



Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care

MEDIA RELEASE

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Statement by SNAICC Chairperson, Sharron Williams

Budget cuts will hurt Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families

Cuts announced in the Federal Budget on Tuesday will place even more pressure on some of the most disadvantaged citizens in Australia — Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families — and reduce their access to some crucial services.

SNAICC believes the cuts to Indigenous early childhood education and care, health and legal services seriously compromise the Abbott Government's Closing the Gap efforts and will inflict even more stress on our families and communities.

SNAICC is extremely disappointed that the Australian Government will not fund the 38 Aboriginal Children and Family Centres beyond June 2014. The Government's decision to turn its back on these critically important services means their funding and future is now in the hands of state and territory governments — many of whom say they cannot feasibly fund them over the long-term. This is a serious setback for our children, families and communities.

These new centres were created under a COAG national partnership agreement to provide integrated education, family support, child care and health services in 38 disadvantaged localities across the country to children and families in desperate need. After a \$296m investment in their establishment, some centres are only just opening their doors, and now only two state governments have indicated an intention to support their future operation.

The Australian Government has also announced a \$3.7m cut to the Budget Based Funding program, under which the vast majority of Indigenous community-controlled early childhood services are funded. The cuts will affect staff who are working with the most disadvantaged, high-needs children — often in rural or remote areas where finding experienced staff is a constant challenge.

Other cuts announced in education will have a major impact on our children and families and compromise education outcomes under Closing the Gap. These cuts include:

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

- \$450m from Outside School Hours care, which provide vital services and are often the only programs available for children after school and during holidays
- axing the Universal Access to Preschool (\$500m per annum), which will disadvantage Indigenous children in the critical year before formal schooling starts, and
- \$14.7m from Early Learning Projects — this will mean community-driven programs such as *iti ninti tjuta* in the APY Lands will no longer be funded despite showing positive results.

SNAICC is concerned that the \$549m the Government has identified in savings in Indigenous Affairs over the next four years — which it says is the result of rationalising programs — will also lead to a reduction of programs and services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander citizens.

As Reconciliation Australia has pointed out, Indigenous Affairs Minister Nigel Scullion has announced a \$4.8 billion investment but provided no detail about where this funding is directed, and very little information about how the radical proposal to replace 150 Indigenous programs with five streamlined programs will be implemented.

SNAICC is disappointed that the Abbott Government has carried through with its plan to no longer fund the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples, a democratically elected agency that is in the best position to represent the diverse needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and play a pivotal linking role between governments and our communities.

We are also concerned that the Budget has cut \$15m from National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS), a decision that will have a major impact on efforts to reduce the dramatically high number of our people in jail.

Budget measures aimed at the wider community, such as changes to family tax benefits, unemployment benefits for young people, the fuel levy and the \$7 GP co-payment will also inflict considerable pain on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

For example, the fuel levy will make the cost of fuel and other items, such as food, even more exorbitant in remote communities; while the reduction in unemployment benefits for young people will be severely felt in our communities, where youth unemployment is extremely high.

While the Abbott Government warned that Indigenous Australians would not be quarantined from cuts, SNAICC is alarmed that the measures will inflict a disproportionate amount of stress on already vulnerable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

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