

# Monitoring to Renewal Framework

Statutory out-of-home care and adoption

March 2023

## Fact sheet

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# Background to the Monitoring to Renewal Framework

The Children's Guardian accredits designated agencies and adoption service providers and monitors their compliance with accreditation requirements. Our accreditation scheme aims to ensure that children and young people in out-of-home care and adoption arrangements receive appropriate standards of care. These standards of care are set out in the NSW Child Safe Standards for Permanent Care.

Currently, accreditation assessments are point-in-time assessments of an agency's compliance with the standards. We also monitor agencies throughout the period of accreditation to ensure they continue to meet the standards. Where an agency cannot demonstrate that it meets the accreditation criteria, the Children's Guardian may impose conditions or shorten or cancel the agency's accreditation.

This fact sheet provides an overview of a planned new approach to monitoring designated agencies and adoption providers. We propose to take a more risk-based approach that focuses on systems.

## Consultation

In 2021, we consulted with the sector about the Children's Guardian's accreditation and monitoring functions. We heard that:

- point-in-time assessments of compliance with the standards at point of renewal are resource intensive for agencies and do not create an incentive to engage in continuous improvement
- our focus should be on understanding how agencies ensure their practices meet the standards
- the monitoring program should encourage agencies to implement strong systems to support quality assurance and continuous improvement.

In response, we are working to change the way we monitor and accredit agencies. We will be testing the new approach with some agencies in the coming months.

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## The process

The proposed new monitoring framework will collect information about how agencies meet the standards and implement practice improvements. This process will inform how intensive the renewal process needs to be for each agency. Where the monitoring program indicates that an agency has sound systems to manage its own compliance and quality of practice, the agency will not need an accreditation renewal assessment.

The monitoring to renewal framework will not be applied to agencies that are provisionally accredited as they are already engaged in the Direct Evidence Program.

## Agency status update

Every designated agency that holds full accreditation will be required to submit an annual agency status update (ASU) following their last assessment. The update will cover all service types (foster care, relative or kinship care, residential care and adoption)

The ASU includes information from the agency about its circumstances and its systems to support quality of practice. The ASU will form the evidence relied on when the agency applies to renew its accreditation.

We will pilot the ASU with some agencies and will review the tool before we implement it more broadly.

## Monitoring visits

Agencies will receive at least two monitoring visits during their accreditation period.

These monitoring visits will review agencies' systems in practice.

At the end of an agency's accreditation cycle, we will review the information from the annual updates and the two monitoring visits to determine the accreditation renewal pathway.

Some agencies will not need to participate in a renewal assessment and may have their accreditation renewed directly, based on the information gathered in the monitoring program. The purpose of this approach is to increase focus on continuous improvement and streamline compliance.

The proposed new approach recognises that some agencies have well-established systems to support the quality of their practice. This approach also aims to create an incentive for agencies to build strong systems to:

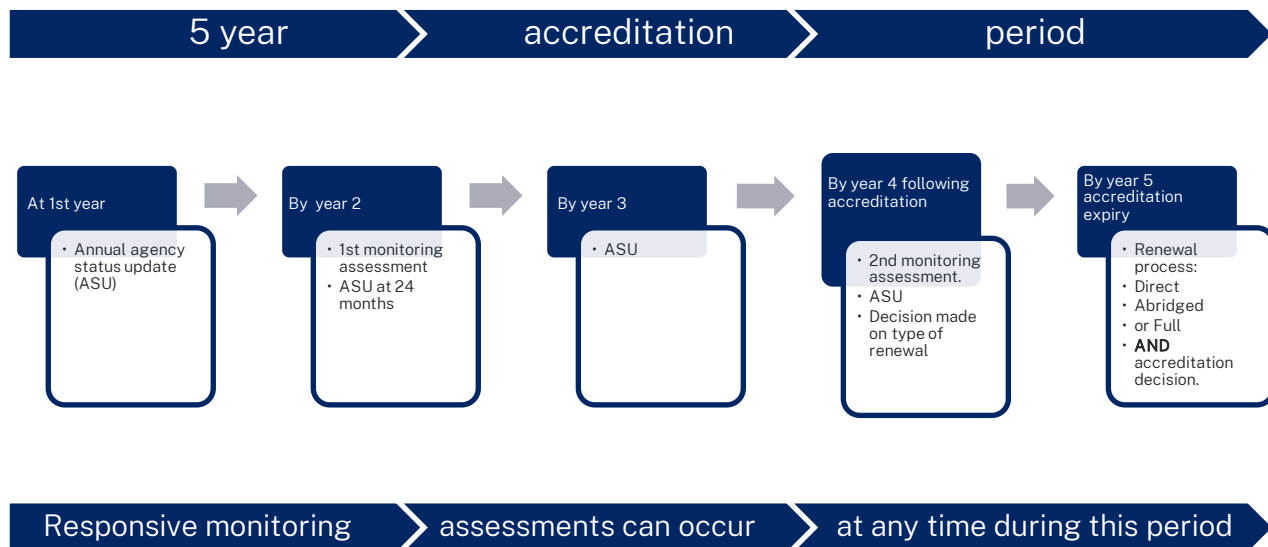
- identify risks to children and young people
- identify and rectify non-compliance with the standards
- implement practice improvements.

