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# **Permanency Goal Reviews and Case Plan Goal Package Extension Policy**



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# 1 Background

Under the Permanency Support Program (PSP), the NSW Department of Communities and Justice ('DCJ') and PSP Service Providers ('service providers') work together to identify, review and decide upon goals to secure a permanent home for every child or young person.

Use this guide when completing permanency goal reviews for cases where service providers hold primary case responsibility; or in an exceptional circumstance where an extension to the two-year case plan goal package is required.

## 1.1 Time-limited supports to achieve permanency for children

One of the fundamental objectives of the PSP is to achieve permanency for children. This is supported by time-limited case plan goal packages that provide additional resourcing to prioritise and undertake the necessary casework to achieve permanency outcomes for children<sup>1</sup> so they don't drift in care.

Permanency goal reviews<sup>2</sup> support this objective by reviewing and documenting progress made towards achieving a child's permanency goal.

Case plan goal packages are funded for a maximum period of two years and service providers are expected to support children to reach their permanency goal within this timeframe.

Only in exceptional circumstances, where additional time-limited supports are required to achieve permanency, an application can be made for an extension to the case plan goal package as outlined below in section 4.

## 1.2 What is a permanency goal review?

Permanency goal reviews involve DCJ and service providers working collaboratively to assess the child's changing needs and case plan goals. The reviews provide a valuable opportunity to jointly:

- check in on the progress of the child's case plan goal
- consider whether a change to the case plan goal is required
- identify any areas in which additional support is required to achieve the child's goal, and
- ensure permanency goal reviews support culturally appropriate practice.

Permanency goal reviews will generally occur separately to the child's case plan reviews as these involve children, parents, carers, family, community and other people important to the child. The child's current Family Action Plan for Change (FAP) and/or OOHC Case Plan is critical in reviewing progress towards the child's goal.

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'child' has been used throughout this document and refers to both children and young people.

<sup>2</sup> Referred to as 'case plan goal reviews' under the PSP Program Level Agreement.

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## 1.3 Minimum frequency for reviews

The minimum frequency for reviews are outlined in the PSP Program Level Agreement (PSP PLA):

Case Plan Goal	Minimum Review Period
Family Preservation	3 monthly
Restoration, Guardianship or Adoption	6 monthly
Long Term Care	12 monthly

Where permanency is unlikely to be achieved within two-years, or there are specific challenges requiring more support, reviews will occur more frequently:

- 1 monthly for family preservation
- 3 monthly for restoration, guardianship or adoption.

Where a change in case plan goal is recommended the next review is to occur 3 months from the date of the consultation/review to monitor progress towards permanency. Once the case plan goal is changed reviews occur in accordance with the minimum review period as outlined above and in the PSP PLA.

## 2 Conducting permanency goal reviews

### 2.1 How will the reviews be completed?

Permanency goal reviews are conducted by the DCJ Permanency Coordinator (from the district who holds secondary case responsibility) and key staff from the service provider. Reviews will generally occur as face to face meetings. However:

- they may be conducted together with other DCJ staff where they are more closely involved in a child's case, for example by the CSC caseworker and manager for family preservation matters
- this does not mean they cannot occur in other ways, especially if there are more immediate concerns or where phone or videoconference is preferable
- they may occur as part of existing meetings when case planning or case management of children is discussed.

DCJ and service providers have complementary roles in permanency goal reviews:

- the Permanency Coordinator convenes a meeting with a service provider to conduct one or more reviews.
- the Permanency Coordinator is responsible for:
  - monitoring and tracking the completion of all reviews
  - monitoring and tracking progress towards achieving permanency outcomes in two years and the cessation of permanency packages
  - providing service providers with a copy of each review

- the service provider is responsible for participating in and providing relevant information to inform the review.

