible for delivering on two goals contained within NSW 2021. The goals are to:

- better protect the most vulnerable members of our community and break the cycle of disadvantage
- increase opportunities for people with a disability by providing supports that meet their individual needs and realise their potential.

3.2 Community Services Plan 2012 – 2014

The Community Services Plan 2012 – 2014 articulates FACS responsibilities for achieving outcomes and goals that contribute to the overall aims of the State Government's plan. For FACS, the aim is to improve children's lives by building a stronger child focussed system. This includes building a system that is flexible and able to respond to the corrosive effects of intergenerational abuse, drug and alcohol misuse, mental health issues, chronic violence in the home and geographic disadvantage. To build a system able to meet these challenges, the Community Services' Plan goals for 2012 – 2014 are:

- fewer children and young people are vulnerable to abuse and neglect
- children and young people at risk of significant harm are safer
- children and young people in out-of-home care have a better future
- a capable organisation and service system.

3.3 Productivity Commission Report

The Productivity Commission Report on the Contribution of the Not-for-Profit (NFP) Sector was released in 2010. The report notes growth in the sector and the need for increased stimulation of productivity, regulation, governance and changes to the funding relationship between government and the sector.

Following from the Productivity Commission Report, the NSW Government submission to the Inquiry noted several key challenges for the Government in relation to transitioning its services and increasing commensurate capacity in the NGO sector. These included:

- supporting capacity, especially in governance, leadership, management and investment to manage sustainable growth in the NGO sector
- creating a partnership approach where government and NGOs work together to deliver outcomes
- building a sustainable workforce, undergoing substantial growth and change.
- shifting to innovative funding approaches which encourage client focussed, improved services and better outcomes for people and communities
- balancing regulation for strengthened outcome focussed accountability without imposing unnecessary administrative burden and detracting from service delivery.

3.4 Localisation

The Department of Family and Community Services is improving services and lives through significant, long-term reforms. As part of the reform agenda, the management of FACS service delivery has been devolved to a more localised model,

bringing together Community Services, Ageing, Disability and Home Care and Housing NSW client services. The model will continue to support the work of the Aboriginal Housing Office and Office for Women.

Localisation supports the NSW Government's focus on Regional Action Plans, outlined in NSW 2021. In line with this, 15 new FACS Districts have been created to enable more localised planning and decision making that better integrates services at a local level and responds to community needs. Community Services regional structures have been replaced with local districts which follow local Health District boundaries.

The changes will foster improved local leadership with a stronger connection to frontline staff, local agencies and non government partners – to help put peoples' support needs first. In addition, clients and local communities will have a stronger role in the planning and delivery of local services.

Each District now has responsibility for its housing, disability and community services performance and service planning and development. A key challenge for FACS through localisation is to enable localised planning whilst maintaining the vision and delivering on the performance of its overarching funding programs.

Over the next two years, community, early intervention and intensive programs will be undergoing reform with a focus on local need and outcome measurement. There will be many opportunities for funded organisations to be a part of that reform process.

Program guidelines from 1 July 2014 will require funded organisations to address impacts and connections with changes including:

- child protection reforms, as part of a Safe Home For Life
- homelessness reforms, including Going Home Staying Home
- localisation, including the requirement to participate in district plans
- domestic violence reforms, including It Stops Here
- developments in other programs.

4. Program description

Protecting Aboriginal Children Together (PACT) is an advisory service provided by Aboriginal advisors in Aboriginal non-government organisations (NGOs) to assist Aboriginal children, young people and families engaging with the NSW child protection system.

The PACT service provides a community perspective on safety and on the care and protection services that are provided to Aboriginal children, young people and families to enable shared decision making between FACS and Aboriginal organisations and community members.

In 2011 the service commenced in two pilot sites – Moree and Shellharbour. At each site an Aboriginal NGO has been contracted to provide the service in partnership with the local CSC. Aboriginal staff are employed as PACT advisors to deliver the service. FACS consults with PACT advisors about risk assessments and other significant decisions in the care and protection of Aboriginal children and young people.

4.1 Program scope and boundary

PACT advisors will provide advice for the risk assessment and assist FACS to determine whether a child protection intervention and further assessment is needed to support the child and family to live safely at home.

During a risk assessment, PACT advisors will help to identify appropriate members of the family or community to be involved. The extended family concept is rarely endorsed or understood by government authorities so it is important that FACS and PACT reflect this understanding in practice.

FACS needs to obtain the views of children and young people and take them into account in the assessment. The PACT advisor can seek appropriate information from the family and apply cultural considerations in collecting and analysing the information.

