



Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care

MEDIA RELEASE

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Statement by SNAICC Deputy Chairperson, Geraldine Atkinson

Governments must support our organisations to help 'close the gap'

On the fifth anniversary of the National Apology to the Stolen Generations, SNAICC calls on governments to guarantee funding and other support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services to help close the gap on Indigenous disadvantage.

Five years ago Kevin Rudd acknowledged and said sorry for past wrongs. The historic apology was crucial on a human and symbolic level. But Mr Rudd also made a number of practical commitments to close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians on life expectancy, educational achievement and employment opportunities.

In moving forward, Mr Rudd spoke of building a bridge between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians and using a new approach to finding solutions to reduce disadvantage based on equal partnership with our people.

SNAICC welcomes the progress made on some of the commitments, as detailed by Prime Minister Gillard in the latest Closing the Gap report — notably in child mortality rates and the Government being on track to achieve its target of 95 per cent of Indigenous four-year-olds in remote communities having access to early childhood education by 2013.

SNAICC calls for a public commitment from Ms Gillard to provide adequate levels of funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled services — which have played a central role in improving access to early childhood education.

Despite this pivotal role, many of our services across Australia — including Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services (MACS), long day care and mobiles services, and the 38 new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and family centres — face a precarious funding future, some immediately and others, such as the children and family centres, beyond June 2014.

Echoing Mr Rudd's apology, Prime Minister Gillard spoke of the shared endeavour, partnership and involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in 'closing the gap'.

It is critical that our early childhood services are recognised and supported to meet the needs of families and communities in raising healthy children who are proud of their identity and ready for the transition to school. To give our children the best chance to lead happy and productive lives.

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

Enrolment is just the first step to access to early childhood education. We need to ensure that the barriers to attendance and engagement by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are removed so that we can measure real outcomes.

Evidence shows community-controlled centres overcome many of the barriers to real access and engagement for our children. Investment in these centres will bring many benefits to our children, families and communities — and confer benefits across a range of areas.

These benefits include improving workforce development outcomes, local empowerment, local leadership, good governance and economic development.

We commend the Australian Government on its continuing commitment, energy and the considerable resources it has invested in measures to improve the quality of life of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander citizens.

To build on the recent successes, and to avoid the policy failures of the past, our families and organisations must be actively engaged in how those resources are invested.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation is also critical in finding solutions to keep our children safe from neglect and abuse.

The sad irony today is that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children continue to be removed from their families at devastatingly high — and increasing — numbers. Our children account for one third of all children in out-of-home care across Australia.

Our families and organisations must be empowered — by state and territory governments — to have a more active role in providing solutions and in assuming responsibility for delivering services to children in out-of-home care. Genuine partnership models are making a difference: they need to be enabled and required across the country.

The alternative is to risk another Stolen Generation — and another apology down the track.

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