



## Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care

The national peak body for Aboriginal and  
Torres Strait Islander children and families  
[www.snaicc.org.au](http://www.snaicc.org.au)

### **MEDIA RELEASE**

**19 August 2014**

#### **Adelaide forum to look at continuing crisis of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children being removed from their families**

A forum in Adelaide on 27 August will bring together Aboriginal community representatives and key players in South Australia's child welfare sector to look at local solutions to address the soaring number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care in the state.

SNAICC Chairperson Sharron Williams — who is also CEO of Aboriginal Family Support Services in South Australia — said the Adelaide forum would look at the factors that contribute to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in South Australia representing 30 per cent of all children in out-of-home care, while comprising only 3.5 per cent of the state's child population.

"The number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care has grown at an alarming rate in the past decade across Australia, and South Australia is no exception. In South Australia in June 2013, there were 788 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care — a figure that has tripled since 2003," Ms Williams said.

"Across Australia in the past decade a distinct pattern has emerged: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families have experienced a disproportionate and growing contact with the child protection system, including notifications and substantiations of child abuse and neglect, and children being removed from their families.

"This is an alarming and totally unacceptable situation. We need to take urgent action and consider different approaches — based on greater Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation — to arrest this worrying escalation in numbers and ensure the best outcomes for our children and families.

"Like other jurisdictions, South Australia has had major inquiries into the child protection system in the past decade — but little follow-up action on the recommendations.

"We are still burdened with a system that is not meeting the needs of our vulnerable children and families, is not doing enough to keep families together, nor enough to keep children in care connected with their family and culture," Ms Williams said.

"The child protection system is expensive, under great stress and geared too heavily towards supporting children and families once the damage is done. We need to rethink the whole approach, so that we provide more support to strengthen the capacity of families to care safely for children.

“At present, governments across Australia are spending huge sums on child protection and out-of-home care — these totalled \$3.2 billion in 2013 — and about a fifth of that amount on prevention and early intervention programs and intensive family support services. If governments redress this funding imbalance, it will lead to better outcomes in child protection and savings in other areas.

“And if children need to be removed from their families, more needs to be done to ensure they retain their connection to family and culture and are re-united with their family as soon as possible.

This must be a priority if we are to provide a better platform for vulnerable children to grow strong and realise their full potential.”

The Adelaide forum will explore local community-driven solutions and ways in which Aboriginal families and organisations can be empowered to improve the safety and wellbeing of children and have a greater say in decision-making at all stages of the child protection process.

A major topic for discussion will be the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (ATSICPP), which is embedded in South Australia’s *Children’s Protection Act (1993)*. The principle features in policy or legislation in all jurisdictions across the country, but in South Australia does not include any provision for the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in child protection processes — a core aim of the ATSICPP since its inception in the 1980s.

In South Australia, the principle is applied narrowly and specifies the involvement of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander agency in placement decisions and judicial decision-making.

Speakers at the Adelaide forum include **Sonia Waters**, Director of Aboriginal Services, Anglicare SA; **Ian Hunter**, SA Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation; **Professor Fiona Arney**, Chairperson of the Council for the Care of Children; **Pam Simmons**, Guardian for Children and Young People; **Simon Schrapel**, Chief Executive, Uniting Communities, and **Professor Robyn Layton**, School of Law, University of South Australia.

The forum, to be held at The Hotel Grand Chancellor, is part of a national initiative, titled *Family Matters — Kids Safe in Culture, Not in Care*, being undertaken by SNAICC in partnership with several other major child welfare agencies. Forum partners are Aboriginal Family Support Services, the South Australian Council of Social Service, Uniting Communities, and Child and Family Welfare Association.

SNAICC and partner agencies will also hold a community meeting at Port Augusta to consult on out-of-home care issues in the Port Augusta region and other regional and remote areas of South Australia. The meeting will be held at the Indigenous Coordination Centre (34 Stirling Road, Port Augusta) on Friday, 29 August.

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