



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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Report takes first step towards long-term change for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families

SNAICC applauds the Productivity Commission's final Report into Childcare and Early Childhood Learning for identifying the need for a long-term community-focused program to support the provision of diverse, culturally-appropriate services for children that are at a higher risk of being developmentally vulnerable.

The report proposes a new Community Early Learning Program (CELP) to replace the current funding program for Indigenous services. The Productivity Commission also correctly recognises that this program should extend beyond rural and remote communities to include urban and inner city areas where Indigenous families are unable to access early childhood education and care services that will meet their needs.

Importantly, the Productivity Commission has recognised the huge gap in service participation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and the need to cater for at least 15,000 additional places to achieve parity for Indigenous children.

It has recommended that the CELP expands over time with considerable investment in start-up costs for new services. This should be the starting point for considering funding allocation needed for a successful CELP.

The proposed CELP holds significant promise to see more and more of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the most difficult situations growing up confident, healthy, excelling in school and realising their dreams, on par with other children across the country.

However, SNAICC is deeply concerned that the recommended requirement for services to transition to child-based funding could see the CELP become a vehicle for transitioning services to a mainstream funding model. A mainstream model simply will not work. As reinforced by many experts, a user pays model is not a feasible or appropriate model through which to provide culturally-strong early childhood education and care programs for families and communities experiencing entrenched disadvantage.

Inter-generational poverty, trauma and disempowerment are long-term issues that require long-term responses.

A short-term transition of Indigenous services to mainstream funding would fundamentally fail our children and families: reducing their participation in early years services and reversing improvements in education outcomes, as well as impacting adversely on parental workforce participation.

Conflicting statements in the report, that recommend both ongoing support for the CELP and a transition to mainstream funding, suggest that the Productivity Commission was also not at ease with this approach.

There is a major need for a separate, long-term block-funded program to enable access to culturally-appropriate early childhood services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in many communities experiencing disadvantage across Australia. This must be the core premise on which the proposed Community Early Learning Program is based.

SNAICC is also concerned that the proposed imposition of a parental co-payment may result in decreased access for many vulnerable children and families.

While we do agree that co-payments can be a valuable way to enable families to feel they are contributing to their child's early childhood education — and many of our services already do charge a co-payment — SNAICC also recommends that the requirement for and amount of any co-payment be worked out with each service on an individual basis.

SNAICC commends the Productivity Commission for its strong support of integrated services, which aim to deliver a “whole of family” approach including early education and care, health and parent support programs.

However, if the enormous value of integrated service delivery is to be realised, governments must take responsibility to fund a streamlined model. All governments and departments need to collaborate to fund integrated services rather than leaving early years services with the heavy burden of searching for funding to provide additional supports to families.

SNAICC also commends the report for its strong recommendation to expand the role of Indigenous Professional Support Units to provide capacity building and inclusion support to strengthen CELP services.

The report provides a strong starting point for consideration. SNAICC hopes to work closely with the Australian Government to develop a sustainable long-term funding program for Indigenous community-controlled early years services — services that are best placed to improve the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

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