



Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care

MEDIA RELEASE

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SNAICC conference to explore critical issues for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in Australia

SNAICC's Fifth National Conference, to be held in Cairns from 4 to 6 June, is a crucial opportunity to re-affirm the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families and build on the successes of recent years, according to SNAICC Chairperson Sharron Williams.

The three-day conference will bring together over 1100 delegates from Australia and overseas, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders, practitioners, policy makers, researchers and government representatives.

It is considered the biggest forum of its type in the southern hemisphere.

"The conference will bring together people that have diverse roles but are united in caring for the rights and welfare of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families," Ms Williams said.

"It will give delegates a priceless opportunity to share information, celebrate the successes, inspire action and consider ways of improving policies and programs that support our children and families.

"There is so much happening out there across the country! This is the time to gather to learn from each other and recognise the amazing work that communities are driving to support the wellbeing of our children and families.

"Past SNAICC conferences also have been influential in shaping or changing government policies and attitudes. We expect this conference to have a similar impact."

A major issue for discussion in Cairns will be the dramatically high number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care in Australia —at 30 June 2012, they comprised over one-third of all children in protective care.

SNAICC will engage with delegates about a national campaign to reduce the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children coming into contact with the child protection system .

The campaign will be led by SNAICC in close collaboration with partners, including the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation, the NSW peak body AbSec and the Queensland peak body QATSICPP.

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

The current uncertainty over the funding future and sustainability of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled services for children and families will also be a major conference topic.

The conference will be officially opened by the National Commissioner for Children, Megan Mitchell, who will be joined in Cairns by a number of her state-territory counterparts.

Among the keynote speakers will be Kathi Gotha, an Aboriginal education expert from Arnhem Land and Professor Judy Atkinson, who is recognised widely for her work on the impacts of trauma and the power of healing in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

The SNAICC conference will once again feature prominent international experts, including Ms Marta Mauras Perez (Chile), Professor Cindy Kiro (New Zealand) and Associate Professor Cindy Blackstock (Canada).

Ms Mauras Perez is the Vice President of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and was Special Rapporteur for Australia from 2009 to 2013.

Marta Mauras Perez will use her visit as a guest of SNAICC to discuss issues raised in the CRC's 2012 report on Australia, which was highly critical of Australia's efforts to protect the human rights of disadvantaged children, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

In particular, the report found continuing "serious and widespread discrimination" against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in accessing basic services and their significant over-representation in the criminal justice system and in out-of-home care.

The report also provided a comprehensive set of recommendations to the Australian Government.

SNAICC would like to acknowledge the major conference supporters: the Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs; the NSW Department of Family and Community Services; the SA Department for Education and Child Development; and the Queensland Government.

**Media inquiries: Frank Hytten, SNAICC CEO, on (0432) 345 652;
Emma Sydenham, SNAICC Deputy CEO, (0415) 188990
Giuseppe Stramandinoli, SNAICC Media Officer,
(0419) 508 125**