



# **PARTNERSHIP**

# **AGREEMENT**

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OUR BOORIS  
*our way*

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The 'Our Booris, Our Way' Committee and the Community Services Directorate pay their respects to the Ngunnawal people as the Traditional Custodians of the land and acknowledge all other Aboriginal peoples and families with connections to the lands of the ACT and surrounding regions.

We recognise that collaboration and partnership have always been practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and endeavour to engage in this spirit throughout this agreement. We also acknowledge the significance of traditional parenting practices and the communal approach to raising children within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Grandparents, aunts, and uncles are highly respected and play a pivotal role in nurturing a child's sense of identity, belonging, and connection to culture.

Both the 'Our Booris, Our Way' Committee and the Community Services Directorate believe that the rich heritage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures is a profound strength and protective factor in supporting families. For thousands of years, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents, families, and communities have provided safe, strong, and loving care for their children, guided by cultural wisdom, shared knowledge, and traditions that uphold the sacred value of children within their communities

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## Table of Contents

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT</b> .....	2
<b>'OUR BOORIS, OUR WAY' PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT</b> .....	2
<b>HISTORY</b> .....	3
<b>PURPOSE OF THE PARTNERSHIP</b> .....	3
<b>DEFINING SHARED DECISION MAKING</b> .....	5
<b>SHARED COMMITMENTS</b> .....	7
<b>COMMUNITY SERVICES DIRECTORATE COMMITMENTS</b> .....	8
<b>IMPLEMENTATION OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE COMMITMENTS</b> .....	9
<b>MONITORING AND EVALUATION</b> .....	10
<b>CONTINUAL LEARNING &amp; EVALUATION</b> .....	10
<b>COLLABORATIVE PROBLEM-SOLVING PATHWAYS</b> .....	11
<b>FINALISATION AND PUBLICATION</b> .....	12
<b>INVITATION</b> .....	13

## **'OUR BOORIS, OUR WAY' PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT**

This partnership agreement between the Community Services Directorate (CSD) within the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Government and the 'Our Booris, Our Way' Implementation Oversight Committee (IOC) will continue to drive how ongoing collaboration will be driven by the principles of shared decision-making and Aboriginal self-determination. Together, the aim is to bring about tangible change for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families by implementing the Our Booris, Our Way recommendations which improve cultural, physical, and socioemotional health and wellbeing outcomes of families within the child protection system.

This Partnership Agreement builds on the foundation established by the OBOW Steering Committee's 2018-2019 review and the ongoing work of the IOC in overseeing the implementation of its recommendations since 2020. It recognises the working relationship between the IOC and CSD, reiterating the need for continued collaboration to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families, and communities.

While this Agreement represents an important milestone, it is crucial to recognise that its structure reflects established systems that have historically positioned Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders within frameworks not designed to serve their best interests or uphold Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural priorities.

As stated in Preamble 1.6 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, "when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a genuine say in the design and delivery of services that affect them, better life outcomes are achieved." This Partnership Agreement seeks to reinforce this philosophy by recognising that meaningful structural change in the way governments engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is not only important but essential to achieving lasting and positive outcomes.

This Agreement serves as a key component of the joint efforts between the IOC and CSD, ensuring a collaborative approach across all four priority reforms of Closing the Gap:

- Priority Reform One: Formal Partnerships and Shared Decision Making

- Priority Reform Two: Building the Community -Controlled Sector
- Priority Reform Three: Transforming Government Organisations
- Priority Reform Four: Shared Access to Data and Information at a Regional Level "

### SHARED VISION

To reduce the over -representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the ACT's care and protection system, enhance their experiences within the system, and actively pursue their restoration to families, communities, and kin networks.

### HISTORY

The Director -General of the Community Services Directorate has agreed to develop a Partnership Agreement with the Committee, which is supported by the September 2024 ACT Cabinet's endorsement of the IOC Terms of Reference, which included the development of such an agreement. These Terms of Reference highlight the Committee's leadership on policy, programs, and plans impacting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

Whilst the Implementation Oversight Committee's governance model is defined in the Terms of Reference as an advisory and monitoring role, this Partnership Agreement allows for shared decision -making between the two parties .

### PURPOSE OF THE PARTNERSHIP

The Our Booris, Our Way Review was announced in 2017 . It commenced in 2018 with the Our Booris Our Way Steering Committee review ing over 300 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cases and providing interim recommendations . CSD worked with the Steering Committee on the review and commenced implementing the recommendations. The Steering Committee then provided its [Final Report](#) to the ACT Government in 2019. This Final report made 28 recommendations and 9 sub-recommendations , calling for "the implementation of each

recommendation to its full intent and potential.”<sup>1</sup> In 2020 the ACT Government provided a [formal response](#) to the Our Booris, Our Way Final Report, which agreed, or agreed in principle, to implement the intent of all recommendations. One recommendation was noted. The Community Services Directorate has been working with the IOC since 2020 on the implementation of the recommendations.

