ACT Youth Justice Strategic Plan

2026 - 2031

ACT Government

Acknowledgement

The ACT Government acknowledges the Ngunnawal people as traditional custodians of the land we live and work on and recognises any other people or families with connection to the lands of the ACT and region. We acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this city and region.

The ACT Government acknowledges the cumulative effect of historical and intergenerational trauma on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities from involvement with the justice system. We acknowledge the cultural wisdom and strength found in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family structures and child-raising practices and reiterate our commitment to closing the gap.

Introduction

The ACT Youth Justice Strategic Plan sets out the ACT Government's goals for improving youth justice over the next 5 years. It provides a clear roadmap for creating a system that is therapeutic, inclusive, and focused on helping young people heal and grow.

At its core is a strong commitment to Closing the Gap, particularly Target 11, which aims to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in detention by at least 30% by 2031.

The vision

Our vision is to lead an ACT youth justice system that:

- understands, addresses and reduces offending by young people.
- uses a therapeutic, rights-based approach to support young people who do offend to be empowered with genuine opportunities to create a better future.
- creates a service system centred on supporting young people to be safe, strong and connected.

Key focus areas

The ACT Youth Justice Strategic Plan focuses on 6 key areas to build a modern and supportive youth justice system:

1. **Earlier support**
   Ensure young people and their families get the right support before things get worse, so young people are less likely to end up in the youth justice system and more likely to heal, feel included and do well in life.
2. **Divert young people from the justice system**
   Support young people to prevent them from entering the youth justice system in the first place, take responsibility and engage in restorative approaches where harm is caused and stay out of the system for good.
3. **Promote equity, eliminate discrimination and address over-representation**
   Improve systems and practices to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are not treated unfairly or disproportionately represented in the youth justice system.

4. **Use a therapeutic approach**
   Ensure both the child protection and youth justice systems respond in ways that support healing and wellbeing.
5. **Respect young people's rights**
   Ensure all youth justice practices protect and promote the rights of all young people, including those with complex needs.
6. **Help young people safely return to the community**
   Provide support for young people leaving detention so they can have a fresh start, rebuild their lives and contribute positively to society.

The importance of this plan

When a young person breaks the law or is accused of an offence, they engage with the statutory youth justice system, which involves police, courts, and—in some cases—youth detention.

Each state and territory has its own youth justice laws and policies. In the ACT, these are set out in the *Children and Young People Act 2008*, which ensures young people are treated fairly and receive the support they need to get back on track.

We know that the reasons young people end up connected with the youth justice system starts early in life, and early support for children and families to address developmental needs and other factors and forms of disadvantage are important.

This plan will work alongside other ACT Government strategies to guide how the ACT Government delivers an effective and supportive youth justice system. It will also shape how government and community services ensure timely responses for children and young people who are at risk—or already involved in the system—so they get the help they need to make better choices and keep the community safer.

Across the ACT and nationally, youth justice systems face ongoing challenges: balancing community expectations for safety, deterrence, and accountability with delivering evidence-based responses that lead to better outcomes and safer communities in the longer-term.

The Strategic Plan will be our roadmap to improve the youth justice system and achieve better outcomes for young people – whether they are at risk of entering the system or already involved in it.

The Strategic Plan focuses on addressing the root causes of harmful behaviour, supporting young people to stay out of the system and strengthening community connection and safety.

It brings together government commitments outlined in strategies, frameworks, action plans and government responses to independent reviews. It also reflects what we have heard from young people, families and stakeholders through consultations.

Equally, it will be a living document so it can be responsive to changing factors and emerging evidence and recommendations for future change. This could mean the Strategic Plan will be updated over its lifecycle, or that updates may be provided as part of annual reviews and reporting.

Alignment with National Standards and other ACT Government priorities

The Strategic Plan aligns with the Australasian Youth Justice Administrators (AYJA) *National Standards for Youth Justice in Australia 2023* (National Standards). These standards provide a framework for a child-and-family-centred approach to youth justice services in domains such as safety and security, health and wellbeing, family and community, and prevention, early support and diversion.

Cross-government alignment ensures the plan reflects shared priorities across key areas including justice, health, education, housing, child protection and community services. The ACT Government has significant work underway across a range of earlier support initiatives to give children and families the best possible start in life and address social determinants of offending.

While critical to the goals of the Youth Justice Strategic Plan, this work is detailed and reported on through other strategies, such as:

It aligns with reform initiatives such as:

- ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement 2019-2028
- ACT Wellbeing Framework
- ACT Housing Strategy
- Best Start for Canberra's Children: The First 1000 Days Strategy
- Child and Adolescent Clinical Services Plan 2023 -2030
- Future of Education Strategy
- Next Steps for Our Kids 2022-2030
- Our Booris, Our Way review
- Disability Justice Strategy 2019-2029
- RR25by25 and Beyond: A Justice Reinvestment Strategy for the ACT.

