



Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

**29 February 2012**

### **Victoria can lead the way for vulnerable children**

SNAICC strongly urges the Victorian Premier Ted Baillieu to implement the recommendations arising out of the Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry.

"The inquiry's report has found that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are being badly let down by an ineffective child protection system in Victoria. Our children and families deserve much better," SNAICC Chairperson Dawn Wallam said.

"The five recommendations relating specifically to vulnerable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have the potential to make a real difference in reducing the number of children at risk and in ensuring a connection to family, community and culture for children who are placed into care.

"SNAICC is particularly encouraged by the principle underpinning the recommendations, which is to place more control in the hands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Victorians in finding solutions.

"Greater self-determination for our people is a fundamental human right and is at the core of addressing the many complex and intergenerational factors of disadvantage that are placing our children at risk.

"The Victorian Premier has the opportunity to show the way for other states and territories — if he has the will and the vision to implement the inquiry's recommendations."

Ms Wallam said a key recommendation was transferring guardianship of Aboriginal children removed from their families to Aboriginal community-controlled organisations (ACCOs) under a comprehensive 10-year plan.

"The inquiry's report paints a grim picture of continuing poor outcomes for Aboriginal children, who have unacceptably high rates of contact with the child protection system and, if placed in care, a precarious chance of remaining connected with their families and culture," Ms Wallam said.

"The report notes that Aboriginal children are 11 times more likely to be in out-of-home care than other children; only half of carers of Aboriginal children have

The national peak body for Aboriginal and  
Torres Strait Islander children and families

support to ensure that the children stay in contact with family and culture; and only 59 per cent of children are placed in out-of-home care in accordance with the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle.

“If implemented, the 10-year plan would provide a sustainable funding model, transfer existing out-of-home care placements statewide from mainstream agencies to ACCOs, and provide incentive for innovative partnerships between ACCOs and mainstream agencies.

“Crucially, the plan would build the capacity of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, including training for staff, to deliver effective and culturally appropriate services to our children and families.”

The SNAICC Chairperson also welcomed another key recommendation: the establishment of a state Commissioner or Deputy Commissioner focused on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children’s issues.

“SNAICC has advocated strongly on the need for a **national Deputy Commissioner** as an independent authority dedicated to protecting and promoting the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people,” Ms Wallam said.

She said the report highlighted the need for increased cultural competence in government departments, child protection services and mainstream service delivery agencies; and greater engagement of Aboriginal people in the creation and delivery of services and programs.

“To greatly reduce the number of Aboriginal children coming into contact with the child protection system, the underlying factors of disadvantage need to be tackled in a more systematic way and with a significant and focused investment.

“But the key for government, child protection services and service-delivery agencies will be to include and engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the whole cycle of creating and delivering those services and programs and monitoring their effectiveness.”

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