## 2.2 When are the reviews to be completed?

The timing of permanency goal reviews depend on a number of factors and will depend on the frequency<sup>3</sup> of the reviews:

Children entering care	6 months from the date the case plan was developed (which is no later than 30 days after the child enters care)
Children in long term care where DCJ approves a change in case plan goal to restoration, guardianship or adoption	6 months from the date the case plan goal was approved to change to restoration, guardianship or adoption <sup>4</sup>
Children with a case plan of family preservation	conducted soon after (and are informed by) the required risk re-assessment and FAP review
Children with a case plan of adoption	completed with the involvement of DCJ adoption caseworker (for agencies who are not accredited to provide adoption services)
Children with a case plan of long term care or leaving care	may be conducted at the same time as the child's annual case plan review regardless of the commencement date of their package and/or may occur as part of operational meetings, cohort reviews or other suitable meeting.
Complex matters	additional staff from either DCJ or service provider may need to be part of the discussion

## 2.3 Preparing for the review

Permanency coordinators and service providers have complementary roles, prior to the review being conducted, to ensure the review is properly informed and to support decision making and practice quality.

The information required to conduct each review will be dependent on each child and their circumstances.

Service providers:

- make available and bring along the child's:
  - family action plan for change and/or OOHC case plan

<sup>3</sup> Refer to section 1.3.

<sup>4</sup> Where DCJ approves a change in case plan goal the service provider reviews the child's OOHC Case Plan and completes the *Case Plan Review* record on the ChildStory Partner Community

- 
- leaving care plan and/or cultural support plan (if applicable)
  - behaviour support plan (if applicable)
  - restoration transition plan (if applicable)
  - critical information including case notes, assessments or reports.
  - bring along new document/s (no specific template) that detail the child's progress since the previous review and actions taken towards enacting any previous recommendations and action items.

Permanency coordinators:

- review any previous consultation/s
- review any previous permanency goal reviews, including recommendations and action items
- review ChildStory in relation to any reports that have been made about the child or family and assessments conducted by DCJ.

## 2.4 What will the reviews cover?

### *Family preservation, restoration, guardianship or adoption reviews*

Consider the following four key areas:

1. progress towards the child's permanency goal and objectives in the child's case plan/s
2. challenges and strategies in place to progress achievement of the child's case plan goal, including the stepping down of services where appropriate
3. service providers views on the likelihood that the goal will be achieved within the specified time frame and actions to address any concerns; and
4. appropriateness of the case plan goal and if the case plan goal needs to be changed.

### *Long term care reviews*

Consider the following four key areas:

1. progress towards the objectives in the child's case plan/s and information that supports long term care remaining in the child's best interests
2. challenges and strategies in place to support stability for the child
3. service providers views on the child's current goal and the likelihood that permanency may be able to be considered, including any steps required
4. appropriateness of the case plan goal and if the case plan goal needs to be changed.

## 2.5 Review recommendations and outcomes

The Permanency Coordinator conducting the review makes recommendations based on the assessment of progress towards the child's permanency outcome. This may include recommendations about casework, referrals or other activities to support achievement of the child's case plan goal.

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Recommendations will determine whether:

- permanency is on track to be achieved within the two year timeframe
- the case plan goal remains in the child's best interests
- permanency consultation is required to consider other permanency options
- the frequency of reviews and whether they need to increase to further monitor progress towards permanency or supports in place<sup>5</sup>
- exceptional circumstances exist and the case plan goal package should be considered for an extension.

Where a recommendation is made during the permanency goal review process service providers complete these tasks prior to the next review or within the recommended time frame agreed during the review.

Approval by the line manager of the Permanency Coordinator or the Child and Family District Unit Manager Client Services (from the district who holds secondary case responsibility) is required where increased monitoring and more frequent reviews are required.

## 2.6 Documenting the review and sharing the outcome

The Permanency Coordinator conducting the review completes the '*permanency goal review – outcome report*' for each child or sibling group. This includes:

- documenting discussions with the service provider
- review of case notes/plans/reports and evidence that supports the review
- analysis of the four key areas outlined in section 2.4, and
- recommendations as outlined in 2.5.

Note: This is recorded in the child's case as a 'note', with the category of 'consultation' and the sub category of 'permanency support'. The note is shared with the service provider for access via the Partner Community. Refer to the ChildStory Recording Tool and Knowledge for more information.

The Permanency Coordinator provides the service provider with a copy of the review and notifies the lead Contract Manager that the review has been completed as per local district processes.

## 2.7 Monitoring and tracking of reviews

Information about the completed review is manually recorded on the relevant District reporting tool including completing the mandatory measures as outlined above at 2.5.

Information about completed reviews is reported quarterly to DCJs Implementation and Performance Unit, Child & Family Directorate within Strategy, Policy and Commissioning as per agreed reporting processes.

