

Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care

Our Future Generations: National Indigenous Child Welfare and Development Seminar . 22-24 July 2003, Melbourne

Summary Recommendations

These recommendations require action from the Australian Government, State and Territory Governments, SNAICC, ATSIC and other organisations at the national level. SNAICC has developed these summary recommendations to bring together the many different but related recommendations developed through the 60 workshops conducted at the seminar. Please note the full set of recommendations follow.

SNAICC is seeking to have these summary recommendations placed on the agenda for discussion and response by the Community Services Ministers Conference. The full set of recommendations will also be provided to all relevant, State, Territory and Commonwealth Ministers for their advice and action.

❖ Greater Support for Prevention and Early Intervention Services for Children and Families

A strong feeling of the Seminar was that governments should work to prevent child abuse and neglect by supporting a range of prevention and early intervention initiatives. There is enormous scope to protect and improve the health, happiness and prospects of Indigenous children through family support programs and initiatives that reduce stress, isolation, substance abuse, illness and disabilities and build physical and mental health, self esteem and parenting skills. Some of the priorities identified by the Seminar are listed below.

- Men's and women's groups should be supported within all Indigenous communities and provided with long term funding support
- Facilitated playgroups should be established and funded to provide friendships, support and information for parents and carers.
- Greater efforts are needed to increase preschool attendance by Indigenous children.
- Indigenous children's services should have a broad family support role and be funded to deliver parenting and other family support programs
- The importance of the prenatal period generally and the issue of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome specifically should be promoted within the Indigenous community and information on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome distributed to all hospitals, health workers and child care services working with Indigenous children across the country – including small, rural and remote communities.
- More education in sexual health, protective behaviours, life choices, rights, self esteem and parenting should be provided for Indigenous young people, including those in remote communities.

❖ **Establishing an Indigenous Children's Services National Workforce Development Strategy**

A National Workforce Development Strategy (NWDS) for Indigenous children's services should be developed. The NWDS should identify and respond to the workforce needs of Indigenous child and family welfare and early learning and care services. The NWDS should include the following elements:

- tri-lateral approach between the Australian and state and territory governments and non-government sector, (SNAICC).
- Carriage should rest with the National Community Services and Health Industry Training Board
- Development of nationally recognised Indigenous early learning and care qualification (Level 4 and above)
- nationally recognised entry level training for the Indigenous child welfare field
- training delivery strategies that address the need for:
 - replacement staff costs,
 - on-the-job and distance education modes; and
 - Recognition of Prior Learning that is appropriate to the life experiences of Indigenous people.

❖ **Establishing a National Indigenous Child Welfare and Development Council**

Establishment of a joint policy council between SNAICC, ATSIC, the Australian government and State and Territory governments to take carriage of long term reforms to Indigenous child welfare policy and responding to the developmental needs of Indigenous children. The Council should:

- be supported by and report to the Council of Australian Governments, COAG
- pursue recommendations from the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission for national Indigenous child welfare standards and legislation
- monitor implementation of the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle nation-wide
- oversee the development of models for child protection in rural and remote Indigenous communities
- research and develop well-being outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in care including in the areas of resilience, cultural identity and spirituality
- pursue child protection reforms which can effectively respond to the disproportionately high levels of child neglect linked to family poverty within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
- develop a nationally co-ordinated approach to the expansion of early learning and care services, programs and support to meet the needs of the increasing population of Indigenous children

❖ **Foster Care/Kinship Care Reforms**

Governments should, through the National Plan for Foster Care implement the following reforms in relation to foster care for Indigenous children:

- kinship carers (ie grandparents and other extended family members) to be provide with financial and other support, including respite care.
- financial and other types of support for carers should be adequate and equal and based on the findings and recommendations of The Costs of Caring.
- foster carers and kinship carers should be provided with accredited training and ongoing resources and support.