This partnership between the Community Services Directorate and OBOWIOC supports a shared commitment to the strategic and targeted implementation of all recommendations outlined in the Our Booris, Our Way Review. Linking the Committee's work to the framework of the National Agreement means that making unilateral decisions regarding the OBOW recommendations would breach the ACT Government's commitment to the [‘National Agreement on Closing the Gap’ \(2020\)](#).

As community leaders with broad expertise, experiences – practice backgrounds, members of the OBOWIOC possess deep knowledge, lived experiences, and comprehensive understanding of the ACT child protection system and how this system often fails Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. As authors of the Review, the committee members also have an unwavering commitment to creating a system that works – that improves existing child protection and early support services to prevent children and families from coming into contact with the child protection system.

As a signatory to the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, the ACT Government is committed to implementing [Priority Reform 1 – ‘Formal Partnerships and Shared Decision -Making’](#) with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and agrees to the [‘Strong Partnership Elements’ outlined at Clause 32 of Priority Reform 1](#).

The Community Services Directorate has the mandate for the wellbeing of children, families and communities in the ACT, able to reform policy, legislation and practice. The Directorate's commitment to implementing the review recommendations is a key foundation for this partnership. It is important to note the Directorate is undertaking broad reform in the child and family services system. This reform is shaped by the [OBOW Final Report](#) and [‘Next Steps For Our Kids’](#) strategy and commitments under the

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<sup>1</sup> Our Booris, Our Way Final Report, December 2019

'ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement', 'Closing the Gap National Agreement', the 'Safe and Supported National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021 -2031'.

**The partnership will work towards these strategic priorities:**

1. Reducing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children entering the care system.
2. Improving the experiences of being involved with the Out of Home Care System, through focusing on physical, socioemotional, cultural health and wellbeing and education .
3. Increasing restoration and connection with family, kin, community, and culture.
4. Driving active efforts to achieve the full implementation of all five elements of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (ATSICPP).
5. Informing the community on progress towards the full implementation of the Review recommendations .

**DEFINING SHARED DECISION MAKING**

Shared decision -making between the Community Services Directorate and OBOWIOC is more than a symbolic gesture; it actively challenge s existing power dynamics that have historically marginalised Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Drawing on the principles from the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, true shared decision -making honors self-determination and emphasise s the authority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to define, prioritise, and lead solutions that impact our lives.

The collective impact model (see Figure 1) offers a strategic pathway here, fostering a process where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices are not only consulted but are central to decision -making, with shared accountability across all involved parties.



Figure 1) Collective Impact Model

This means building a shared understanding of the challenges, co-creating solutions, and ensuring that both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives and quantitative data hold equal weight in determining definitions, reviews, monitoring, evaluation and outcomes.

The Committee and Community Services Directorate recognises the importance of establishing a robust foundation for working in partnership that prioritises equity and cultural safety. The following values will guide the partnership:

- **Relationality:** Emphasising the significance of building deep, meaningful relationships founded on mutual respect and shared responsibility.
- **Truth-telling:** Acknowledging the colonial histories and ongoing impacts that shape this partnership, ensuring that these truths inform our collaborative efforts.
- **Self-Determination:** The Implementation Oversight Committee will have the authority and autonomy to lead, make decisions, and shape the direction of this partnership in alignment with our cultural values, aspirations, and needs.
- **Two-Way Knowledge Sharing:** Actively creating spaces where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge systems and worldviews are equally valued alongside Western knowledge, fostering mutual learning, and blending diverse perspectives.
- **Genuineness:** Holding a genuine desire to foster transformative change, avoiding tokenism or superficial gestures, and ensuring that outcomes benefit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in meaningful ways.
- **Accountability & Transparency:** Maintaining accountability to the principles of equity and cultural safety, ensuring that our actions align with the needs, visions, and worldviews of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in our region.

These principles integrate the values and customs of both mainstream and Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander worldviews and perspectives, not as concessions, but as essential strategies for fostering effective collaboration and mutual understanding. Shared decision-making will be driven by a flexible and responsive approach, determined jointly by both parties, ensuring that the process remains adaptable to the needs and priorities of all involved.

