



## 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

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### **Adelaide forum identifies strategies to stem the soaring number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care**

A forum in Adelaide on 27 August attended by 170 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members, practitioners, service providers and researchers in the child welfare sector has identified a number of initiatives to improve South Australia's child protection system and stem the flow of Indigenous children being removed from their families.

The forum was told that in South Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children make up 3.5 per cent of the child population yet comprise 30 per cent of all children in out-of-home care. The number of Indigenous children in care in SA has tripled in the past decade, from 236 in 2003 to 788 in June 2013.

This disproportionate rate is reflected across the nation, with almost 14,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care — representing a staggering 34 per cent of all children in care.

Participants at the Adelaide forum called for an overhaul of the child protection system in South Australia — which is still operating on principles from the 1960s — including a shift in focus from tertiary services to prevention and early intervention services to strengthen the capacity of vulnerable families to keep children safe.

According to participants, this new prevention focus would not necessarily require extra government investment, more a major re-alignment of existing funding. Other measures suggested by participants included:

- the use of family conferencing as soon as possible once a risk or possible risk to children has been identified, to bring service providers and family groups together to discuss issues and make informed decisions
- the need for cultural competence education for social worker students at university so that they gain an understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, including traditional child rearing practices, and an understanding of the impacts of intergenerational trauma on children and families, including past policies of forcible removal
- a simplified system for family members to gain information from government agencies, as well as the creation of an independent tribunal to review child protection decisions and complaints
- more recognition and support for informal kinship care arrangements and the adoption in South Australia of the highly-acclaimed Winangay assessment tool for carers in use in NSW, and more stringent requirements on non-Aboriginal carers to ensure children remain connected with their birth families and culture, and
- the need for alternative and Aboriginal community-controlled residential care models — for example, boarding schools such as the highly successful Worawa College at Healesville, Victoria.

The Adelaide forum is part of a series of state-territory meetings under the *Family Matters — Kids in Culture, Not in Care* national initiative being driven by SNAICC in partnership with other major child welfare agencies to reduce the alarmingly high rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care. Forum partners in South Australia are Aboriginal Family Support Services, the

South Australian Council of Social Service, Uniting Communities, and Child and Family Welfare Association.

A community meeting under the Family Matters initiative will be held today at Port Augusta 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.

A report on measures and recommendations arising out of the Adelaide and Port Augusta meetings will be available soon from SNAICC. More information on the Family Matters initiative is available at [www.snaicc.org.au](http://www.snaicc.org.au)

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