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<sup>5</sup> More frequent monitoring will be required where progress towards permanency is not on track to be achieved within two-years, or there are specific challenges requiring more support.

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Service provider participation and completion of reviews is not currently included in the NGO Performance Dashboard. As the quality and consistency of data matures, DCJ will work toward including this on each provider's dashboard.

## 2.8 Resolving disputes

DCJ and service providers may experience occasional disagreements during the permanency goal review process. This can be expected as a normal part of participants working collaboratively, having different perspectives and playing different but complementary roles.

Districts and service providers address disputes by using existing conflict resolution procedures that aim to:

- resolve issues at a district level in the first instance and
- strengthen the capacity of the service system to achieve better outcomes for children, their parents and family/kin.

Refer to the 'handling disputes' section on pages 84-86 of the [Permanency Case Management Policy, Rules and Practice Guidance](#) for more information.

## 2.9 Reviews for agencies with delegated parental responsibility (Barnardos)

Where an agency (Barnardos) is delegated certain powers and functions of parental responsibility under a deed entered into by the Minister for Family & Community Services the agency's roles and responsibilities vary to that of other service providers.

Barnardos under a Deed with DCJ can make and approve a change in case plan goal for children they have delegated parental responsibility for (that is non Aboriginal children with a final order).

DCJ approves all PSP service packages including any extensions to the case plan goal package.

Agencies with delegated responsibility (Barnardos):

- participate in the minimum period permanency goal reviews as required under their PSP Program Level Agreement
- receive case plan goal packages as determined by DCJ
- achieve permanency outcomes for children within two years.

In exceptional circumstances where additional time-limited supports are required to achieve permanency for a child an application is to be made for an extension to the case plan goal package as outlined below in section 4.



## 3 Monitoring progress after the two-year package expires

### 3.1 Children’s permanency goals are still to be achieved

Case plan goal packages are time-limited for a maximum period of two years. This is to focus and prioritise casework for children to ensure their permanency needs are met. Achieving a permanent, safe and loving home gives a child a better chance at leading an independent, successful life as an adult.

For children in out-of-home care, where permanency has not been achieved in this time and the goal remains in their best interests, service providers continue casework towards the child’s goal until this is achieved.

Circumstances may occur from time to time that delay achievement of permanency. In most cases additional funding to achieve permanency (and undertake specific permanency casework/assessment) will not be required.

### 3.2 Case plan goal packages automatically cease at the end of the two-year period

The case plan goal package automatically ceases<sup>6</sup> at the end of the two-year period. Service providers will receive a case plan goal package ‘continuing permanency beyond 2 years’ paid at the same rate as the long term care package until the permanency goal is achieved.

The child’s case plan goal remains unchanged, unless it is no longer in their best interests to be pursued (then a new goal and package should commence accordingly).

Case Plan Goal prior to two-year package expiring	Case Plan <u>Goal</u> after two-year package expires <sup>7</sup>	Case Plan Goal <u>package</u> after two-year expiry
Restoration	Restoration	Continuing permanency beyond 2 years <sup>8</sup>
Guardianship	Guardianship	
Adoption	Adoption	

### 3.3 Frequency of reviews and reporting requirements

Where permanency is not achieved in the two-year period, reviews occur every 3 months until restoration, guardianship or adoption is finalised. This includes matters:

<sup>6</sup> Work is occurring within the ChildStory system. Further advice will be provided as to any steps required by DCJ staff to update if required.

<sup>7</sup> Where the child’s case plan goal is no longer in their best interests, a permanency consultation should occur to determine the best permanency outcome. A new goal and package should commence accordingly.

<sup>8</sup> A new package ‘continuing permanency beyond 2 years’ is funded at the same rate as the long term care package.

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- where permanency has not been achieved and the package automatically ceases
  - where an extension is approved under exceptional circumstances.

## 4 Seeking an extension to the two-year package in exceptional circumstances

[Applications](#) to extend the two year case plan goal package will only be considered by DCJ in exceptional circumstances. An overview of the process is available in the [Flowchart](#).

Extensions can be made for a maximum period of up to:

- 3 months where COVID-19 has specifically impacted achievement of permanency
- 3 months for family preservation
- 6 months for guardianship
- 12 months for restoration or adoption.