Although the PACT service and the family participate in decision making processes, FACS retains ultimate responsibility for casework decisions.

4.2 Program results and outcomes

- Two PACT services being piloted in Moree and Shellharbour each with a manager and three PACT advisors.
- PACT advisors have a caseload of 12 cases each.
- PACT support is provided for the life of the case.
- Service delivery to all Aboriginal children and young people entering the child protection system up to a maximum of 72 families.

4.3 Service group objectives

Better protect the most vulnerable members of our community and break the cycle of disadvantage.

- Aboriginal children and young people are safe and remain connected to their family, community and culture.
- Fewer Aboriginal children and young people are vulnerable to abuse and neglect with fewer reports/re-reports.

The PACT service aims to:

- improve case planning and decision-making processes for Aboriginal children & young people
- improve Aboriginal family and community members' involvement in supporting Aboriginal children and young people
- improve Aboriginal families' and their children's engagement with relevant support services
- reduce the number of Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home-care
- provide FACS staff with an Aboriginal perspective in safety and risk assessments for Aboriginal children and young people and participate in all significant decisions regarding case planning
- consult with FACS about suitable placement options in line with the Aboriginal Child Placement Principles, as outlined in Section 13 of the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998*
- provide support to Aboriginal children, young people and their families in understanding the FACS policies and processes.

4.4 Evidence base

Lakidjeka is a specialist service providing advice to the Child Protection Branch of the Victorian Department of Human Services (the Victorian DHS) on culturally appropriate intervention for Aboriginal children and young people alleged to be at risk of abuse and/or neglect. It is a legislatively mandated service covering all components of child protection support. Lakidjeka has been profiled by the Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) and the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) as a program demonstrating promising practices in working with Aboriginal communities to deal with family violence.¹

HREOC identified four lessons from the Lakidjeka approach:

- **Formal protocol:** ensures that consultation with Indigenous people about child protection issues occurs systematically and places Indigenous expertise in a central position within the child protection system. The protocol also has a dispute resolution mechanism which facilitates constructive, professional relationships
- **Effective consultation:** Continual engagement in the community – both through community consultation and through empowering families to have a say in what is happening with their children
- **Indigenous staff expertise and networks:** local Indigenous networks and relationships help to find placements in compliance with the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle, and Indigenous staff help child protection workers make culturally-appropriate decisions in the best interests of the child
- **Independence:** strengthens Lakidjeka's ability to advocate and challenge policy and practice in the Victorian DHS.

FACS and AbSec undertook a comprehensive consultation process to involve NSW stakeholders in decisions about where and how to start building the service. NSW Aboriginal peak organisations, mainstream non-government peak organisations, FACS and other NSW agencies, and representatives from the Community Services State Aboriginal Reference Group participated in discussions about the development of the NSW PACT service model.

PACT services operate under the principle of a child-centred approach. This approach is about the prioritisation of a child/children's safety and wellbeing. In a child-centred model the child's safety, wellbeing and needs are prioritised and placed at the centre of all aspects of intervention with the family – assessment, case planning, case work, service coordination, service provision, case monitoring and review, and exit planning.

¹ Australian Human Rights Commission (HREOC) Social Justice Report 2007
<https://www.humanrights.gov.au/publications/social-justice-report-2007-chapter-2-indigenous-communities-dealing-family-violence-and#part3>

5. Target group

During the pilot phase of the PACT pilot project, the PACT service will target Aboriginal families newly entering the child protection system at participating Community Service Centres (CSCs).

It is mandatory for Community Service Centres to engage the PACT service for all priority clients, but take up of the PACT service by families is voluntary.

The PACT service will remain involved with these families as long as the children and young people who have been allocated a PACT service have an open case plan. In this way, it is expected that over time the service will grow and develop to cover all phases of a child protection intervention.

6. Service types/activities to be funded

Each family will have one primary PACT advisor allocated to them. The PACT advisor may have contact with the child and family and consult with FACS in their case management.

The primary PACT advisor will:

- participate in home visits and other meetings to improve communication between FACS and the family
- identify and advise the FACS caseworker about members of the child's family and other important community members to be consulted
- provide input into all decision-making processes and meetings
- facilitate the active involvement of children and their families in decisions
- maintain an ongoing role with the family until case closure.

7. Performance measures and service results

Performance measures:

- number of children and young people who are re-reported to FACS after receiving a PACT service
- percentage of FACS caseworkers surveyed who agree PACT has a positive influence on client engagement with FACS
- percentage of FACS caseworkers surveyed who agree PACT has a positive impact on family's understanding of risk issues and keeping children and young people safe.