Who is responsible?

The ACT Health and Community Services Directorate (HCSD) will lead implementation of the Strategic Plan. However, an effective youth justice system will only be achieved through a whole-of-government and whole-of-system coordinated approach. , Each directorate is therefore responsible for delivering its part of the plan.

Who the Strategic Plan supports

The Strategic Plan supports a range of children and young people who are at risk of entering, or already involved in, the youth justice system. This includes:

- Children aged 10 and older who have been charged under Commonwealth law**,** which has different rules about the age of criminal responsibility.
- Children aged 12 and 13, in rare cases, when they have been charged under ACT law with certain serious and intentionally violent offences.
- Children aged under 14 who are engaging in high risk and harmful behaviour. These children are not yet old enough to be charged under ACT law but still need support. Following the increase in the Minimum Age of Criminal Responsibility, this Strategic Plan prioritises providing children aged 10 – 14 years with early access to therapeutic, developmentally appropriate and culturally safe responses.
- Young people aged 14 to 17 who are at risk of entering or are already involved in the youth justice system.
- Young people aged 18 to 21 who are engaged in the youth justice system because of offending or alleged offending that occurred when they were under 18.

The role of families, kin, and carers

Parents, families, kin, carers, and other trusted people play a crucial role in supporting young people. The Strategic Plan focuses on the young person within their family and community context, recognising that these relationships help young people to stay connected, heal and thrive.

Where the Strategic Plan applies

The Strategic Plan applies across the youth justice system, including:

- in **community** – where support services and diversion are delivered to help prevent youth justice involvement, including through case management and support from HCSD, other ACT Government entities and community partners.

- when **police** engage with young people including through Youth Liaison Officers, diversionary efforts, collaborating in multi-agency responses, investigating matters, and making referrals or arrests.

- In short-term police **custody** before court or transfer.

- **in court transport and court cells** – when a young person is transported to and from detention, or is in custody and held in cells at the court.

- when a young person is held in Bimberi Youth Justice Centre (Bimberi) on **remand** while waiting for their court case to be decided.

- when a young person is supervised in the community on **community-based orders** instead of being detained.

- when a young person is in **detention** at Bimberi, having been convicted of an offence.

- **transition out of detention or from court orders** – helping young people reintegrate into the community with the right support, services and opportunities for a fresh start.

Local context

Understanding the local context in which this plan operates is essential to achieving meaningful change. The ACT's unique demographic, social and cultural characteristics shape both the challenges and opportunities for youth justice reform.

The ACT has one of the youngest populations in Australia. While the ACT enjoys a high standard of living, with the highest median incomes and educational attainment nationally, this can mean young people experiencing vulnerability are more marginalised. Those who engage in harmful behaviour may also be more visible to government services, community supports and law enforcement.

There are several complex and structural drivers leading to over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Islander young people in the youth justice system. In a small jurisdiction like the ACT, this over-representation can increase their visibility to police and heighten the risk of systemic bias.

Recent reforms in the ACT, including raising the age of criminal responsibility and the establishment of the Therapeutic Support Panel, have provided a new evidence base to assess factors that increase the likelihood young people will engage in harmful behaviour and become involved with the youth justice system. Some of these include complex trauma, mental ill-health, disability, alcohol and other drug use, educational engagement, and involvement with child protection.[1]

Other groups such as culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) and gender diverse young people also have unique sociocultural factors that influence their interactions with the youth justice system. HSCD is monitoring trends in young people's involvement in the youth justice system in the ACT and working with communities to respond to their needs.

Current snapshot[2]

- Average daily number of all young people in detention: **17**
- Average daily number of all young people under community-based supervision: **47**
- Average daily number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in detention: **6**
- Average daily number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people under community-based supervision: **16**
- Rate of over-representation: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are **14.9 times**[3] more likely to be in detention or under community based supervision than non- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

A focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people are significantly over-represented in Australia's youth justice system. Although they make up around 6% of the national population aged 10 to 17, they accounted for more than 50% of those under youth justice supervision[4] in 2024[5]. In the ACT, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young

[1] Therapeutic Support Panel for Children and Young People 2025 Report
[2] 2024-2025 youth justice data available at Report on Government Services 2026. Data in this section refers to young people aged 12 to 17 in the ACT.
[3] Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people aged 12 to 17 years were 14.9 times more likely than non-Indigenous young people to be in detention or under community-based supervision in the ACT in 2024-25. Due to low overall numbers, this rate can fluctuate significantly from year to year.
[4] In detention or under community-based supervision
[5] Report on Government Services 2026 Table 17A.5, 17A.6 and 17A.28

people aged 12 to 17 represented around 34% of those under youth justice supervision on an average day in 2024–25.[6]

This over-representation reflects longstanding systemic disadvantage and inequality, and remains a critical challenge for the ACT youth justice system. Strong connections to family, community, culture and Country are factors that support wellbeing. When these connections weaken or break, young people become more vulnerable to harm and youth justice involvement.

