

15 October 2024

Kate Bryant
Coroners Registrar
Coroners Court of Victoria
65 Kavanagh Street
Southbank VIC 3006

By email: cpuresponses@coronerscourt.vic.gov.au

Dear Ms Bryant,

**Re: COR 2021 003810 Investigation into the death of XY
BDAC Response to Coroner's Recommendations**

1. On behalf of Bendigo District Aboriginal Co-operative (BDAC), I welcome and fully endorse all of Coroner McGregor's recommendations concerning the care and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.
2. BDAC endorses Recommendation 1, and echoes the Coroner's call for the Department of Families, Fairness, and Housing (DFFH) to transition all Aboriginal children in the Victorian child protection system to the care of local Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO), in line with the recommendations arising out of the Yoorrook Justice Commission.
3. As the provider of the local Aboriginal Child Specialist Advice and Support Service (ACSASS), BDAC endorses Recommendation 3 and the expansion of the ACSASS service. Currently, BDAC operates ACSASS with a team of 2.0 EFT staff, funded at \$304,000 annually, to provide round-the-clock cultural support. However, we run this service at full capacity. To comply with the Coroner's recommendation that ACSASS be expanded to provide full coverage to all Aboriginal children in the district, BDAC would need to triple its current staffing and funding to approximately \$950,000.00 annually. This expansion would allow us to offer consistent, culturally safe support during critical moments, such as law enforcement interactions or hospital admissions.



BDAC
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4. BDAC fully supports the emphasis in Recommendation 4 on regular cultural awareness and anti-racism training, to be designed and delivered by First Peoples organisations. BDAC is committed to partnering with the relevant state authorities to develop and implement this training, ensuring that both frontline and executive staff in child protection and related services are equipped with the knowledge and understanding necessary to care for Aboriginal children in a culturally safe and appropriate manner. Through this partnership, we can work together to create a system that better supports the cultural needs of Aboriginal children.
5. BDAC welcomes the responsibility imposed by Recommendation 7 on DFFH, to ensure a proper focus on culturally informed care for Aboriginal children with mental health needs. BDAC supports the requirement for consultation with ACCOs to develop Social and Emotional Wellbeing approaches. It is essential that DFFH, in collaboration with the health services, ensures that Aboriginal Health Liaison Officers are consistently available to provide cultural support when Aboriginal children are admitted to hospitals for mental health treatment. BDAC emphasises the importance of expanding this support to ensure that Aboriginal Liaison Officers or ACSASS are available whenever Aboriginal children encounter the criminal justice system.
6. BDAC seeks urgent funding in order for BDAC to deliver residential care services for Aboriginal children in the Bendigo area, outlined by Recommendation 14. BDAC is committed to providing culturally appropriate residential care in line with best practices, but we emphasise that this must be supported by adequate funding and resources to ensure quality care.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dallas Widdicombe'.

Dallas Widdicombe
Chief Executive Officer
Bendigo and District Aboriginal Co-operative