



## Secretariat National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care

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### COAG ANNOUNCES NEW NATIONAL CLOSING THE GAP TARGET FOR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER ACCESS TO EARLY EDUCATION

**Sydney, Australia:** One of the key outcomes of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG)<sup>1</sup> meeting in Sydney last week is a new Closing the Gap target for access to early childhood education. SNAICC, Australia's national peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Families, welcomes a renewed national focus on access to vital early years services, but remains concerned that effort to close the gap in access to quality early years services may be undermined by recent funding changes to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled early childhood services.

In 2008, COAG recognised the importance of early childhood education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children by creating a Closing the Gap target to ensure, by 2013, 100% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander four-year-olds in remote communities had access to early childhood services. Despite this target, by 2013 only 85% of four-year-olds in remote communities were enrolled. Furthermore, only 73.9% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander four and five-year-olds, nationally, were enrolled in preschool in the year before full-time schooling, compared to nearly 91% of non-Indigenous children. The enrolment rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children falls as low as 66.7% in major cities.<sup>2</sup>

In response to these unmet needs, COAG has agreed to prioritise and accelerate efforts in this area by setting a new early childhood education Closing the Gap target of 95% enrolment for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander four-year-olds by 2025, extending beyond the expired 2013 target.

While SNAICC warmly welcomes a renewed focus on access to vital early education services, these efforts may be undermined by changes to parenting payments and service funding introduced in the 2015 Federal Budget. SNAICC also believes that any new target must be underpinned by efforts that focus not only on enrolment, but

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<sup>1</sup> The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) is the peak intergovernmental forum in Australia. COAG exists to promote policy reforms that are of national significance, or require co-ordinated action by all Australian governments.

<sup>2</sup> Productivity Commission (2014) *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage 2014: COAG Targets & Headline Indicators* pp. 4.19-4.21.



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on effective engagement, quality of services, and ensuring an adequate amount of early learning support for each child.

Early childhood and school education are both critical to opening future economic and social opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. The most recent [Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage](#) report, released by the Productivity Commission in late 2014, notes that high-quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) services not only enhance child development, but provide vital supports for families.

Currently, just 2.9% of children participating in Commonwealth funded early childhood education and care programs are Indigenous, while Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children make up 5.5% of the population.

Furthermore, there are just over 300 early years services targeted to provide holistic support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, falling far short of service needs, with the Productivity Commission estimating a gap of 15,000 places and a funding shortfall that is obstructing access for those most in need.<sup>3</sup> Child care reforms before Federal Parliament are proposing to end the Government program that supports these services, while at the same time halving early learning access for the most vulnerable families where parents do not meet work and study requirements. SNAICC firmly believes these initiatives punish children, and further obstruct – rather than encourage – the efforts of parents to enter the workforce. They threaten to undermine the new COAG target from the outset.

To view the full meeting communiqué please visit:

<https://www.coag.gov.au/node/529>

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For more information please visit <http://www.snaicc.org.au> or contact:

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***About SNAICC:***

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<sup>3</sup> For further information, go to: <http://www.snaicc.org.au/news-events/fx-articles.cfm?loadref=168&id=783>



## **Secretariat National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care**

SNAICC is the national non-government peak body in Australia representing the interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

Founded in 1981, SNAICC was established to engage in activities that promote and accommodate a strong voice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families.

Over the past 30 years SNAICC's efforts have resulted in many key milestones and achievements both in policy developments at state, territory and federal levels and in developing innovative and useful resources for the sector.

SNAICC is governed by an influential National Executive made up of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled children and families' services.