- recognise the role of Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Agencies (AICCA's)
- establish a national recruitment strategy for Indigenous foster carers
- assessment and training for Indigenous foster carers to be managed by Indigenous agencies in accordance with agreed standards

❖ **Development of National Quality Standards and Accreditation for Indigenous child care provision.**

Establishment of a partnership process between SNAICC, FaCS and the National Child Care Accreditation Council to develop national quality standards and an accreditation system for Indigenous child care provision. This partnership process should aim to:

- engage the existing different service providers to Indigenous families
- reflect the cultural base and focus on supporting child development with the Indigenous child care sector
- develop a set of quality standards and accreditation process which builds on the existing strengths of services
- provide for flexibility through transferable quality standards which are applicable across all the existing segmented service types ie long day care, occasional care, OSHC, family day care

❖ **Development of a National Indigenous Family Violence and Child Abuse Healing Strategy**

As a partnership between SNAICC, ATSIC and the Australian Government a national healing and education strategy, adequately funded and supported by Government, should be put in place that addresses and provides:

- healing for victims and perpetrators of family violence and child abuse,
- education for victims and perpetrators,
- education in protective behaviours for very young children to lessen the chance of them becoming victims,
- training to empower community leaders who are trusted and respected in their own communities to help with healing and education
- programs addressing familial sexual abuse with elements to address the needs of the victim, the other children in the family, the non-abusive parent and the abusing parent.

❖ **Reforms to State and Territory based child protection systems**

The seminar developed a range of recommendations which relate to the current child protection systems of each State and Territory. The following should be pursued as a matter of priority within each jurisdiction and through the Community Services Ministers Conference.

- SNAICC, ATSIC and governments to develop a culturally appropriate risk assessment framework for child protection systems in each state/territory which reflect local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child rearing and cultural practices and the prevailing poor socio-economic circumstances of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.
- State and territory governments to ensure that birth records are able to record the name of the community that an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child comes from and that this information is accessible if and when alternative care is being planned

- Arrangements for the application of permanency planning to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to be reviewed and the appropriateness of permanency planning negotiated with SNAICC and local AICCA agencies
- Establishment of joint government / non-government advisory bodies within each State and Territory jurisdiction, (with equal Indigenous representation), to drive child protection reforms
- Staff within the government and non-government sectors with a role in child protection to be provided with systematic education and awareness of the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle and training in its proper implementation
- The National Plan for Foster Care and foster care related recommendations from Our Future Generations to be pursued as a matter of priority

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Full Recommendations:

Recommendations for the Australian Government or State and Territory Governments - Indigenous Childcare and Early Childhood Development

- C1 Supported" (facilitated) playgroups should be promoted as promising "community development" tools for engaging families, with a focus on early child development as well as parenting, and for social support.
- C2 Increased attendance at preschools should be an important goal for Indigenous services and parents, in terms of preparing children for their entry into school.
- C3 More opportunities should be provided for parents / carers to be involved in Indigenous children's services and programs and services should focus more broadly on families needs.
- C4 Programs that empower, support and educate Indigenous women must increase as they are the first and most important persons in the development of their children, who can guide their development at a young age.
- C5 More funding should go to the Indigenous early childhood services which have the existing infrastructure and could be utilised to deliver parenting and other family support programs to allow these services to develop new programs.
- D1 The Department of Family and Community Services should set up and fund an appropriate working party, which includes SNAICC, to develop appropriate process to develop standards for Indigenous child care services, including innovative services, playgroups and MACS, and commit to extending Quality Assurance to these services once suitable standards have been developed.
- D2 To facilitate use of the mainstream QIAC system pending the development of a system for Indigenous services, the Commonwealth Government should fund the development of resource books for MACS centres and other Indigenous child care services similar to those developed by Minbani Family Centre in the Northern Territory, with the mainstream QIAC questions written in culturally appropriate language.
- E1 We need to develop a national training strategy for the Indigenous childcare field with SNAICC and the National Industry Training Advisory Board leading the process.
- E2 A nationally recognised Indigenous early learning and care qualification (Level 4 and above) should be established with SNAICC and the national Industry Training Advisory Board leading the process.