## Responsive monitoring

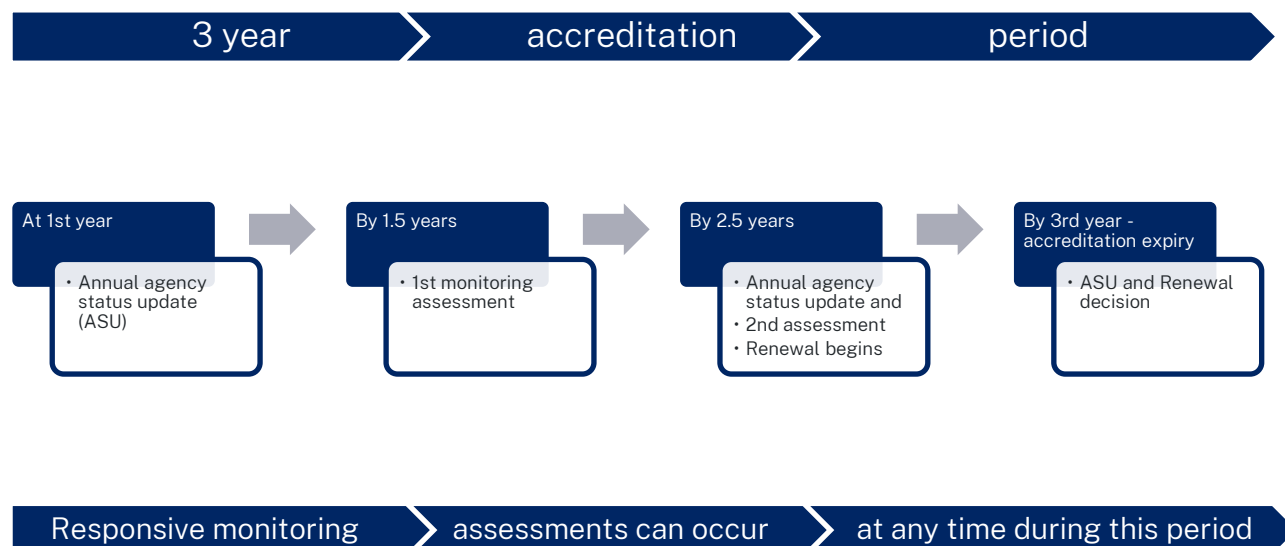
In addition to the annual updates and two onsite monitoring visits we may also conduct responsive monitoring visits at any time. These monitoring visits may happen if we have concerns about an agency's compliance with the standards or where there are conditions on an agency's accreditation that need more regular monitoring.

The flowcharts below set out the proposed process. Flowchart 1 sets out the process for an agency that is accredited for five years and Flowchart 2 sets out the process for an agency that is accredited for three years.

Flowchart 1 sets out the proposed process for an agency that holds full accreditation for 5 years



Flowchart 2 sets out the proposed process for an agency that holds full accreditation for 3 years.



**Note:** The current process will remain in place for all provisional agencies doing the Direct Evidence Program. When these agencies become fully accredited, they will follow the 3-year accreditation period flow chart set out above.

## Making accreditation renewal decisions

Under the proposed new framework, there are now three pathways to accreditation renewal.