## SHARED COMMITMENTS

### 1. *Promoting Cultural Safety*

- 1.1. All parties actively work to ensure that the principle of cultural safety are embedded in all practices.
- 1.2. Guided by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (ATSICPP), services must be culturally appropriate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

### 2. *Shared Decision -Making*

- 2.1. The Community Services Directorate (CSD), and the Our Booris, Our Way Implementation Oversight Committee (IOC) engage in transparent and inclusive processes guided by the values that form the foundation of this partnership. These values are relationality, truth telling, self -determination, two -way knowledge sharing, genuineness and accountability, and transparency.
- 2.2. Decisions are made in collaboration with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, ensuring our voices and leadership are central.

### 3. *Monitoring and Accountability*

- 3.1. The Community Services Directorate is bound by the Public Sector Management Act 1994 and the ACT Public Sector Code of Conduct . The OBOWIOC are guided by their Terms of Reference . All Parties are committed to fulfilling the purpose and objectives of this Agreement in a transparent, consultative, accountable and respectful manner .
- 3.2. All parties take joint responsibility for tracking progress and measuring outcomes.

### 4. *Expertise Sharing and Capacity Building*

- 4.1. Each party contributes resources, knowledge, and expertise to strengthen collective capacity.
- 4.2. This ensures the delivery of culturally safe, informed, and effective services and tailored solutions in child protection.

### 5. *Adaptability and Flexibility*

- 5.1. All parties maintain a flexible and responsive approach to address emerging challenges defined by the strategic priorities of the partnership .

5.2. Priorities are adapted to meet the dynamic needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

**6. *Regular Communication and Reporting***

6.1. Each party commit to clear, consistent and open communication.

6.2. All parties are to report data to reflect principles of data sovereignty - increasing collective control, oversight and ownership of the data.

6.3. Both parties agree to ensure open communication with community, providing regular up to date progress on the implementation. This includes providing accessible data.

**7. *Shared Definitions***

7.1. All parties commit to a collective understanding and shared definition of social issues impacting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This ensures that any strategic work or decision-making is based on an agreed and culturally informed perspective, allowing for more targeted and meaningful action.

**COMMUNITY SERVICES DIRECTORATE COMMITMENTS**

**1. *Commitment to Shared Decision -Making and Self-Determination***

1.1. CSD is strongly committed to shared decision-making and Aboriginal self-determination by upholding the values that form the basis of this partnership

1.2. CSD exercises its powers to reform policy, legislation and practice to support the partnership's vision and agreed stated positions.

**2. *Advocacy Across Government Branches***

2.1. CSD will continue to advocate and work across ACT Government Directorates to enable holistic and coordinated consideration of all OBOW recommendations.

2.2. CSD will provide avenues for the Committee to communicate with representatives of varying branches of the directorate that relate to the OBOW recommendations.

**3. *Data Sovereignty and Transparency***

3.1. CSD will develop a transparent and robust information system, governed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data sovereignty principles.

#### *4. Community and Lived Experience Engagement*

4.1. CSD will continue to centre lived experience and community perspectives in the work they do.

#### *5. Resource Provision*

5.1. CSD will provide the resources needed to uphold the vision and commitments of this partnership.

#### *6. Independent Secretariat Capacity*

6.1. CSD will fund an independent secretariat capacity where work will be guided by the OBOWIOC through the Chairperson.

### **IMPLEMENTATION OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE COMMITMENTS**

#### *1. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Perspective*

1.1. Centre Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, family structures, community voice and approaches to raising children in the work of this partnership.

#### *2. Strategic Advice*

2.1 Provide strategic advice to CSD on policy, legislation, and practice reform that will progress the work towards completion of the recommendations.

#### *3. Support for CSD Advocacy*

3.1 Support CSD as partners in their advocacy across ACT Directorates to enable the full implementation of OBOW recommendations.

#### *4. Development of Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Frameworks*

4.1 Partner with CSD in the development of monitoring, evaluation, and learning systems and frameworks.

4.2 Provide expertise and community intelligence to enable the adoption, utilisation, and continuous improvement of these models.

#### *5. Consultation and Engagement*

5.1 Support consultation and engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, leaders, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community -Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Commissioner and other stakeholders, where required and where appropriately resourced.

5.2 Draw on and seek the views of children, families, and communities as part of this consultation process.

6. *Guidance for Independent Secretariat*

6.1 Provide guidance to the independent Secretariat to progress the implementation of the recommendations .

### **MONITORING AND EVALUATION**

Monitoring and evaluating the success of 'Our Booris, Our Way' recommendations should prioritise a collaborative approach where both statistical data and community voices are valued equally. To ensure the integrity of shared decision -making, it's crucial t o recognise that community insights and lived experiences also influence the direction of the work alongside quantitative measures. When the perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities differ from what the data suggests, both should b e given equal consideration to maintain a truly balanced and inclusive process. By incorporating this, we create space for community -driven solutions while building a system that reflects the cultural values and priorities of those it serves, ensuring the work is holistic and responsive to all dimensions of the issues at hand.

