



Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care

MEDIA RELEASE

31 August 2012

Inclusive approach the way forward on serious child protection issues

On the eve of National Child Protection Week, SNAICC Chairperson Dawn Wallam has urged governments to make the welfare of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children an urgent priority — with the active involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities.

Ms Wallam said the Second Action Plan 2012-15 of the national framework to protect Australian children, recently released by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), presented a crucial opportunity to build on the momentum of major reforms on child protection systems at the state-territory level.

“We have a blueprint from COAG which has placed at its centre improving the wellbeing and protection of our children— with an inclusive philosophy to finding solutions. We should not waste this important chance,” Ms Wallam said.

“Clearly current approaches have not worked, as the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children coming into contact with child protection systems in the states and territories continues to grow at an alarming rate.

“The financial cost of these continued failures is considerable. But the human cost to the individual children, their families and communities is incalculable — and it will impact on generations to come.”

Figures from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) show that in 2010-11, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were:

- 5.1 times more likely to be subject of a notification
- 7.6 times more likely to be substantiated for abuse or neglect
- 9.5 times more likely to be subject to a care and protection order, and
- 10.1 times more likely to be in out-of-home care.

AIHW figures also reveal that almost one-third of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care were not placed with kin, other Indigenous carers or in Indigenous residential care.

The figure raises serious questions about the application of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle in the various state-territory jurisdictions.

Ms Wallam said SNAICC would be advising the Australian Government and state – territory governments that addressing the underlying causes that lead to child abuse and neglect was at the core of improving the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

SNAICC: The national peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

“Our children and families continue to experience systemic discrimination and disadvantage in health, education and housing. They go without basic services and facilities that other Australians take for granted,” Ms Wallam said.

“Any long-term and sustainable solutions to our children’s welfare must be based on ensuring the basic needs of our children and families are met. This will require long-term planning and commitment from governments and support across all political parties.”

“And, as SNAICC has said many times, closing the gap measures must have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities front and square in the design and delivery of programs.”

In seeking solutions, Ms Wallam said SNAICC would also emphasise:

- the importance of early intervention — the need to improve access to Indigenous community-based early childhood, child care, family support and child welfare programs
- the need to maintain Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children’s rights to remain connected with their extended family, community and cultural heritage
- the need to recognise and build on the strengths of Indigenous families and communities to support and nurture their children
- the key role of partnerships between government and non-government organisations and between Indigenous and mainstream agencies to enable effective delivery of services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

Ms Wallam said it was important to support and build on the successes of intensive family support services, integrated early childhood services, the increased focus on healing and reviving cultural identity and pride, and increased community action to protect and care for children.

“We can also learn from some of the innovative programs arising from the major reforms to child protection systems in the states and territories. For example, NSW has begun the transition of all Aboriginal children in out-of-home care to Aboriginal agencies and is trialling intensive early intervention programs for vulnerable children,” Ms Wallam said.

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