



Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care

MEDIA RELEASE

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SNAICC calls for new program to support early childhood outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

SNAICC, the national peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and family services, will urge the Australian Government to support Aboriginal early childhood education services — which face an uncertain future despite their crucial role in closing the gap on Indigenous disadvantage.

In meetings with Government ministers this week, SNAICC will discuss options for a new program it has developed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood services. The SNAICC proposal does not require significant new funding and will allow services to build on their proven success of improving educational outcomes for Australia's most vulnerable children.

Members of SNAICC's National Executive, including Chairperson Sharron Williams, are meeting with Indigenous Affairs Minister Nigel Scullion, Assistant Minister for Education Sussan Ley, as well as Opposition spokesman Shayne Neumann and other MPs in Canberra.

Foremost on the agenda is the future of the Budget Based Funding (BBF) program — which funds the majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood services and is currently being reviewed — and the 38 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres (ACFCs), whose funding ends in June 2014.

SNAICC's proposal for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood services is based on consultations with these services and a new research paper it commissioned from Professor Deb Brennan, a highly-respected voice in the early childhood sector.

"The BBFs and ACFCs are bedrock services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families around Australia. They deliver services in flexible, locally determined ways that community needs and build on community strengths," Professor Brennan wrote.

"As a result of the goodwill and trust built up by these services and their staff, sometimes over many decades, they have tremendous potential to help 'close the gap' for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children."

However, Professor Brennan found a low participation rate by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in the mainstream child care and early childhood

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education system. Barriers included a lack of places, cost, quality, hours of opening, location and lack of responsiveness to the needs of Indigenous children and families.

Professor Brennan concluded: “This is a real opportunity we can’t miss: the building blocks are all in place: high level policy, a strong and growing evidence base about what works and a core group of services that have close and trusting relationships with their communities...What is needed now is to join the dots by bringing policy and evidence into alignment with program objectives and establishing secure funding arrangements to deliver long-term benefits in a cost effective way.”

SNAICC’s proposal looks to do just this: secure appropriate and sustainable levels of funding for evidence based Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services for the next 10 years, and calls for the creation of 40 new community-controlled services across Australia every three years.

“The future of these services is in peril,” SNAICC Chairperson Sharron Williams said. “What is more, there remain vast areas of the country with high populations of our children and no service support. This is simply not acceptable.

“What we are asking for is simply to rework current allocations to provide the same funding levels to the most disadvantaged children as are provided to other children in Australia.

“At the moment, that is clearly not happening, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children continue to suffer a lack of access to quality services as a result.

“There is ample evidence that our services are doing a great job in improving educational, health and wellbeing outcomes for children and meeting the needs of children, families and communities in an affordable and integrated way.”

SNAICC has received 1200 postcards from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities expressing support for its proposal — the postcards will be sent to Prime Minister Abbott. The proposal also has the backing of major agencies such as ACOSS, Early Childhood Australia, UNICEF and the Human Rights Law Centre.

See [SNAICC’s proposal](#) and [Professor Brennan’s paper](#) on the SNAICC website.

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