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WA Expands Aboriginal-Led Family Support Programs

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The Western Australian government has announced the expansion of its Earlier Intervention and Family Support (EIFS) programs, awarding 18 new contracts to provide services for children and families at risk of entering the child protection system. The initiatives are led by Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) or delivered in partnership with them. According to the Department of Communities, the programs aim to keep children safe at home and connected to their communities.

The expanded services include the Family Support Network (FSN), which offers assessment and coordination, and Intensive Family Support Services (IFSS), which provides intensive case management. These services will be available across both metropolitan Perth and regional areas of the state.

Child Protection Minister Jessica Stojkovski said the increased Aboriginal-led involvement ensures that culturally responsive approaches remain central to efforts to keep children at home. The contracts build on the Aboriginal In-Home Support Service (AISS), a program designed to help families prevent child removal and promote reunification.

The AISS, delivered by Wungening Aboriginal Corporation, was evaluated by Social Ventures Australia in 2021, with findings indicating that the program supports the goal of maintaining family unity. A subsequent evaluation by Keogh Bay in 2023 reported improvements in family functioning among participating households.

The expansion aligns with commitments under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, which prioritises Aboriginal-led solutions in service delivery. The 2022–2032 Aboriginal Family Safety Strategy complements these efforts by addressing family violence and providing \$5.75 million in grants for community-led initiatives. The strategy is intended to ensure responses are culturally safe and respectful of Aboriginal values and knowledge systems.

Minister Stojkovski stated that evidence indicates ACCO-led services deliver strong outcomes for Aboriginal families. She also noted that the government is seeking to ensure programs are designed and delivered in ways that build trust and engagement within Aboriginal communities.

Data from the 2021–2022 reporting period shows that Aboriginal children in Western Australia remain significantly overrepresented in out-of-home care, with a rate of 61.6 per 1,000 compared to 3.1 per 1,000 for non-Aboriginal children.

The government has said the new contracts represent a further step toward addressing this disparity. The Department of Communities will continue to work with service providers to monitor outcomes and adapt programs as needed to ensure effectiveness.