



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

MEDIA RELEASE

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Statement by SNAICC Chairperson, Sharron Williams

Latest OID report delivers a call to the Australian Government for greater leadership on crucial Indigenous issues

The latest Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage report has again delivered a frustrating mixed bag of results — and a powerful argument for greater Australian Government leadership on a number of issues, including child protection, justice and early childhood funding.

As with previous OID reports and the Prime Minister's annual Closing the Gap progress statements, there are some positive outcomes (on child mortality and life expectancy), a disappointing lack of improvement in other areas (reading, writing and numeracy; family violence) and some alarming findings (incarceration rates and contact with the child protection system).

SNAICC calls on the Australian Government to create a Closing the Gap target on child protection to reduce the alarming and disproportionate contact of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families with the child protection system.

The OID report reveals that the rate of Indigenous children on care and protection orders has increased by over 440 per cent from 2004 to 2013, while the non-Indigenous rate has remained constant.

And today, there are over 14,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care in Australia — or a staggering 34 per cent of all children in care despite representing only 4.4% of Australia's child population.

The enormous human and financial costs of child removal — to the children, their families and their communities and the wider society — will impact on the generations to come.

The devastating impact of the high number of children being removed from their families is compounded in our communities by the high incarceration rates of Indigenous men, women and youth.

The 2014 OID report contains more compelling evidence for the Australian Government to create specific justice targets under Closing the Gap to address the soaring number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the criminal and juvenile justice systems.

As the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS) has pointed out, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people comprise only 2.3 per cent of the adult population, but make up over 27 per cent of the adult prison population.

NATSILS has previously noted that addressing incarceration rates is as critical a part of the equation as progress in education, health and housing to close the gap on Indigenous disadvantage.

Urgent action is needed by governments — at the federal and state-territory levels — to deliver early intervention and prevention programs to strengthen the capacity of vulnerable families to stay together and reduce their contact with punitive child protection, criminal and juvenile justice systems.

One striking and disappointing feature of the 2014 OID report is the lack of data on numerous important indicators such as school attendance and school engagement and unclear results on early childhood education.

As SNAICC has asserted before, greater investment by governments in early childhood development is the platform for sustained improvements in other Closing the Gap targets, including school attendance, reading, writing and numeracy, employment, health and life expectancy.

Governments must support and increase the number of Indigenous community-controlled early years services to give every Indigenous child every chance of success at school and beyond.

Despite years of under-funding, the services — numbering around 200 across Australia — are nurturing children and getting them school-ready, providing accessible, affordable and integrated support to families, creating employment and building the capacity of their communities.

Greater Indigenous community control and greater participation in decision making in child welfare and early childhood development and other Closing the Gap targets are the key to delivering fewer mixed results and more positive outcomes in future progress reports.

**Media inquiries: Frank Hytten, SNAICC CEO, on (0432) 345 652;
John Burton, SNAICC Policy Manager (0401) 878 063
Giuseppe Stramandinoli, SNAICC Media Officer, (0419) 508 125**