8. Identification of data collection strategies

Currently the two PACT sites collect data manually via excel spread sheets that are submitted on a quarterly basis.

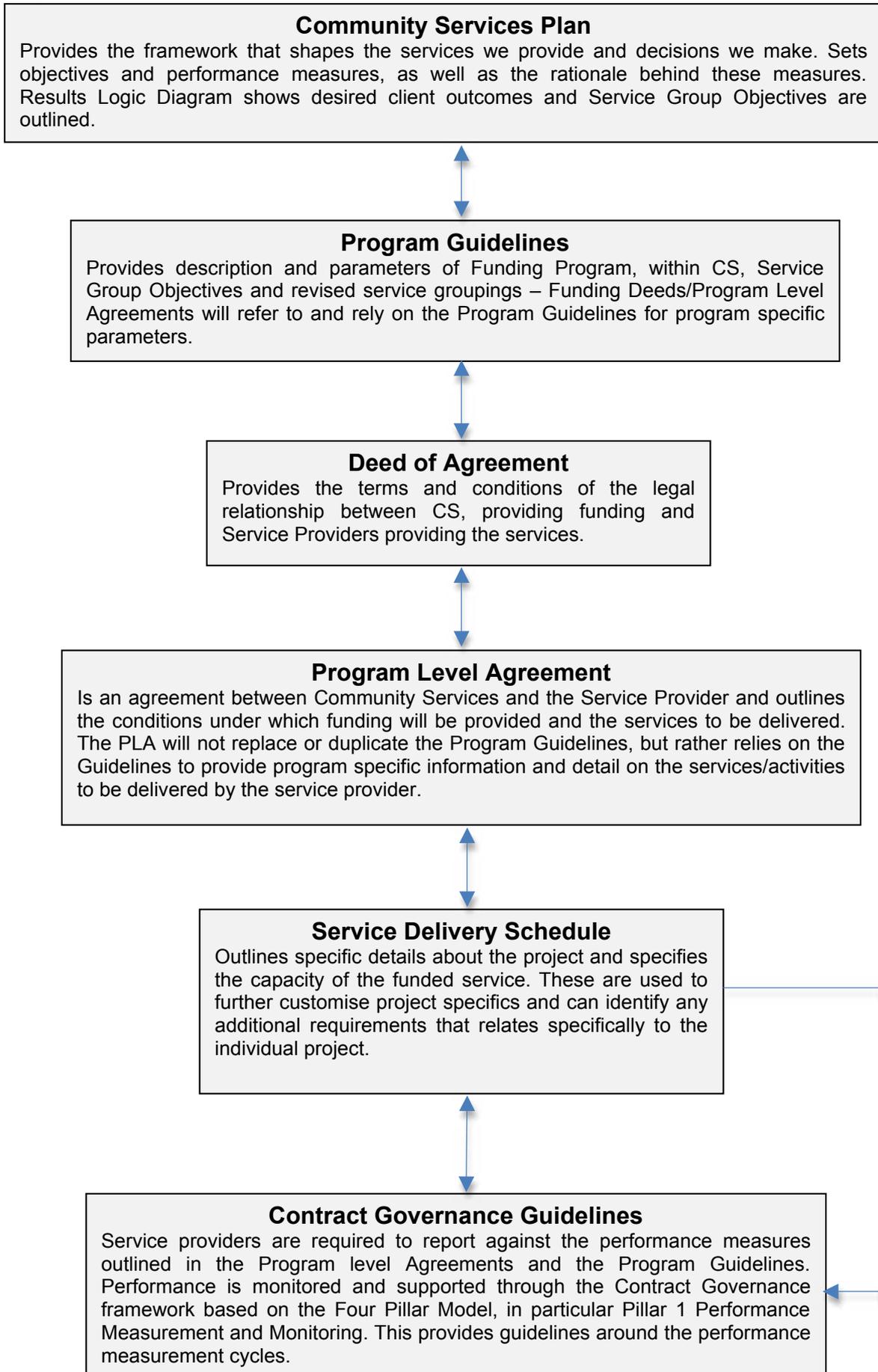
If the PACT program was extended to other sites the development of an information-sharing system could be integrated into the service provision. This would be similar

to the portal currently used by the Intensive Family Based Services (IFBS) program, which allows caseworkers from FACS and the NGO-based IFBS provider to exchange and share client information in a secure environment.

9. Partnership framework

The PACT service requires the collaboration of FACS and PACT advisers in decision making about Aboriginal children and young people. Collaboration is acknowledged as requiring time and investment in relationships, and the development of a shared working culture.

Funded Services Documentation





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