This Strategic Plan will drive coordinated, sustained action across government in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations. It demonstrates how Government aims to reduce over-representation in our youth justice system by is targeting systemic barriers and seeking to eliminate discrimination and bias.

Target 11 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, in which the ACT Government is a partner, is to reduce the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in detention by at least 30% by 2031. The ACT Government recognises that achieving Target 11 requires more than incremental change and demands sustained effort across the life of the Strategy.

The *ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement 2019–2028* is the commitment of the ACT Government and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body to deliver real outcomes that improve the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Canberra.

Development of this plan is an agreed action under *The ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement 2019-2028 Phase Three Closing the Gap Implementation Plan* to address the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in the youth justice system.

Consistent with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, achieving sustained reductions in over-representation will require genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations. This includes strengthening shared decision-making, supporting self-determination, and building the capacity of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to design, deliver and evaluate responses for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

A focus on young people with disability

Young people in the youth justice system are more likely to have disability and have often missed out on assessment, diagnosis or support. This may include intellectual disability,

[6] Report on Government Services 2026 Table 17A.5 and 17A.6

developmental delay, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, and autism. For some, detention is the first time they receive an assessment of their support needs.

Too many young people face repercussions for behaviours linked to their disability that are counter-productive. This increases the risk of detention and reinforces disadvantage. This group can also experience complexity of need, including mental ill-health and traumatic experiences that combine with their disability to further increase their risk of youth justice involvement. The ACT Government's focus on early support aims to ensure timely, integrated services and appropriate information and support, including system navigation to enable better engagement for children and families reducing this risk.

While outside the scope of this plan, significant disability reforms are also underway through *Thriving Kids* that will change the landscape of early disability support for children aged 0-8 years with low to moderate support needs and/or autism and their families, carers, and kin.

The link between child protection and youth justice

There is a well-established link between involvement in child protection and later contact with youth justice, sometimes called the care-to-custody pipeline. Young people in out of home care, especially residential care, are more likely to enter the youth justice system. There are a range of reasons for this, including that behaviours which might be managed in a family setting are more likely to be reported to police and result in criminal charges.

Historically, fragmentation of services and a lack of trauma-informed or culturally safe responses have failed to address this trend. The Strategic Plan promotes restorative and therapeutic practices across child protection and youth justice systems, supported by reforms such as Raising the Minimum Age of Criminal Responsibility and Next Steps for Our Kids 2022–2030 – the ACT's strategy for strengthening families and keeping children and young people safe (Next Steps).

A focus on young people who are victims of domestic, family and sexual violence

Young people in the justice system are more likely to have experiences of domestic, family, or sexual violence. They may be the victim of sexual assault or family violence, or they may have witnessed domestic violence that occurs between the young person's parents or family members. Experiences such as these early in a young person's life can have a significant and lifelong impact on their development, health, and wellbeing. This can include the development of trauma symptoms and mental ill-health.

The National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032 calls for the establishment of appropriate supports and services that meet the safety and recovery needs of children who have experienced or witnessed violence. The ACT Government has responded with tailored therapeutic interventions for children and young people.

This Strategic Plan further acknowledges the intersecting experiences of young people, including the need for therapeutic trauma informed responses that focus on violence prevention, as well as healing from domestic, family and sexual violence.

Human rights commitment

The Strategic Plan is grounded in human rights, guided by the *Human Rights Act 2004* (ACT) and international standards. It ensures youth justice practices are:

- rights-based – protecting dignity and fairness
- developmentally appropriate – suitable for age and needs and
- therapeutic – focused on healing and rehabilitation.

Therapeutic and trauma-informed approach

Many young people in the youth justice system have experienced complex trauma, including abuse, neglect, poverty, instability, and experiences of domestic and family violence. A therapeutic approach focuses on healing and helping young people understand their behaviour, manage emotions, and build healthy relationships. A trauma-informed approach recognises past harm and ensures the system does not make things worse, instead helping young people to feel safe and respected.

Consideration for victims

Victims are important stakeholders in the youth justice system. They may be family members, other young people, or members of the broader community or businesses.

The Strategic Plan promotes restorative justice, helping young people understand the harm they caused to victims and the community and to take responsibility. Accountability supports rehabilitation and reduces re-offending. The Plan also acknowledges that a restorative justice approach may not be available or suitable in all circumstances, and that any approach must consider the individual experiences and impacts of the harm on the victim.

