



SNAICC – MEDIA RELEASE

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2004 Federal Election

- Specific Election Commitments Needed for Indigenous Children -

In the lead up to the 2004 Federal Election all parties have been asked to demonstrate their commitment to turning things around for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across Australia by supporting Indigenous families with children.

Muriel Cadd, Chairperson of the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) said: “all sides of politics have started to recognise that a child’s early experiences in life have a profound impact on their future life chances and have indicated that early childhood programs are an important priority. Ms Cadd said, “ The current Minister for Children and Youth, Larry Anthony MP, had succeeded in putting childcare and early childhood on the national agenda but Indigenous families still had the worst access to these important services.”

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are: 3 times less likely to have access to an early childhood or childcare service but are nearly 7 times more likely to be removed from their families for child protection or poverty related reasons and are twice as likely to leave school early.

She added, “ Parties must respond to the poverty, ill health, violence and trauma that is blighting the lives of so many Indigenous children, damaging their growth and development and destroying their chance for a good education and a happy childhood.”

Ms Cadd said, “ With both the ALP and Coalition agreeing to abolish ATSIC it was time to hear in detail how they will ensure mainstream agencies deliver a better outcome for our children. We have made it clear to the parties the priorities for children they need to address.” She said, “ these include a national apology for past stolen generations policies, support for families affected by family violence and child abuse, child protection reforms including national standards for children in out-of- home care and a major expansion early childhood and Indigenous child care services.”

SNAICC’s policy priorities paper is available at <http://www.snaicc.asn.au/news/index.html>.

(More over.....)

Specific budget initiatives SNAICC is looking to see included in the election policies of all parties include the need for:

- Expanded **Indigenous family support and parenting programs** to provide assistance and support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families where early intervention is likely to minimise the occurrence of child abuse or neglect and prevent family breakdown or poor developmental outcomes in children;
- A **National Strategy to combat Child Neglect and Child Abuse** including national standards legislation for child protection, a focus on child poverty and improved support for foster carers, kinship carers and grandparents raising their grandchildren.
- A **National Indigenous Child Care Strategy** including additional childcare services to improve access to Commonwealth funded child care for Indigenous families and assist families to meet the developmental needs of their young children;
- An **Indigenous family healing and family well being program** to assist Indigenous families affected by family violence, child abuse and child removal practices in previous generations to restore their health, emotional well being and family functioning;
- **Facilitated playgroups for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children** to build supportive networks and interactions between Indigenous families with young children and provide a mechanism to link families to parenting support and a range of children's services;
- An **Indigenous Children's Services National Workforce Development Strategy** to overcome shortages of trained Indigenous childcare and early childhood workers and address the workforce needs of Indigenous child and family welfare and early learning and care services,
- A **National Indigenous Child Welfare and Development Council** to bring together all levels of government and the non-government sector to plan and implement reforms relating to indigenous child and family welfare policy, and
- Retaining support previously provided through ATSIC for the important **National Cultural Events** including NAIDOC week and National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day, NAICD.

SNAICC will be assessing the merit of all election policies as they are released against these priorities and will be available for comment throughout the election campaign

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