



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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SNAICC concerned new childcare package is unfair and punishes our most vulnerable children

SNAICC Chairperson, Sharron Williams, says the childcare package released in the federal budget, “punishes those children who need support most.”

Ms Williams welcomed the vital investment in early childhood education and care, but believes the benefits are unfairly distributed: “The Treasurer says it is a fair budget, a budget for all Australians. Well again it seems that Indigenous children are not Australians, that they just don’t matter.

This package excludes vulnerable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children by mainstreaming Indigenous services and cutting child care access for struggling families.

These children are the ones that stand to gain the most from early childhood service supports. Unless we invest in their education, intergenerational cycles of disadvantage will continue.”

The activity test in the package limits access to any childcare subsidy to 12 hours per week where both parents don’t meet work, training or study requirements or 0 hours where one parent doesn’t work sufficient hours.

“We know that the reasons many of our families aren’t working are linked to intergenerational poverty, disadvantage and disempowerment. Excluding these families from childcare will only compound these issues and do little to get Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families into work. It will undermine efforts to prepare children for school.

The decision to make all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander childcare services operate on mainstream funding from July 2017 will also reverse improvements in access to early learning services for our most vulnerable children.”

The Budget Based Funded (BBF) early years program, consisting of 303 services across Australia, approximately 80% of which are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander focused, will be abolished under the new measures. Many BBF services have been providing community-controlled early childhood programs for over 30 years.

From 1 July 2017 these services will have to operate on the mainstream, fee-based, Childcare Subsidy. Ms Williams said, “This funding model will not work for our communities. It will drive up fees making childcare completely unaffordable. Budget projections for the Aboriginal Child and Family Centres are telling: they would have deficits of, on average, \$500,000 per year operating solely on mainstream subsidies.



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A market based model means that these services won't be able to target the most vulnerable community members. In some communities, where there are few employment opportunities and effectively no market, I believe – and Government reports have stated - vital childcare services will be forced to close."

Ms Williams noted positively the Government commitment of \$304m to a Community Child Care Fund that our services could apply to for funds to improve service access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families: "This is a promising initiative, but is slated to reach 4,000 services, meaning an average of only \$76,000 per service through a competitive tender process.

The recent Indigenous Advancement Strategy grant round showed that competitive tender processes are not the right mechanism to support capacity development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and services.

Our services need support to grow and develop – they won't survive pitted against large mainstream providers. Who will be looking out for our culturally strong, community-run services when there is no longer a dedicated government program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children?"

Ms Williams welcomed \$10m per year in funding for integration of child care, maternal and child health and family support services in Indigenous communities: "This is just the kind of initiative that is needed, but \$10m out of an approximate \$7.6 billion childcare budget is entirely tokenistic and will barely begin to implement the early childhood reforms proposed by the Forrest review."

The Productivity Commission recommended investing \$200 million in the Community Early Learning Program to support:

- evidence-based services in Indigenous communities where children have a high probability of being developmentally vulnerable
- a coordinating role for effective integrated service delivery and
- 20 new services annually to start to redress a 15,000 place gap.

"We call on the Government to revisit this proposal. Work with us to build an early years service system that works for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

If we're serious about closing the gap in outcomes for our children, the conversation we need to have is: What are we doing for our most vulnerable families?

The Productivity Commission identified in its early childhood review a 15,000 place gap just to bring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families on par with the childcare access that other Australian families enjoy. Where are the measures to address this massive gap? Can we stand by as a nation and watch another generation of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children be left behind?"

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