### **CONTINUAL LEARNING & EVALUATION**

The continual learning and evaluation element of the Partnership Agreement emphasises the importance of maintaining a flexible, fluid, and adaptable partnership that evolves with the needs of the parties involved. This Partnership Agreement can be amended at any time by written agreement of the signatories. Including to reflect emerging pr iorities, implementation progress and feedback from community. This Partnership Agreement will be reviewed nine months after signing to ensure its terms meet the needs of the parties.

## COLLABORATIVE PROBLEM-SOLVING PATHWAYS

The Parties agree to remain accountable to the foundational values of relationality, truth-telling, self-determination, two-way knowledge sharing, genuineness, accountability, and transparency are essential in forming a pathway to collaboratively problem solving any future concerns or challenges.

### 1. *Consensus-Based Decision Making*

- 1.1. Decisions will be reached through consensus wherever possible, upholding the principles of relationality and collaboration.
- 1.2. The Chair of the OBOWIOC and the Director-General will lead discussions, emphasising respectful dialogue to resolve any disagreements and ensure that all voices are heard.

### 2. *Co-operation and Good Faith*

- 2.1. Discussions will be conducted in the spirit of openness, respect, trust, and mutual understanding.
- 2.2. The Parties will engage in relational approaches, such as informal yarning and workshops, valuing truth-telling and active listening to collaboratively reach shared solutions.

### 3. *Timely Resolution*

- 3.1. To avoid delays, disputes will ideally be resolved in a 60-day timeframe, with special consideration given to complexity of the issue.

### 4. *External Cultural Mediation*

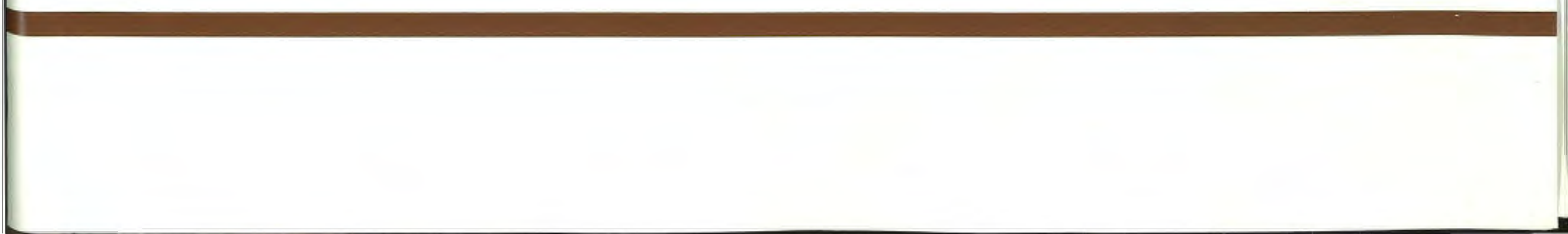
- 4.1. In instances where informal methods do not yield consensus, the Parties will seek the assistance of a mediator from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-controlled body, selected by mutual agreement. This ensures that the resolution process remains culturally safe, impartial, and accountable, aligning with the principle of self-determination. It will also include a documented, impartial account of the mediated process and position.

### 5. *Withdrawal*

5.1. If a party chooses to withdraw from the Agreement, they must fully engage in the outlined resolution process, including mediation, to ensure that every effort has been made to resolve the matter in the spirit of cooperation and respect.

#### **FINALISATION AND PUBLICATION**

Once signed, this Partnership Agreement will be published on the CSD website and will remain publicly available. The Agreement will also reflect any future changes, ensuring that the most current version is always accessible to the public.



**INVITATION**

We warmly invite current and future Implementation Oversight Committee members and Government Representatives to commit to the vision, purpose, and shared objectives of this Partnership Agreement.



**Natalie Brown**  
Chair Our Booris Our  
Way Implementation  
Oversight Committee



**Catherine Rule**  
Director -General  
Community Services  
Directorate



**Barbara Causon**  
Implementation  
Oversight Committee  
Member



**Charmaine Barratt**  
Our Booris Our Way  
Implementation  
Oversight Committee  
Member



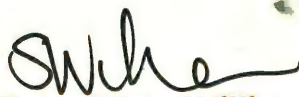
**Helen Wright**  
Aboriginal and Torres  
Strait Islander elected  
Body Representative



**Justin Church**  
Implementation  
Oversight Committee  
Member



**Robyn Martin**  
Implementation  
Oversight Committee  
Member



**Sharon Lee Williams**  
Implementation  
Oversight Committee  
Member

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