

5. CONCLUSION

The interviews conducted with stakeholders confirmed the shortage of Indigenous carers and the inability for the current system to cope with the demand for home-based care placements created by the over-representation of Indigenous children in out-of-home care.

Stakeholders were:

- professionals in Indigenous agencies;
- professionals working for state and territory governments (including mainstream out-of-home care services, Indigenous specific policy or program workers, and policy officers);
- non-Indigenous specific, non-government out-of-home care agencies;
- peak bodies;
- key Australian academics;
- carers (Indigenous and non-Indigenous carers of Indigenous children); and
- Indigenous children in home-based care.

Stakeholder responses indicated that the problems needing to be overcome within the wider out-of-home care service sector (for example, lack of foster carers, children's challenging behaviours) were also present within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. However, carers and service providers described these issues as being compounded by the grief and disadvantage caused by past welfare practices directed towards Indigenous people and the material disadvantage experienced by many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Carers and service providers believed that there was a need for culturally appropriate recruitment, assessment, training, and support for carers and services for children. Promising practice described by participants was frequently characterised by the involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples during the development of new practice initiatives and in the delivery of services (either as the drivers or in partnership with mainstream services).

The fit between the structure of the out-of-home care system and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture was often described as poor. Furthermore, carers and service providers believed there was a need for the service system to better meet the needs of Indigenous people rather than expecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to adapt to the current service system.

One of the key differences between non-Indigenous and Indigenous carers was the issue of retention. Carers and service providers observed that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers, once recruited, tended to remain within the system – there was virtually no turnover of carers. This is indicative of the strength of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and their commitment to children, families and

community. Carers and service providers also described commitment to community as one of the reasons there are more Indigenous carers than non-Indigenous carers.

In the wider community, there is a shortage of people *willing* to become foster carers. Participant responses suggest that in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, those who were able to become carers were frequently also willing to be carers (despite there being a shortage of Indigenous people *able* to become carers). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' connection to community is a key aspect of Indigenous culture and underpins many of the recommendations made by participants in relation to improving service delivery to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their carers. This connection to community is also an apparent advantage in relation to the placement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in home-based care. Thus, in this aspect at least, adapting the structure and procedures that guide the out-of-home care service system to better meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, would also serve to alleviate some of the pressure placed on the out-of-home care system.