The ACT Government is committed to ensuring that victims of crime and harmful behaviours receive the support and assistance they need. The Government has a crucial role to play in ensuring victims are provided with necessary support and assistance to

ensure their wellbeing, and recovery from trauma. This includes protecting and promoting the rights of victims under the Charter of Rights for Victims of Crime, enabling victims to receive support from Victims Support ACT or ensuring victims can raise concerns and complaints with the Victims of Crime Commissioner or Victims Support ACT.

The Strategic Plan seeks to achieve better outcomes for young people while recognising the impacts of offending on victims, families and the wider community.

The journey so far

The ACT Government has taken significant steps to reform youth justice and create a more therapeutic, culturally responsive system. These changes aim to reduce harm, break cycles of offending, and improve outcomes for young people and their families.

Together, they aim to deliver a therapeutic, trauma-informed and culturally appropriate service system that prioritises healing, early intervention and family support.

This Strategic Plan replaces the Blueprint for Youth Justice in the Act 2012-2022. The Blueprint was a 10-year plan that provided strategies that set the direction for the youth justice system in the ACT and laid the foundation for this plan.

Raising the Minimum Age of Criminal Responsibility

On 1 July 2025, the ACT raised the Minimum Age of Criminal Responsibility (MACR) to 14 years. This landmark reform reflects a commitment to trauma-informed and culturally sensitive responses to harmful behaviour, rather than punitive measures.

Establishing the Therapeutic Support Panel

A key part of the system response in support of raising the MACR was the creation of the Therapeutic Support Panel (TSP), a multi-disciplinary team that:

- identifies unmet needs for children and young people and.
- provides advice on assessments, referrals, therapy plans and treatment options.

The Therapeutic Case Management Team works alongside the TSP to deliver and coordinate support for children, young people and families. Data collected through this process will build an evidence base to inform future service design.

Implementing Next Steps for Our Kids 2022-2030

The ACT Government also continues to implement Next Steps, a strategy focused on:

- diverting families from statutory child protection involvement as early as possible
- providing tailored, intensive support for families and
- strengthening practice and integrating service delivery.

This includes ongoing work to adopt a commissioning approach for the Child, Youth and Family Services Program (CYFSP), ensuring earlier and more effective support for children and families.

Relevant reports

Challenges and recommendations relating to youth justice have featured in several reports, including:

- Reports from the ACT Custodial Inspector, including –
    - 2020 and 2024 Healthy Centre Reviews of Bimberi Youth Justice Centre
    - Thematic Review of a Correctional Service and National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) Pilot Visit: Isolation of children and young people at Bimber Youth Justice Centre
- National Preventive Mechanism's post-visit to Bimberi summary report in 2025
- Jumbunna Institute's Final Report of its Independent Review into the Over-Representation of First Nations People in the ACT Criminal Justice System
- The Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety's 2024 Inquiry into the Administration of Bail in the ACT Report.
- The Australian Human Rights Commission's *Help Way Earlier!* Report.
- The Interim Report of the Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs' Inquiry into Australia's youth justice and incarceration system.
- Associate Professor Hannah McGlade and Professor Megan Davis AC's racial discrimination complaint to the United Nations regarding youth justice practices and the disproportionate impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.
- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) reports showing changing trends in youth offending and detention.
- Therapeutic Support Panel for Children and Young People 2025 Report

The Strategic Plan brings together key findings and recommendations into one clear plan. It is designed to drive systemic change, track progress easily, focus action and deliver positive outcomes for young people.

Focus area 1: Earlier support

Helping children and families early is one of the most powerful ways to prevent young people from entering the youth justice system. Research shows that when young people get the right support early, and before issues grow, they are less likely to engage in harmful behaviour, including breaking the law.

Progress and recently delivered activities

1.1 Next Steps for Our Kids 2022–2030 and its first 4-year action plan combine actions under Safe and Supported: The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children and Our Booris, Our Way recommendations. This provides an integrated approach to strengthen ACT families and keep children and young people safe and connected, one of the strongest levers to prevent engagement with the youth justice system.

1.2 The ACT Government is the first jurisdiction in Australia to raise the general Minimum Age of Criminal Responsibility (MACR) to 14. This reform diverts children and young people from the criminal justice system, recognising the underlying unmet therapeutic needs that drive young people to engage in harmful behaviour.

1.3 To support raising the MACR, the Therapeutic Support Panel (TSP) has been established, providing assessment and coordination of individualised, culturally appropriate, trauma-informed services for children and young people at risk of, or engaging in, harmful behaviours.

1.4 The Safer Youth Response Service (SYRS) pilot service has also been launched, providing therapeutic crisis support, case coordination and emergency accommodation for children and young people who come to the attention of police, complementing existing services such as the Children Youth and Families After Hours support service.

1.5 The Safe and Connected Youth Program continues to provide therapeutic outreach support and circuit-breaker accommodation to children and young people aged 8 to 15 years and their families who are experiencing family conflict and are at risk of youth homelessness.

