



Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care

MEDIA RELEASE

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How do we remove the harm and not the children? Child protection issues a major focus at SNAICC National Conference

How do we reduce the dramatically high and increasing number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-home-home care in Australia?

And how do we ensure that the right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-home-care to remain connected to their family, their community and their culture is respected?

The complex issues around these questions will be a major focus of discussions at SNAICC's Fifth National Conference in Cairns from 4 to 6 June.

According to the latest figures, more than one third of the 39,600 children in out-of-home care are Aboriginal and-or Torres Strait Islander — although they comprise only 4.6 per cent of the national child population — and they are eight times more likely to be the subject of substantiated child abuse and neglect.

"It is a totally unacceptable situation — far too many of our children are being separated from their family at a great human cost to those children and families," SNAICC Chairperson Sharron Williams said.

"Clearly we need to find different solutions. There must be a greater focus on early intervention and prevention, and on boosting healing and family support services.

"We need to remove the harm and not the children."

Ms Williams said there had been a lot of recent media coverage on adoption as a possible solution, but SNAICC believes this to be a short-sighted option that does not come to grips with the factors that lead to child abuse and neglect.

Ms Williams said sustainable improvements in child protection would not happen until the underlying causes of over-representation — including intergenerational trauma, discrimination and disadvantage — were redressed.

She said a key to improvements was greater Aboriginal participation in decisions affecting children and families and that the conference would highlight some positive recent developments in this area.

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

“For example, in NSW the process is well under way to transfer out-of-care services from government agencies to Aboriginal community-controlled organisations by 2020,” Ms Williams said.

“And in Victoria, guardianship of Aboriginal children will soon transfer from the state Department of Human Services to the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency.

“This greater control by Aboriginal agencies in ‘looking after their own’ can only mean good news for Indigenous children in NSW and Victoria. They are encouraging developments that will be of great interest to conference delegates from other states and territories.

“However, it’s essential that services are adequately resourced to provide integrated and intensive family support as and when a family needs it. Money spent now in prevention, will be returned a hundred fold in savings through the child’s life cycle.”

Ms Williams said the conference would also analyse issues around the fact that once in care, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are losing connection with family, community and culture. This is despite authorities in all jurisdictions having to comply with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle.

SNAICC will use the conference to consult with delegates from the child protection sector and develop strategies for a national campaign that aims to halve the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care by 2018.

The campaign will be undertaken by SNAICC in partnership with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation, the NSW peak body AbSec, the Queensland peak body QATSICPP, Families Australia, and the Australian Council of Social Service.

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