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Recommendations for the Australian Government or State and Territory Governments - Indigenous Childcare and Early Childhood Development (cont.)

- E3 Training strategies must recognise the need for:
- replacement staff costs,
 - on-the-job and distance education modes; and
 - Recognition of Prior Learning that is appropriate to the life experience of Indigenous people.
- E4 Staff undergoing training to upgrade skills should have ongoing support from the training provider. Dollars to be made available for this to happen.
- E5 Rates of pay for childcare workers under relevant awards should be increased.
- E6 A cadetship should be developed to cover the Associate Diploma in Childcare course.
- E7 Additional funds should be provided for existing Indigenous children's services staff capable of and willing to undergo the RPL process.
- E8 Additional dollars should be provided to employ staff to develop childcare resources pertaining to NSW.
- L1 Information about the RAATSIC model for training of child care workers in remote communities should be shared with other communities – by providing adequate funding for TAFE to support this model of training in other remote areas who choose to access it.
- L2 Cape York communities and RAATSIC should be congratulated for the programs they have developed.
- L4 Funding for Indigenous childcare in rural and remote communities needs to continue.
- L5 In addition, the State and Commonwealth departments must work together to develop a capital works program for Indigenous childcare centres in remote communities to provide funding to address occupational health and safety and licensing requirements and maintain and improve existing buildings. An inventory of buildings and facilities must be developed and an appropriate time-line created for minor and major works to be completed.
- N1 Indigenous children's services resource agencies in each state and territory should be funded at a level at least equal to resource agencies for all types of mainstream children's services.

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Recommendations for the Australian Government or State and Territory Governments - Indigenous Childcare and Early Childhood Development (cont.)

- N4 An opportunity should be provided for remote Indigenous children's services to meet annually to discuss issues.
- P5 Training should be provided for child care staff working with children displaying behaviour as a result of sexual abuse.
- W1 The importance of the prenatal period generally and the issue of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome specifically should be promoted within the Indigenous community.
- W2 A plan should be developed to distribute information on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome to hospitals, health workers and child care services working with Indigenous children across the country – including small, rural and remote communities.
- W3 More funding should be provided to improve preventative health care for Indigenous children.

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Recommendations for the Australian Government or State and Territory Governments -Indigenous Child and Family Welfare

- A1 Governments should raise the focus on kinship carers (ie grandparents and other extended family members) and provide them with financial and other support, including respite care.
- A2 Governments should focus more on prevention of child abuse and neglect, particularly in Queensland and the Northern Territory.
- A3 An Aboriginal worker from an Aboriginal controlled organisation should be involved with every Aboriginal child from the point of notification through the life of the case in child protection as recently implemented through the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency /Department of Human Services protocol in Victoria.
- A8 Funding should be provided to support families to keep their children to prevent the need for out-of-home care.
- A9 All Aboriginal foster carers and kinship carers should be provided with accredited training and ongoing resources and support.
- B1 Men's issues, need to be included in the development of Indigenous family support, parenting and preservation programs. Men's groups should be funded as well as women's groups.
- F1 A National Data Base for all Indigenous children in out-of-home care placements, including kinship care placements, should be developed.
- F2 The Aboriginal Child Placement Principle should be implemented nationally through national framework legislation overseen by a National Indigenous Child Welfare and Development Council.
- F3 Full financial and other support should be provided for kinship care/extended family care – with training available when appropriate.
- F4 COAG should embrace the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's recommendation for national Aboriginal child welfare legislation and SNAICC's recommendation for a National Indigenous Child Welfare and Development Council
- F5 Financial support to 'extended families' who support children should be provided on time all the time.
- F6 Financial and other types of support for carers should be adequate and equal and based on the findings and recommendations of *The Costs of Caring*.

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Recommendations for the Australian Government or State and Territory Governments -Indigenous Child and Family Welfare (cont.)