1.6 The ACT Government is partnering with PCYC to deliver the Solid Ground program to support young people experiencing domestic and family violence.

1.7 The Child and Mental Health Service (CAMHS) responds to complex and challenging mental health presentations, including young people with trauma-

related mental health diagnoses. A range of community partners also provide community-based and residential mental health services for young people, ranging from prevention and early intervention to intensive residential services.

1.8 Tedd Noffs Drug and Alcohol Rehabilitation Service supports services, family members and self-referrals of children and young people aged 12 to 17 years. Services include in-house detox and rehabilitation, Street Uni, outreach, and crisis accommodation services.

1.9 Gaps in ACT interventions for children and young people using harmful sexual behaviours have been explored and considered in response to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, and services for children and young people under 12 are provided through Enhanced Child Health Services delivered by Canberra Health Services (CHS).

1.10 Commissioning is underway for the Child, Youth and Family Services Program (CYFSP), which aims to improve supports and programs for vulnerable children, young people and families.

Future actions

1.11	Support the implementation and refinement of support services related to the MACR reforms, including analysing issues identified in TSP yearly reports and responding to findings from the independent review of SYRS.
1.12	Undertake a service system review and develop an agreed approach to reporting, monitoring and evaluating the work related to the MACR reforms.
1.13	Provide therapeutic outreach support and culturally safe, family-centred responses for children aged 10-14 years at risk of becoming involved in the youth justice system.
1.14	Conduct a statutory review of amendments made by the Justice (Age of Criminal Responsibility) Legislation Amendment Act 2023, to commence in late 2028.

1.15	Support the newly established Youth Trauma Service to support young people aged 13 to 17 (or 18 if attending school) with complex needs and moderate mental ill-health.
1.16	Explore expansion and better use of the Flexible Education Program and other pathways to increase education support for young people who are accessing therapeutic supports and/or disengaging from school.
1.17	Expand supports available to young people at risk of harmful sexual behaviours.

Focus area 2: Divert young people from the justice system

When young people start to engage with the youth justice system, evidence shows that harsh punishments like detention often make things worse. Punitive measures can increase the risk of re-offending and may also deepen trauma. Diversion helps young people take responsibility in a way that supports healing and keeps communities safer.

2.1 Progress and recently delivered activities Additional funding to expand PCYC's Project 180 program that delivers support to high-needs young people in the ACT aged 12.5 to 16 years through recreational activities, educational programs and/or vocational pathways, intensive case coordination, and weekend activities.

2.2 The Youth Alcohol Diversion initiative run by CHS and ACT Policing continues to provide alcohol and other drug education, referral and treatment to young people aged under 18 years with underage drinking offences.

2.3 Restorative justice processes are available for young people, their families and victims, at any time in the youth justice system, in addition to restorative justice conferencing for children and young people aged 10 to 17 years who are engaged in harmful behaviour but not engaged in youth justice via referrals from the TSP, ACT Policing and others.

2.4 Youth Justice and Adolescent Services (YJAS) provide voluntary, intensive support and service coordination for young people with complex needs, those at risk of entering youth justice, and those transitioning from custody.

2.5 The Recidivist Offender Multi-Agency Round Table continues to provide multi-agency case coordination for young people (aged 14 years and over) who are high-risk, high-harm offenders at risk of re-offending.

2.6 A review of decision-making criteria has been undertaken relating to young people in the Bail Act 1992 and the Government has progressed a Bill that would require decision-makers to take into account specific matters when making bail decisions related to children.

2.7 CHS continues to implement coordinated transition-of-care processes with community primary health providers and public specialist services to ensure sustained healthcare continuity for young people exiting Bimberi.

Future actions

2.8	Deliver therapeutic supports for children and young people who have engaged in harmful behaviour.
2.9	Strengthen proactive referral pathways for police and other agencies, including awareness and messaging about available services.
2.10	Explore the availability and accessibility of diversion services for young people at risk of offending and with low-risk offences. This would include exploring Youth Justice Community Residential Services and other possible alternative accommodation options.
2.11	Improve planning and information sharing practices across agencies, including HCSD and ACT Policing, to ensure children and young people displaying high-risk, high-harm behaviours receive coordinated, responsive support in a timely way.
2.12	Explore bail support services and programs available to young people in comparison to other jurisdictions and consider how bail support could be improved in the ACT, including a focus on supported accommodation and measures to divert young people from Bimberi, including Sunday bail court and bail support programs such as the Ngurrambai Bail Support Program.
2.13	Continue to monitor the accessibility, effectiveness and opportunities to expand restorative justice processes, with feedback from victims as well as children and young people and their families, carers and advocates.

Focus area 3: Promote equity, address discrimination and over-representation

Reducing the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in the youth justice system is a critical priority for the ACT Government. This focus area is directed toward addressing systemic barriers and strengthening culturally safe, community-led responses that improve outcomes for children, young people and families.

