

Complaint management reform plan: a more responsive system for child protection and out-of-home care

May 2025



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The NSW Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) pays respect to the Traditional Custodians throughout NSW.

We listen and learn from the knowledge, strength, and resilience of Aboriginal communities.

We extend our respects to all Elders past and present, and to Stolen Generation Survivors and their descendants.

We celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters of NSW.

We recognise the important role that families and communities play in providing children with a sense of safety, belonging and resilience.



Reforming DCJ's child protection and out-of-home care complaint system

A holistic and integrated approach to reforming complaint management in DCJ.



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DCJ is undertaking significant reform to our complaint management processes. This is in response to the findings identified in the NSW Ombudsman's Review of the DCJ Complaint System in respect of its Aboriginal Child Protection functions.

The Review report included 58 recommendations that highlighted how delays, lack of clarity, and inconsistent responses have undermined the effectiveness of DCJ's complaint system. It showed the need for a thorough and thoughtful approach to addressing systemic complaint management issues.

In response, we are making improvements to complaint management within the child protection and out-of-home care (OOHC) system.

In particular, we will ensure that Aboriginal children and families feel heard, respected, and supported. By building on previous reform work and past learnings, we are designing a system that provides a more integrated and user-friendly complaint handling experience - one that is fair, accessible and responsive to the unique needs of Aboriginal children, families and communities.

These improvements will benefit anyone who interacts with DCJ, ensuring that everyone who receives our services feels valued and receives fair outcomes.

Addressing the needs of Aboriginal children and families

DCJ's complaint system is not effectively meeting the needs of Aboriginal complainants.

We recognise that DCJ's
systems are complex.

We also recognise that
understanding the
experiences of Aboriginal
children and families is
central to building an effective
complaint system.

DCJ will ensure supportive
complaint processes and
ongoing improvements to
cultural capability and trauma
awareness.

This commitment includes
actively listening and
responding to the perspectives
of Aboriginal people to ensure
a complaint management
system that is truly equitable.

The NSW Ombudsman's report
findings reveal critical gaps in
accessibility, cultural understanding
and responsiveness within DCJ's
complaint management system.

In response, our reform plan prioritises
Aboriginal needs at each stage.

These include:

Workforce uplift and capability
building.

Developing **transparent, accessible**
and **responsive** complaint processes.

Ongoing cultural learning to
effectively support Aboriginal people.

Ensuring **Aboriginal perspectives**
are integrated into all aspects of the
complaint system.

Developing robust mechanisms for
accountability.

A unified approach to improving our services

Complaint management reform is part of a broader program of end-to-end reform across the out-of-home care and child protection system.



Complaint management reform plays an important role in enhancing DCJ service quality, improving system accountability, and prioritising client voices and experiences.

This reform is part of a raft of broader child protection and OOHC reforms. In the recently released **Reform plan: transforming the out-of-home care system in NSW**, complaint management reform is a key action to improve oversight and accountability.

Complaints from Aboriginal children, families and communities are a critical source of evidence to identify systemic issues and inform ongoing improvements to the child protection and OOHC system. This includes supporting complaints from children and families currently in contact with the system.

By embracing a proactive, client-centered approach, we are working to deliver a service system that is accessible, accountable, and ultimately more effective in meeting the needs of communities.

Complaint reform will be guided by four focus streams, each driving specific improvements to enhance the overall client experience.

A complaint system that is fair, accessible and responsive

Reform will be guided by four focus streams.

1

Greater accessibility, responsiveness and workforce capacity building

Develop reforms in partnership with Aboriginal stakeholders to make the complaint system more culturally sensitive and accessible.

Includes strengthening training and development to support ongoing cultural learning and awareness of bias.

Stream 1 seeks to address 14 recommendations across the following key improvement areas:

- Accessibility - enabling and promoting complaints
- Workforce Development - culture and training.

2

Integrated complaint management system

Consider options to design a more integrated complaint management system that includes efficient, standardised processes.

Stream 2 seeks to address 19 recommendations across the following key improvement areas:

- Integrated Policy Framework
- Benchmarks
- Comprehensive Safe Complaints Framework.

3

Complaint handling performance uplift

Improve the effectiveness of complaint handling via clear performance benchmarks, improved complaint acknowledgement, monitoring and follow-up.

Explore options to improve data management and system capabilities.

Stream 3 seeks to address 20 recommendations across the following key improvement areas:

- Centralised data and case management
- Records
- Quality Assurance
- Resolving complaints.

4

Complaint handling independence and investigation capability

Improve the independence of our complaint handling processes.

Develop processes for independent investigation outside the local area.

Explore options for a formal review function, adjacent to the complaint management function.

Stream 4 seeks to address 3 recommendations across the following key improvement areas:

- Investigation
- Review.

Delivering a better complaint system

A comprehensive strategy will be developed to implement these changes.

A new implementation strategy, developed through Aboriginal consultation and partnership, will effectively manage delivery of work under the four focus streams.

In particular, the strategy will specify how DCJ will improve complaint management in the following areas:

- Strengthening stakeholder engagement and relationships
- Improving early identification of systemic issues
- Implementing proactive risk management practices
- Building data-driven decision-making
- Enhancing accessibility
- Optimising resource allocation
- Improving record-keeping and data management system solutions.

DCJ will closely monitor the delivery of these changes. An outcomes report detailing our progress will be published by **1 December 2025**.

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