



Forced Adoption Reference Group

Terms of Reference

The WA Government announced the establishment of the Forced Adoption Reference Group (Reference Group) on 22 October 2024 as part of the Government Response to the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs' Report 66 – Broken Bonds, Fractured Lives: Report on the Inquiry into Past Forced Adoption in Western Australia (Government Response to Report 66).

The Reference Group will ensure that people with lived experience of forced adoption play a key role in driving change and informing the legislation, policies, practices and services that impact them.

The Terms of Reference outlines the purpose, membership, roles, operating rules and reporting arrangements of the Reference Group.

Reference Group members provided input to this document during the establishment phase of the group and approved this document on the 29 August 2025.

Purpose

The Reference Group will have an important role in contributing to the future of adoption reform in WA. Membership will be primarily people with lived experience of forced adoption, including mothers, adopted people, and representatives from community-led support groups.

The Reference Group will provide the Director General of the Department of Communities (Communities) and the Government with strategic advice related to the implementation of supported recommendations in the Government Response to Report 66.

Recognising that there are many differing experiences of forced adoption, lived experience members will be actively involved in establishing meeting processes and agreed ways of working together to ensure members are supported to contribute to the group.

The Reference Group may not be the only forum for Government consultation on the implementation of the Government Response. Community consultation through the Reference Group may be complemented by other stakeholder engagement processes.

Co-Chair persons

The Reference Group will be co-chaired by Deputy Director General, Child Protection and Family Support from Communities and two individuals with lived experience of forced adoption. Together, the Co-Chairs will be responsible for ensuring a trauma-informed approach to all meeting processes, informing the development of agenda items and for guiding the Reference Group members in discussions.

Further guidance on the roles of the Co-Chairs and members is provided in the Western Australian Forced Adoption Reference Group Induction Booklet.

Composition and membership

The Reference Group will consist of 13 members, including the Co-Chairs. To reflect the Terms of Reference of the Inquiry into Past Forced Adoption, membership was open to people with lived experience of forced adoption between the years of 1939 – the early 1980s.

Three community support groups have nominated representatives on the Reference Group:

- Association Representing Mothers Separated by Adoption (ARMS)
- Great Southern Adoptee Support Group (GSASG)
- South West Adoption Support Group Supporting Survivors (SWAGSS).

Function

The Reference Group will:

- Provide independent advice about specific issues relating to forced adoption and the implementation of recommendations in the Government Response to Report 66.
- Act as a consultative forum to ensure that advice reflects the broad range of views and experiences of forced adoption.
- Provide critical review, feedback and endorsement of proposed initiatives, projects and policies related recommendations in the Government Response to Report 66.

Responsibilities of Members

The role of the Reference Group members is to:

- Contribute to the development of the Reference Group Terms of Reference, agreed ways of working, and workplan.
- Work collaboratively and respectfully with each other, the Co-Chairpersons and the secretariat.
- Participate in meetings and preparation for meetings (reading papers).

- Participate in sub committees/working groups if appropriate.
- Provide input into the meeting agenda.
- Draw on their lived experience expertise and represent the views of the wider community related to items on the meeting agenda.
- Contribute feedback on proposed initiatives, projects and policies.
- Uphold a duty of care to keep themselves, other members, and secretariat staff safe.
- Follow the relevant policies, Terms of Reference, Statement of Committee Conduct, and other group approved procedures and guidelines.

Membership and Terms of Office

The Director General is responsible for the appointment of all members including the Co-Chairs. Appointed members were selected based on their ability to contribute to the development of advice to the Director General. Appointed members are appointed for up to two years.

Psychological safety

The Reference Group will address sensitive issues and for many people with lived experience, the impacts of their experience are significant and ongoing. Group meetings and processes will prioritise psychological safety through a trauma-informed approach.

A Reference Group Working Together Agreement has been developed in collaboration with group members to articulate group values, principles of working together, psychological safety, ethical standards, conflict management and supports required. The Working Together Agreement was developed during the induction meeting and will be finalised and agreed to by members.

Administrative Arrangements

Review Terms of Reference

The Reference Group reviewed these Terms of Reference on appointment and were invited to give feedback. The Terms of Reference will be reviewed annually or as required.

Frequency of Meetings

The Reference Group will meet on a quarterly basis (or as required), with options for both face to face and virtual attendance. During the meetings, members will consider outstanding actions from previous meetings, standing agenda items and new business arising.

Meeting Agenda and Minutes

Secretariat support for the Reference Group will be provided by Communities. The scheduling of meetings, preparing of meeting agendas, minute taking, and other coordination functions will be the responsibility of Communities.

Agenda items may be nominated by any Reference Group member and will be confirmed two weeks prior to the meeting.

As far as is practicable, all meeting notices, agenda and supporting papers will be circulated to members as they become available or at a minimum two weeks prior to the meeting.

Documents circulated to members will have short file names, and Communities will print and provide hard copies of all documents to members at the meetings.

Members are encouraged to read minutes thoroughly and confirm whether the minutes are a true summary of discussion and actions arising. If on reading the minutes, a member disagrees with what was recorded in the minutes, they should email the Secretariat team to suggest changes. The Secretariat team will confirm with the Co-Chairs the final content of the minutes.

The Secretariat must maintain all records from the Reference Group within the Communities corporate record management system.

Out of Session Activities and updates

Reference Group members will be provided with papers that will require time in between meetings to review in preparation for an upcoming meeting or to provide feedback.

Remuneration

Appointed members will be remunerated according to Communities' Paid Participation Policy. Eligible members are also entitled to the reimbursement of travel expenses for travel to and from Reference Group meetings. Reimbursement is based on the most economic means of transport available. Any travel costs must be discussed and approved by prior arrangement with the Secretariat team.

Decision Making

A quorum for meetings will be met if there are eight members in attendance which must include one of the Co-Chairs with lived experience. Members will try to reach a consensus view. Where consensus is not reached the majority view will be documented, and the minutes will reflect differing advice. Meetings will not be able to go ahead unless quorum has been met.

Confidentiality

Membership on the group requires the identity of members to be shared with other members, the Secretariat, and the Minister. To minimise traumatisation, lived experience members are not required to disclose their personal experience of forced adoption with other members, the Secretariat or the Minister.

Discussions within Reference Group meetings are confidential. Members will be required to sign a Statement of Commitment which includes a confidentiality declaration.

Communications that can be shared externally to stakeholders and the wider community will be agreed within the Reference Group.

Authorising Minister

The Hon Jessica Stojkovski MLA, Minister for Child Protection is the authorising Minister for the Reference Group.