3.1 Progress and recently delivered activities The rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people are promoted and protected through the role of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People Commissioner.

3.2 The Yurwan Ghuda (strong child) On Country program addresses over-representation by supporting children aged 10 to 14 years who are at risk of contact, or already in contact, with the youth justice system.

3.3 Support is provided to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families through Yarrabi Bamirr, using a family-centric model of support to improve life outcomes and reduce or prevent contact with the youth justice system.

3.4 Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation provides alcohol, tobacco and other drug (ATOD) information, support, advocacy, case management, and court support, as well as youth homelessness and outreach services, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

3.5 Support for Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) to deliver culturally safe and inclusive services supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability.

3.6 A commissioning approach is underway to explore new and existing programs to divert Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from the justice system, including young people and those on bail and remand.

3.7 Focus remains on increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff recruited to child protection and youth justice roles.

3.8 The Warrumbul Children's Circle Sentencing Court (Warrumbul Court) provides an alternative model of sentencing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people attending the ACT Childrens Court.

3.9 Arrangements are in place for the spiritual centre and fire pit at the Bimberi Youth Justice Centre to be used for regular yarning circles to support connection.

3.10 A range of measures are in place to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in Bimberi can connect with their community and culture. This includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community service providers delivering counselling, family support and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art programs, and the spiritual centre and fire pit used for regular yarning circles. A Cultural Development Program has also been incorporated into Bimberi's youth worker induction program.

Future actions

3.11	Investigate drivers of under-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in formal police diversion.
3.12	Respond to the recommendations made by the Jumbunna Institute's Final Report of its Independent Review into the Over-Representation of First Nations People in the ACT.
3.13	Finalise agreed outcomes from the commissioning process for the First Nations Justice programs considering support services and programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on bail and remand.
3.14	Engage a specialist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consultancy and support ACCOs to co-design a new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth mental health service.
3.15	Support ACCOs and ACCHOs to grow their capacity to deliver services in Bimberi through appropriate service partnerships.
3.16	Support the delivery of WOKE, Stepping Stones, MindMap Youth Navigation Portal, and Youth Aware of Mental Health.
3.17	Develop a cultural competency framework for youth justice workers as part of reform work underway in Youth Justice and Adolescent Services focusing on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. This work will be informed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and will include cultural safety principles and expectations to guide service delivery across youth justice settings and intersect with development of the model of care.
3.18	Identify and leverage opportunities to strengthen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in the youth justice workforce building on existing workforce and recruitment initiatives.

3.19	Explore opportunities to strengthen cultural identity, cultural connection, and connection to Country for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people across the justice continuum, including responding to recommendation 5(a) of the 2024 Healthy Centre Review.
3.20	Grow capacity and strengthen relationships with ACCOs and the broader service system to meet the needs of children with a trauma history.
3.21	Work in partnership with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body to ensure delivery of agreed actions under the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement 2019-2028 Phase 3 ACT Closing the Gap Implementation Plan.
3.22	Work in partnership with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body to refine monitoring and reporting arrangements, including establishing baseline measures and supporting indicators to better measure progress in reducing over-representation and improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. This work will respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data sovereignty principles, ensuring communities help to guide how data is collected, used and shared.

Focus area 4: Use a therapeutic approach

A therapeutic approach helps young people involved in the child protection and/or youth justice systems by focusing on their needs and experiences, not just their behaviour. It supports healing, reduces re-offending, and builds a safer, fairer youth justice system.

Progress and activities to date

4.1 Melaleuca Place provides assessments and therapeutic interventions for children aged up to 12 years who have experienced abuse and neglect and are under a care and protection order.

4.2 The ACT Position Statement on Trauma Informed Practice for children and young people has been implemented and operationalised.

4.3 Functional Family Therapy – Youth Justice (FFT-YJ) is delivered together with OzChild and Yerrabi Yurwang, providing a family-based program working with young people and their families to prevent or reduce involvement in the youth justice system.

4.4 Case and cultural planning is provided when a young person is under youth justice supervision, including access to appropriate supports in out of home care.

4.5 The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between HCSD and JACS to deliver Court Transport services is reviewed at least every 2 years.

4.6 A range of measures are in place to support therapeutic approaches in Bimberi. These include the Joint Services Group, which supports therapeutic and pro-social services, a continued preventive building maintenance schedule and education program to reduce radicalised symbols being drawn, and a thorough recruitment and training program for operational staff.

4.7 Consideration of a mechanism to systemically review the use of force in Bimberi has also been undertaken in consultation with the ACT's Chief Practitioner.

