



Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care

The national peak body for Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander children and families
www.snaicc.org.au

MEDIA RELEASE

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Statement by SNAICC Chairperson, Sharron Williams

Since the National Apology, the number of Indigenous children in care has increased by 65 per cent. When will governments start listening?

The latest report on child protection has delivered another chilling picture on the disproportionate number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care — and the urgent need for new approaches to improve the protection and wellbeing of our children.

The *Report on Government Services* (ROGS) released this week by the Productivity Commission reveals that 14,991 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were in out-of-home care on 30 June 2014 — accounting for almost 35 per cent of all children in care. This is despite the fact that our children comprise only 4.4 per cent of the nation's child population.

It's safe to assume that today, seven months on from the June 2014 figures, well over 15,000 of our children are living in protective care. The bewildering reality is that since Prime Minister Rudd's apology to the Stolen Generations in 2008, the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children placed in out-of-home care has increased by 65 per cent.*

This is beyond a crisis, it is a national disgrace. If non-Aboriginal children were being removed from their families at a similar rate, there would be calls for an immediate national inquiry.

The rate at which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families are coming into contact with the child protection system is spiralling upwards at an alarming rate.

The Productivity Commission's recent *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage* report noted that the rate of Indigenous children on care and protection orders has increased by over 400 per cent in a decade.

SNAICC again calls on state governments to place a greater focus on early intervention and family support programs, to strengthen the capacity of vulnerable families to keep children safe and stay together.

We need to recognise and build on the strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait families and communities to support and nurture their children.

The latest ROGS reveals that last financial year state-territory governments spent \$3.3 billion on child protection and out-of-home care services — a figure that has increased by \$543.4 million since 2010 — and \$300.8 million on intensive family support services.

This imbalance must be redressed, so that governments invest much more in proven intensive family support services, integrated early childhood education and care services, healing and cultural programs, and supporting communities to protect and care for children.

SNAICC's current national campaign to reduce the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in care has highlighted the enormous stress under which child protection systems are operating in the states and territories, and the feelings of powerlessness and distrust of the systems by Indigenous families and communities.

Our national campaign is delivering compelling evidence that fostering greater inclusion and involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in child protection decision-making, as well as improving cultural competence across child protection systems, will lead to better outcomes for children.

Many practical alternatives are emerging to improve child protection processes and safeguard the best interests of our vulnerable children. It is now time for governments to start listening to our families and communities to stem the tide of child removals.

Ultimately, addressing the underlying disadvantage in Aboriginal communities — such as lack of adequate housing, financial security and education — is at the core of improving the lives of our children and families.

Governments must empower our communities and organisations to help reduce the levels of family violence, drug and alcohol misuse and mental illness, caused by disadvantage and poverty, that are contributing to child abuse and neglect.

None of this will come as news to governments — but when will they start listening to us?

* Percentage is based on June 2008 figure (9,070 children) from Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and June 2014 figure (14,991 children) from 2015 Report on Government Services

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