- F7 A National Framework and Standards for high quality foster care across Australia is supported.
- F8 The National Plan for Foster Children and Carers should recognise:
- the role of Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Agencies (AICCAs)
 - the importance of kinship care
 - the role of grand-parents.
- F9 A national recruitment strategy for Indigenous foster carers should be developed as part of the National Plan for Foster Care.
- F10 Assessment and training for Indigenous foster carers should be managed by Indigenous agencies in accordance with agreed standards.
- G1 A National Workforce Development Strategy (NWDS) for Indigenous children's services should be developed with a curriculum that includes Recognition of Prior Learning and Life Skills.
- G2 National Indigenous Children's Welfare Standards should be developed.
- G3 The National Workforce Development Strategy should identify and respond to the workforce needs of Indigenous child and family welfare and early learning and care services. A tri-lateral approach between the Australian and state and territory governments and non-government sector should underpin the development of a National Workforce Development Strategy as is the case in Indigenous health.
- I1 Separating Aboriginal children from their families must stop now. Policies must change immediately to ensure that children remain with family and support services are provided to the family, enabling the whole family to benefit from the support and services.
- I2 Link-up and mental health counseling need to be brought together. The National Sorry Day Committee is working with OATSI and the Minister to try to get this happening.
- I3 An independent authority should be established to monitor the implementation of *Bringing Them Home*.
- I4 Providing a national apology and developing a compensation program for Stolen Generations members should be high priorities for the Australian Government.

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Recommendations for the Australian Government or State and Territory Governments -Indigenous Child and Family Welfare (cont.)

- K1 SNAICC, ATSIC and governments need to assess the limitations and effectiveness of child protection policies and systems in rural and remote communities.
- K2 Models of child protection which don't involve child removal need to be explored for remote communities.
- K3 Child welfare systems need to focus more effectively on child neglect and poverty.
- M2 Active men's and women's groups should be part of every community's plans to deal with violence and abuse.
- M4 Programs that concentrate on individual healing should be supported.
- M6 Men's groups should be supported within all Indigenous communities and provided with long term funding support.
- O1 A National Indigenous Child Welfare and Development Council should be established to develop and run a committee to monitor implementation of the Aboriginal Child Protection Principle nation-wide.
- O2 In all states, an Indigenous agency should be funded to support implementation of the Principle, as VACCA is in Victoria, where VACCA workers attend all notifications.
- O4 AICCAs should be provided with funding for legal advice or legal staff that can assist in their court advocacy activities and advocacy for foster carers.
- O5 There is a need for SNAICC, ATSIC and governments to develop a culturally appropriate risk assessment framework for child protection.
- P3 A Healing and Education Strategy, adequately funded and supported (but not controlled) by Government, should be put in place that addresses:
- healing for victims and perpetrators,
 - education for victims and perpetrators,
 - education in protective behaviours for very young children to lessen the chance of them becoming victims,
 - training to empower community leaders who are trusted and respected in their own communities to help with healing and education.

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- P6 Accredited training should be implemented at a national level within all Aboriginal Child Care Agencies to begin training Aboriginal carers to gain appropriate skills to support children placed in their care.
- P8 In order to better engage Indigenous families to work with counselors who have the skills to deal with domestic violence and child abuse, agencies should use the NPY Women's Council model where a position is filled by the most qualified person available and funds are provided to also employ an Indigenous person in the same position to work alongside and be trained by the qualified worker.
- P9 Programs addressing familial sexual abuse need to provide for the needs of the victim, the other children in the family, the non-abusive parent and the abusing parent.
- P10 More education in life skills should be provided for boys and girls in communities – this would involve consultation with all community members, including children, about what should be taught, who should teach it and where it should be taught. Life skills might include sexual health, protective behaviours, life choices, rights, self esteem and parenting.
- Q2 The Australian and state and territory governments should fund a project with SNAICC to investigate the appropriateness of LAC for Indigenous children.
- S1 Governments should allow individual community controlled Indigenous child welfare agencies to determine their own priorities and the types of services they provide to their communities.
- S2 Commonwealth funding should ideally focus on family support and early intervention.
- S3 The *Bringing Them Home* report also reported on issues of contemporary removal and made recommendations in relation to the role and licensing of agencies, National Standards legislation for the care and protection of children and respective roles of Indigenous agencies and State authorities in relation to child welfare. These recommendations should be implemented.
- S4 The Commonwealth should secure increased investments from the States and Territories for existing and new AICCAs before moving to re-direct its funding of AICCAs into early intervention.
- S5 The Commonwealth review of the AICCA program should be conducted in an open and transparent manner involving SNAICC's input into the Terms of Reference, close consultation with all stakeholders, participation of consumers (carers and families), and on a state by state basis.