4.8 Work is underway to implement a Use of Force committee at Bimberi.

Future actions

4.9 Develop a strategic framework and model of care for Bimberi, focusing on rehabilitation, therapeutic responses and human rights. The framework for Bimberi will include consideration of priorities and cultural needs, to ensure there is a balance between the needs of the young person and the operation of a secure environment. This will inform policies, procedures and a series of tools, plans and guidance in working with young people at Bimberi.

4.10	Identify resources needed to deliver the model of care, including access to allied health professionals and a supported and sustainable workforce.
4.11	Align the Use of Force committee at Bimberi with a new model of care.
4.12	Review alcohol and other drug treatment and prevention supports offered to young people in Bimberi, with a view to improving rehabilitation and counselling options for young people.
4.13	As part of the Model of Care, consider options to:
4.13.1	extend health services to ensure young people in any ACT detention setting are provided with timely assessment and care for their health and wellbeing needs, including from allied health professionals, and receive ongoing culturally appropriate care.
4.13.2	review the process for assessing young people's health care needs on entry to Bimberi and where this health care assessment should best take place.
4.14	Review record keeping mechanisms to capture young people's attendance at the Murrumbidgee school and other Bimberi programs.
4.15	Explore options to improve access to the Flexible Education Program as well as alternative pathways to support young people exiting Bimberi or accessing residential care, rehabilitation services, or homelessness services to restore or maintain their engagement with education.
4.16	Explore additional mechanisms for young people to take personal accountability for actions that have caused harm, including where restorative justice processes are not appropriate.

Focus area 5: Respect young people's rights

Respecting young people's rights ensures they are treated fairly, safely and with dignity. When their rights are protected and they participate in decisions that affect their lives, young people are more likely to engage positively with support services, take responsibility and build better futures. It also helps create a justice system that is more just, inclusive and aligned with human rights standards.

Progress and activities to date

5.1 The rights of children and young people are promoted and protected through the role of the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People Commissioner, ACT Children and Young People Commissioner and Public Advocate.

5.2 Work is ongoing to modernise the Children and Young People Act 2008 by incorporating recommendations from oversight bodies to better meet the needs of children, young people, families and carers.

5.3 Access to the Youth Law Centre in Legal Aid is a free legal service provided to young people, while the Intermediary Program continues to provide assistance with communication, understanding and participation of accused young people interacting with Police and Courts.

5.4 The Australasian Youth Justice Administrators (AYJA) Principles of Youth Justice in Australia (Principles), National Standards for Youth Justice in Australia (National Standards) and the Child Safe Standards have been implemented in all youth justice settings.

5.5 Bimberi practices have been improved to ensure the rights of children are protected and promoted, including the promotion of the Charter of Rights for Young People, access to physical contact with visitors, a supported decision-making program, guaranteeing timely confidential communication between young people and their lawyers, and establishing an appropriate restricted internet platform to support education.

5.6 The Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT) National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) continues to be enabled by a youth justice system that promotes and embraces international scrutiny.

5.7 A better practice guide for ACT Policing responses to people with disability has been developed.

5.8 The Disability Justice Strategy Second Action Plan has been developed, which includes actions to support the experiences of people with disability within the justice system and influence organisation and system change.

5.9 The Integrated Service Response Program (ISRP) continues to provide support for services, family members and self-referrals of children and young people aged 12 to 17 years with high or complex support needs related to disability.

5.10 The TIRA (Tool for Identifying Reasonable Adjustments) is used to identify suitable adjustments for young people with disability, as part of Bimberi induction.

5.11 Disability Liaison Officers have been established within ACT Policing and CYF.

5.12 Staff continue to be integrated into Legal Aid to assist and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds, by improving access to legal assistance.

Future actions

5.13	As part of the development of a strategic framework and model of care, review the Youth Justice chapters in the Children and Young People Act 2008 to promote the safety and wellbeing of children and young people and improve compliance with obligations under the Human Rights Act 2004. This includes consideration of a young person's human rights as central to decision making and risk assessment.
5.14	Identify options to progress Court matters as quickly as possible in the ACT Magistrates Court and Childrens Court.
5.15	Explore functionality in the Bimberi client management system to ensure information can be captured about when a young person has been secured in their room and when they have time out of their rooms. This includes options about how this might be captured in a consolidated register to increase accountability and review of restrictive interventions.
5.16	Work with oversight bodies on access to services for young people when they need them and continue to refine how best to support oversight access to meet their legislated compliance activities. This will include reviewing the Bimberi Business Continuity Plan to ensure operations are managed in a way that maintains access by young people to critical services, including oversight.
5.17	As part of the Model of Care, in partnership with the Human Rights Commission, embed a greater human rights culture at Bimberi over the long term.