### Direct renewal

Direct renewal may be considered where the agency holds full accreditation for five years and has consistently demonstrated that it has effective systems to ensure compliance with the standards. Under direct renewal the agency does not need an onsite assessment of practice. The decision to renew the agency will be based on information gathered in the annual updates and the onsite monitoring visits. Agencies on a direct renewal pathway will not be required to participate in an accreditation renewal assessment.

### Abridged renewal

Abride renewal may be considered where the agency currently holds full accreditation and has had areas for improvement identified throughout the monitoring to renewal program that require changes to systems or practices. The abridged renewal process will include an onsite renewal assessment and will primarily focus on the areas for improvement or changes to systems and practices identified during the monitoring program.

### Full renewal

Full renewal will apply to:

- agencies holding provisional accreditation and applying for full accreditation
- agencies fully accredited that have had ongoing gaps in practice or noncompliance with the standards and have shown little improvement in practice over the monitoring program.

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## How things will change for the sector

The proposed new approach aims to increase focus on continuous improvement. There will be changes to how agencies experience the accreditation and monitoring program.

- We will have more frequent communication with each agency throughout their accreditation period. This communication will generate evidence that the Children's Guardian can consider when making a decision whether to renew the agency's accreditation. For some agencies, they will no longer be required to participate in an onsite accreditation renewal assessment.
- Each agency will receive a tailored monitoring-to-renewal process. The process will consider the capacity of the agency to identify where it is non-compliant with the requirements of the standards and implement practice improvements.
- Agencies that can demonstrate they have strong systems to identify and manage risk and non-compliance with the standards will not be required to participate in an accreditation renewal assessment.
- Each agency will have the opportunity through the annual status update to demonstrate improvement, strengths, and its priorities for the coming year.
- Monitoring visits will focus on areas of practice where there is greatest risk to children and young people. This means that we will not review all areas of practice against the standards every time we visit agencies.
- Our feedback report will contain information from each engagement with an agency throughout the accreditation period. This means that at the end of the accreditation cycle the agency can review all the information we have considered over the accreditation period. It will also provide a record of the agency's capacity to demonstrate compliance with the standards.
- Where significant gaps in practice are identified our assessors will discuss systems with agency staff. This will replace written requests currently used to seek missing casework items from individual files. We will assume that agencies review their own records to ensure that children and young people's records are accurate and up to date.
- The assessment will focus on core practice areas. The information provided in the annual updates is a form of evidence to support an accreditation decision and information the agency provides must be honest and accurate.

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## Monitoring compliance with the standards under the new approach

Monitoring visits to agencies will determine whether systems are in place to meet the standards and whether these systems are consistently implemented. Information will be gathered from a range of sources that demonstrate how the agency meets the standards. This may include:

- information we hold in the Working with Children Check and Reportable Conduct directorates
- matters brought to us by external bodies
- interaction with the agency, discussions about systems and a review of information provided by the agency.

We will ask agencies to explain the systems they have in place to meet the standards and describe how these systems work. During onsite monitoring visits we will test the effectiveness of the systems described.

We will review a sample of files to see whether the system the agency has described can be seen in practice. For example, an agency may describe a system to ensure that caseworkers are on track with meeting tasks and goals set out in children and young people's case plans. Our monitoring

visits will look at a sample of records to determine if this system is working in practice. We will talk with the agency about what we have observed in the records we have reviewed. If there are significant gaps in practice, we may ask the agency if there are other materials we can review to understand the agency's systems. If we have concerns about the safety, welfare or wellbeing of individual children and young people we will alert the agency.

We will no longer provide comprehensive lists of information that may be missing from individual files. We will assume that an agency has its own systems to audit its records to ensure that files are accurate and up to date.

However, where we review a sample of records and information appears to be consistently missing from children and young people or carer records, we will discuss this with the agency while we are onsite.

## Following an onsite visit

After reviewing the agency's evidence of systems in practice we will provide feedback about whether:

- there is a system, and it is implemented the majority of the time
- there is a system, it is not consistently implemented and is identified as requiring improvement
- a system could not be identified, or the systems are poorly implemented.

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## Next steps

We will pilot the agency status update with some agencies in the coming months before rolling it out more broadly. We will update agencies on this work as it progresses.