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**Recommendations for the Australian Government or State and Territory
Governments -Indigenous Child and Family Welfare (cont.)**

- V1 All relative and kinship carers should receive financial and non-financial support (as stranger foster carers do).
- V2 We should continue to strive to look at and research well-being outcomes, including in the areas of resilience and spirituality, for all Indigenous children in care.
- V3 State and territory governments should ensure that birth records are able to record the name of the community that children come from
- V4 Child Protection councils in every state should include Commissioner for Children (Indigenous Children)
- X1 Culturally appropriate service delivery should be expanded through the development of an Indigenous employment strategy in courts with family law jurisdiction. This would include the retention and expansion of the Indigenous Consultant positions in the Family Court.
- X2 The experience of the Family Court in developing appropriate services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities should provide a model for other service providers in the system.

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**Recommendations for the Australian Government or State and Territory
Governments - General**

- B2 Government agencies need to acknowledge the importance of active partnership arrangements with Indigenous service providers that are inclusive in nature and that identify a common purpose, rather than Governments deciding funding priorities in isolation.
- B3 Government agencies need to acknowledge the importance of developing a range of culturally appropriate reporting approaches within individual communities which allow them to report on their work in creative ways.
- H3 Governments should be transparent about if and when they fund mainstream agencies to deliver programs with specific Indigenous targets or outcomes.
- M1 Strategies need to be developed to support Indigenous women as leaders. Often Indigenous women take the lead in communities but they are not part of existing political structures. This needs to change.
- M7 Aboriginal support services across the board should be given more support and support needs should be tailored to the needs of remote communities.
- M8 Government programs should be provided where they are needed, including in rural and remote areas.
- O3 Gazetted and appropriate local Aboriginal organisations need to be appropriately funded so that they are well recognised and able to develop strong affiliations within communities.

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Recommendations for ATSIC - Indigenous Childcare and Early Childhood Development

- C4 Programs that empower, support and educate Indigenous women must increase as they are the first and most important persons in the development of their children, who can guide their development at a young age.
- W1 The importance of the prenatal period generally and the issue of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome specifically should be promoted within the Indigenous community.

Recommendations for ATSIC -Indigenous Child and Family Welfare

- H1 SNAICC and ATSIC should facilitate discussions with Non-Government organisations on their appropriate roles and functions in the delivery of Indigenous child welfare programs and services.
- K1 SNAICC, ATSIC and governments need to assess the limitations and effectiveness of child protection policies and systems in rural and remote communities.
- M3 ATSIC Regional Councils need to negotiate and consult more closely with AICCAs, Aboriginal Legal Services, Aboriginal Medical Services and other organisations that are working around family violence to develop strategies that are going to start to address concerns about the level of family violence.
- O5 There is a need for SNAICC, ATSIC and governments to develop a culturally appropriate risk assessment framework for child protection.
- P1 ATSIC Commissioners should move the motion at the next ATSIC Board meeting that funding be found to allow SNAICC to conduct a National Anti Child Sexual Abuse campaign to be implemented forthwith.
- P4 SNAICC or ATSIC should organise another National Family Violence Conference to assist community members in further raising the awareness of family violence issues – to keep the momentum going.