5.18	Explore the use of body scanner technology in various law enforcement locations across the ACT to reduce the need for strip searches. Explore the use of body worn cameras to improve transparency, record keeping and accountability.
5.19	Implement the ACT Disability Strategy 2024-2033 and the First Action Plan 2024-2026 to build a more accessible and inclusive ACT, where people with disability can fully participate in all aspects of community life.
5.20	Continue implementation of the Disability Royal Commission recommendations, including: • 8.16 Support by First Nations organisations to people in custody. • 8.20 Improving police responses to people with disability. • 8.21 Diversion of people with cognitive disability from criminal proceedings.

Focus area 6: Help young people return safely to the community

Helping young people transition from detention back to the community ensures they have the support they need to build a better future. Without proper help in critical areas such as employment, housing, education and mental health care, young people are more likely to re-offend. A strong, coordinated approach helps young people succeed and keeps everyone safer.

Progress and activities to date

6.1 The ACT has implemented changes to extend the provision of care for young people who have been engaged in the Care and Protection system up to 21 years, while better support is provided to care leavers to transition to independent living.

6.2 Youth Justice Community Residential Services continue to provide crisis, short- to medium-term accommodation for young people aged 14 to 18 years who are on community-based justice orders. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are prioritised for this service.

6.3 The Reconnection, Employment and Learning (REAL) Program facilitates proactive mentoring to build and support pathways to employment, education and training for people who are on remand or in prison, with a focus on supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

6.4 An operational Countering Violence Extremism (CVE) Framework has been jointly designed, tailored to the ACT youth justice system in partnership with Justice and Community Safety Directorate (funded via the ACT CVE Partner Project).

6.5 Specialised, evidence-based programs and services are being delivered in Bimberi and the broader community through the Youth Justice and Adolescent Services Branch of HSCD.

6.6 There has been an increase in teaching staff to expand the Murrumbidgee Education and Training Centre in Bimberi, with a new bridging program developed for students exiting Bimberi.

6.7 Case management services continue to be provided within Bimberi to support young people exiting detention.

6.8 The Collaborative Service Group including HCSD, Education Directorate and Canberra Health Services has been established and explores options to strengthen cross-directorate collaboration and decision making in relation to programs and services at Bimberi.

Future actions

6.9	Implement throughcare support and programs in youth justice settings, particularly at Bimberi. This includes consideration of strengthening transition planning to support young people exiting Bimberi.
6.10	Through the existing Collaborative Services Group including HCSD, Education Directorate and Canberra Health Services, strengthen cross-directorate collaboration and decision making in relation to programs and services at Bimberi. This includes considering throughcare principles in decision making and co-ordination of programs and services for young people in detention. This will explore how best to maximise opportunities for young people's participation in programs or events in the community and, where appropriate, continue to maintain connection to their education provider.
6.11	Improve and increase collaboration with ACCOs to ensure existing and potential future post-release support is delivered in a way that is culturally safe and appropriate.
6.12	Explore options to implement the Disability Royal Commission recommendation 7.39 – preventing homelessness when people with disability transition from service or institutional setting.

Monitoring and reporting

It will be critical to continue to work collaboratively with government oversight bodies to assess this work and navigate progress, including:

- ACT Government directorates
- Official Visitors
- ACT Human Rights Commission, including the Public Advocate and Children and Young People Commissioner
- ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People Commissioner
- ACT Custodial Inspector
- ACT's National Preventive Mechanism, comprising the ACT Ombudsman, the ACT Human Rights Commission and the Office of the Custodial Inspector.

It is important to keep the Strategic Plan responsive and on track, to ensure there is ongoing transparency, continuous improvement and public accountability.

HCSD will develop a Monitoring and Reporting Framework, in partnership with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body, which will establish baseline measures to define the current state, set clear targets and responsibilities for the future state and develop supporting indicators to strengthen accountability and track progress over time.

Annual reviews will commence in 2027 to assess progress against commitments, baseline measures and targets, identify barriers to implementation and highlight areas where further or corrective action is required to achieve the Strategic Plan's vision and delivery of actions under the focus areas.

- Annual reviews will take the form of a written report.
- The report will be provided to the responsible Minister and tabled in the ACT Legislative Assembly by the end of each calendar year.

As implementation of the Strategic Plan progresses, additional mechanisms may be introduced to strengthen how progress is monitored and outcomes are assessed. This may include the incorporation of the voices of young people and their families.

Performance measures and reporting mechanisms will be progressively refined to track progress over time, build robust trend data and strengthen accountability for outcomes. This may include updating the Bimberi Headline Indicators report.

Delivering the Strategic Plan

The Strategic Plan details the work already happening across the ACT Government and community. It shows what work has recently occurred, the work currently happening, and what we have committed to do over the next five years to keep improving outcomes for young people involved with the youth justice system, as well as those at risk of entering the system.

Over the life of the Strategic Plan, work will focus on the careful consideration of legislative, operational and financial considerations to progress and implement actions identified. This could mean the Strategic Plan will be updated over its lifecycle, or that updates may be provided as part of the annual review and reporting process.