Applications are made only for the period that time-limited casework supports are required. Refer

The decision to extend a case plan goal package beyond the two-year maximum period is delegated to Executive District Director (EDD). This is the EDD of the district who holds secondary case responsibility.

### 4.1 Criteria for an extension in exceptional circumstances

Applications from service providers will only be considered where all of the following criteria has been met (with supporting evidence):

1. significant progress towards the case plan goal has been made
2. the service provider has participated in the required permanency goal reviews
3. extension of the preservation/restoration/guardianship/adoption package is required to put in place additional time-limited supports to assist the family to achieve the child's permanency goal
4. the case plan clearly identifies the supports and casework tasks required to be completed by the service provider to achieve the child's goal including clear timeframes
5. evidence demonstrates factors delaying achievement of the child's case plan goal are beyond the service provider's control (see 4.3 below for guidance)
6. the case plan goal remains in the child's best interests.

COVID-19 may have delayed the achievement of permanency for some children. Where this is the case, and where all other extension criteria has been met (criteria 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6), an application can be made for a 3 month extension.

Where the case plan goal is family preservation extensions will only be considered for approval where the below additional requirements are met:

- DCJ and service provider have good reason to believe that a final risk reassessment, within the two-year period, will return a risk outcome that allows

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DCJ to close the case. At this point, the service would have the standard three months to finalise casework with the family.

OR

- the family has recently experienced a crisis and setback, which DCJ (relevant CSC) believes requires a response and can be best addressed by the existing service provider.

## 4.2 Applying for an extension

Service providers notify DCJ of concerns about any delays in casework, or their ability to achieve permanency within the two-year maximum period with as much notice as possible.

The service provider applies for an extension by:

- notifying the Permanency Coordinator and Lead Contract Manager as soon as practicable that permanency is unlikely to be achieved within the two-year maximum period
- completes the [application form](#)<sup>9</sup> and collates supporting information demonstrating all requirements have been met
- submits the application and all supporting evidence to the Permanency Coordinator (copy to the Lead Contract Manager) by email.

As the case plan goal package automatically ceases at the end of the two-year period applications should be made in advance. This is to ensure the case plan goal package is funded correctly and to avoid underpayment (as the package reduces to the long term care funding level)<sup>10</sup>.

Applications will not be considered retrospectively except in very rare extenuating circumstances (such as during COVID-19) where a crisis has occurred delaying achievement of the permanency outcome.

Service providers receive confirmation of the outcome of the application in writing within 15 business days after the confirmation of receipt of application.

An overview of the process is available in the [Flowchart](#).

## 4.3 What is an exceptional circumstance

Only where an extenuating circumstance arises, after significant progress towards permanency has already been made would an application for extension be warranted.

Some examples of these circumstances may include:

- Significant delays occur in accessing services including attending rehabilitation. Despite attempts from DCJ and the service provider (who is not located centrally), permanency could not be achieved within the two year period however has progressed in accordance with the care plan. Restoration remains in the child's best interests and ongoing restoration assessment and family action planning has occurred. The order does not expire for a further 6 months' time. The child since transitioned home and the required risk assessment is occurring.

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<sup>9</sup> Where an application is required to be made in relation to a sibling group a single application form may be submitted.

<sup>10</sup> Any adjustments to service provider payments will be managed through the reconciliation process

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- Cultural identity of the child becomes known after significant progress has been made towards permanency. Significant casework is required to support the child and carer/s, develop and implement cultural support plans, develop cultural connections and then re-assess the carers suitability. Additional funds are required to conduct the necessary updated guardianship/adoption assessments.
  - Separation of carer applicants occur after significant progress has been made towards guardianship/adoption. Casework is needed to put in supports for the child and family, and further assessments are required before seeking a guardianship or adoption order therefore requiring additional permanency funding.
  - A significant event or illness occurs for a member of the carer household after significant progress towards permanency has occurred. This may include the birth of a new sibling, a terminal diagnosis of a foster sibling. These events may cause some placement instability and additional supports are required including an updated assessment where a significant period of time passes before progressing a guardianship/adoption application.
  - Where an adoption matter is contested by the parents/family and ongoing casework has occurred to engage them in the decision making and assessment process. The service provider is required to attend hearings, conduct additional casework or assessment and further evidence is required to achieve the permanency goal.