Recommendations for ATSIC -General

- P2 A national partnership committee should be established to address all issues that affect Aboriginal Communities. The Committee should comprise of the CEO and Chairperson of NACCHO, SNAICC, NAILS, ATSIC and NAJAC. The Committee should meet on a regular basis and provide advice to Ministers at local, state and national levels.

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Recommendations for SNAICC - Indigenous Childcare and Early Childhood Development

- D3 SNAICC should take on a leadership role in co-ordinating the development of a national Indigenous child care accreditation pathway.
- E1 We need to develop a national training strategy for the Indigenous childcare field with SNAICC and the National Industry Training Advisory Board leading the process.
- E2 A nationally recognised Indigenous early learning and care qualification (Level 4 and above) should be established with SNAICC and the national Industry Training Advisory Board leading the process.
- L3 Indigenous childcare services should inform SNAICC of any issues that arise so that the issues can be addressed and solutions sought.
- N2 SNAICC should provide representation for remote services at state, territory and national level and provide ways for remote Indigenous children's services to put their views forward.
- N3 SNAICC should develop a register of all metro, regional, rural and remote Indigenous children's services throughout Australia.
- N5 SNAICC should develop a mailing list of Indigenous child care services.
- N6 SNAICC should develop a register should be developed of Indigenous publications and appropriate publishers for Indigenous early childhood resource material.
- N7 SNAICC should develop a data base of resources held by Indigenous children's services should be developed to enable sharing of resources and prevent duplication of resource development.
- W1 The importance of the prenatal period generally and the issue of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome specifically should be promoted within the Indigenous community.

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Recommendations for SNAICC -Indigenous Child and Family Welfare

- A4 SNAICC should explore the appropriateness of the Aboriginal Family Decision Making meeting having the authority to make decisions, rather than simply recommendations, regarding the children the meeting has been about.
- A6 SNAICC should develop a policy on the permanent placement of Aboriginal children as soon as possible. The policy should be consistent with the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle and presented to the Community Services Ministers Conference.
- A7 SNAICC should develop a national definition of out-of-home care with proper consideration of the role of kinship carers within Indigenous communities.
- H1 SNAICC and ATSIC should facilitate discussions with Non-Government organisations on their appropriate roles and functions in the delivery of Indigenous child welfare programs and services.
- K1 SNAICC, ATSIC and governments need to assess the limitations and effectiveness of child protection policies and systems in rural and remote communities.
- M5 SNAICC and relevant bodies should organise and run a National Family Violence Conference.
- O5 There is a need for SNAICC, ATSIC and governments to develop a culturally appropriate risk assessment framework for child protection.
- P4 SNAICC or ATSIC should organise another National Family Violence Conference to assist community members in further raising the awareness of family violence issues – to keep the momentum going.
- P7 SNAICC should lobby for Government child welfare agencies to review staff selection, training and appraisals to ensure that staff have appropriate cultural sensitivity and values when working with Indigenous families.
- P11 SNAICC and ATSIC should support a National Working with Children Check for staff in government and non-government organisations working with children.
- Q1 The Child and Family Welfare Association of Australia and SNAICC should review the appropriateness of the LAC system for use with Indigenous communities in each state and territory.

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Recommendations for SNAICC -General

- B4 SNAICC should investigate and develop a range of innovative reporting approaches for governments to consider.
- H2 SNAICC should negotiate with mainstream agencies to secure their commitment to supporting the development of the Indigenous service sector and Indigenous self-determination.
- H4 SNAICC and its members need to assist mainstream agencies to work appropriately with Indigenous families and children.

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Recommendations for Mainstream Non-Government Agencies

- A3 An Aboriginal worker from an Aboriginal controlled organisation should be involved with every Aboriginal child from the point of notification through the life of the case in child protection as recently implemented through the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency/Department of Human Services protocol in Victoria.
- A8 Funding should be provided to support families to keep their children to prevent the need for out-of-home care.
- Q1 The Child and Family Welfare Association of Australia and SNAICC should review the appropriateness of the LAC system for use with Indigenous communities in each state and territory.