#### **4.4 Children who transitioned to the packaged care service model on 1 July 2018**

On 1 July 2018, a number of children transitioned to the packaged care service model and an agreed case plan goal package commenced.

Some children, prior to this time, already had an approved goal of restoration, guardianship or adoption and additional time and funding to achieve permanency occurred. This includes funding during the transition period of the PSP PLA from October 2017 to June 2018.

Any application requesting an extension of the case plan goal package will take into consideration the actual date the case plan goal commenced and the total time taken to achieve this; including payments made during the PSP transition period.

#### **4.5 Reviewing an application for extension**

Permanency goal reviews form critical evidence in determining whether the case plan goal package should be extended where permanency is not achieved within the two-year period.

DCJ permanency coordinators:

- acknowledge receipt of the service providers' application within 2 business days
- review the service providers' application and advise the service provider within 5 business days whether there is sufficient evidence to consider the application
- considers the application and evidence submitted by the service provider and makes a recommendation as to whether an extension should be approved (in

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consultation with other DCJ staff if necessary, such as the DCJ adoption caseworker)

- records any recommendation/s on the extension application form
- submits to the CFDU Manager Client Services for endorsement to the Director Community Services/Operations
- communicates the outcome of an approved application to the service provider in writing.

#### 4.6 Outcome of the application for extension

A decision about the extension application is to be made within 15 business days (after confirmation of receipt of application).

##### *Application for extension is approved*

Service providers receive confirmation of the outcome of the application in writing including:

- the period that the extension is approved for
- confirmation that reviews will now occur 3 monthly
- specific requirements as conditions to the extension (if applicable).

##### *Application for extension is declined*

The decisions to approve an extension is delegated to the Executive District Director. However a decision to decline an application can be made by any person in the decision making chain including the Manager Client Services (CFDU, CSC or PSP) or Director Community Services/Operations.

Service providers receive confirmation of the outcome of the application in writing including:

- the reasons why the application was declined
- any changes to the frequency for permanency goal reviews
- recommendations for permanency consultation where the permanency goal may no longer be in the best interests of the child
- any other specific advice or steps to be undertaken as determined by the decision maker.

Service providers can request the opportunity to discuss, in person, the outcome of the application with the relevant DCJ staff. For example, the CFDU Manager Client Services and Permanency Coordinator.

Where emerging practice issues are identified (following multiple applications or multiple declines) the Lead Contract Manager is to be advised. These issues can be discussed at the relevant operations or contract management meeting. Emerging practice and performance issues addressed by Permanency Coordinators and Commissioning and Planning staff in line with their roles and escalated where appropriate

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## 4.7 Requesting a review of the decision to decline to extend the package

Where an application to extend the case plan goal package is declined, service providers may request a review of the outcome in writing to the Executive District Director within 10 working days. An overview of the process is available in the [Flowchart](#).

## 4.8 Monitoring and tracking package extensions

DCJ Permanency Coordinators manually track the approval using the centrally agreed process and submits the approved application to the lead Contract Manager and [permanency support](#) mailbox.

# 5 Contacts and more information

## 5.1 District Permanency Coordinator contact list

District	Email address
Hunter Central Coast	PermanencySupportHunterCentralCoast@facs.nsw.gov.au
New England	NewEnglandPermanencySupportTeam@facs.nsw.gov.au
Illawarra Shoalhaven and Southern NSW	ISSNSWPermanencySupport@facs.nsw.gov.au
Northern NSW and Mid North Coast	PSPNorthernCluster@facs.nsw.gov.au
Murrumbidgee, Far West and Western NSW	permanencysupportmfww@facs.nsw.gov.au
South Western Sydney	SWSPermanencySupport@facs.nsw.gov.au
Western Sydney and Nepean Blue Mountains	WSNBMPermanencySupport@facs.nsw.gov.au
Sydney, South Eastern and Northern Sydney	SSESNSDPermanencyReform@facs.nsw.gov.au

## 5.2 More information or questions

Service providers may seek further information from Permanency Coordinators or their Contract Manager.

Feedback or questions about permanency goal reviews or this process can be directed to [permanency.support@facs.nsw.gov.au](mailto:permanency.support@facs.nsw.gov.au)