

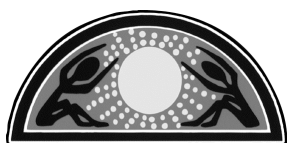


Research priorities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people

Discussion Paper – April 2012

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A strong voice for our children and families

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SNAICC is the national non-government peak body
that advocates on behalf of Aboriginal and Torres
Strait Islander children and families.

This paper briefly introduces key research priorities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to inform planning for the next three year action plan for the *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020 (National Framework)*. The paper draws on recent literature and significant government policies and systems reviews. In particular, this includes the *National Research Agenda for Protecting Children (2011) (National Research Agenda)*, which was developed as a priority action under the *National Framework*.

1. Priority for research targeted towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people

The *National Research Agenda* identifies the need for targeted research for specific populations, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, because of 'their specific cultural, developmental or care and protection needs.'¹ The significant and continuing over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the child protection and juvenile justice systems in particular informs the high priority of targeted research for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.² Persistence of poverty, exclusion and separation from culture in the historical context of colonisation calls for refined research and creative strategies to shift prevailing standards.

There are significant cultural differences in child-rearing practices, alongside distinct historical and social impacts on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parenting, including the impact of the Stolen Generations.³ These differences require the identification and development of targeted approaches to child and family support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, recognising that mainstream approaches are frequently not the most appropriate or effective.⁴

Approaches to research also require targeted and appropriate methodology in research of and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Action research processes that include a significant element of stakeholder participation in the design, conducting of and response to research processes have been identified as a culturally respectful way for researchers to work alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in responding to the issues they experience.⁵ Strategies for including the voices of children are a further important priority in the design of research processes for children and young people.⁶

2. Priority thematic research gaps and priorities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

This section outlines some key thematic areas in which research gaps and priorities are commonly identified. Research on strategies that respond to broader issues of poverty and

¹ Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (2011) *National Research Agenda for Protecting Children 2011-2014*, 3.

² Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (2011) *National Research Agenda for Protecting Children 2011-2014*, 6; Bromfield, L. and Osborne, A. (2007) *Getting the big picture: A synopsis and critique of Australian out-of-home care research*, Australian Institute of Family Studies; *Report of the Victoria's Vulnerable Children*, 308; Commonwealth Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Key Indicators 2011 Report*, 4.130.

³ SNAICC (2004) *Indigenous Parenting Project*.

⁴ SNAICC (2004) *Indigenous Parenting Project*.

⁵ SNAICC (2010) *Working and Walking Together*, 131-134.

⁶ Bromfield, L. and Osborne, A. (2007) *Getting the big picture: A synopsis and critique of Australian out-of-home care research*, Australian Institute of Family Studies, 19.

social disadvantage, including poor housing and homelessness in particular, must complement these specific areas in order to address the causes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander over-representation in the child protection system.⁷

2.1 Development and care of children and young people

- Cultural child-rearing practices that contribute to protecting children and young people, including strategies to support, promote and strengthen them.⁸
- Service and program responses to key health issues for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, including: foetal alcohol syndrome, antenatal care, dental care in young children, nutrition for babies and young children, and Otitis Media.⁹
- Factors affecting access and engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families with mainstream and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood education and care services.¹⁰
- Impacts of positive and strong cultural identity on development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.¹¹
- Strategies to encourage nurturing roles in families and communities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men.¹²

2.2 Preventing and responding to child abuse and neglect

- 'Identifying culturally appropriate responses to abuse and neglect of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children is a vital area of inquiry.'¹³
- Approaches to and impacts of integrated and holistic service delivery for preventing and responding to child abuse and neglect.
- Assessing current levels of cultural competence of services and how this impacts on outcomes for children and families.¹⁴
- The impacts of culturally appropriate responses to social risk factors for child abuse and neglect, including: child safety impacts of problem gambling;¹⁵ strategies for reducing alcohol related harm through community alcohol management plans;¹⁶ and development of community based and owned family violence intervention and treatment approaches.¹⁷

⁷ McDonald, M. et al (2011) *Protecting Australia's Children Research Audit (1995-2010)*, Australian Institute of Family Studies, 41-42.

⁸ Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (2011) *National Research Agenda for Protecting Children 2011-2014*, 5.

⁹ SNAICC (2004) *Research Priorities for Indigenous Children and Youth*

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (2011) *National Research Agenda for Protecting Children 2011-2014*, 6.

¹⁴ Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (2011) *National Research Agenda for Protecting Children 2011-2014*, 6.

¹⁵ Report of the Northern Territory Board of Inquiry into Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse (2007), 32.

¹⁶ Report of the Northern Territory Board of Inquiry into Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse (2007), 28.

¹⁷ Report of the Northern Territory Board of Inquiry into Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse (2007), 31.

- Evidence of impacts of economic strategies, such as employment, and income management and support, on reducing child abuse and neglect in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.¹⁸
- Models, impacts and outcomes of family preservation services for families at-risk of child protection intervention.¹⁹

2.3 Child protection intervention and out-of-home care

- Implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle, including:
 - (a) factors that effect implementation and compliance,²⁰ including identification of successes;
 - (b) outcomes of variations in definition and application of the principle;²¹
 - (c) cultural knowledge, awareness and understanding of child protection decision makers, and the role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural advice and support services;²²
 - (d) the importance of connection to family, culture and community for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care and strategies to ensure connections are maintained;²³ and
 - (e) international best practice self-governance models and possible application to Australia.²⁴
- 'There is an urgent imperative to address the knowledge gap arising from the lack of research in relation to kinship care and alternative models of residential care.'²⁵ Priority areas include: outcomes and benefits of kinship care; support needs of kinship carers; and factors that guide decisions on kinship care placements.²⁶
- Long-term experiences and outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care placements supported by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander out-of-home care agencies;²⁷ and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers compared to other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care.²⁸

¹⁸ Higgins, D. (2010), *Community Development Approaches to Safety and Wellbeing of Indigenous Children*, 1.

¹⁹ Tully, L. (2008) *Literature Review: Family preservation services*, 9-10.

²⁰ Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (2011) *National Research Agenda for Protecting Children 2011-2014*, 6; SNAICC, 2004, Research Priorities

²¹ Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (2011) *National Research Agenda for Protecting Children 2011-2014*, 6

²² SNAICC (2004) *Research Priorities for Indigenous Children and Youth*.

²³ McDonald, M. et al (2011) *Protecting Australia's Children Research Audit (1995-2010)*, Australian Institute of Family Studies, 41-42; Libesman, T. (2011) *Cultural Care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children in Out of Home Care*.

²⁴ Libesman, T. (2004) *Child Welfare Approaches for Indigenous Communities: International perspectives*, 14.

²⁵ Bromfield, L. and Osborne, A. (2007) *Getting the big picture: A synopsis and critique of Australian out-of-home care research*, Australian Institute of Family Studies.

²⁶ Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (2011) *National Research Agenda for Protecting Children 2011-2014*, 7.

²⁷ Libesman, T. (2011) *Cultural Care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children in Out of Home Care*, 49.

²⁸ Ibid, 53.

- The effects of reunification, adoption and permanency planning on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and approaches that support family reunification.²⁹

2.4 Disability

Disability is a particularly significant issue in research for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, given the high prevalence of disability for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (approximately twice that of the non-Indigenous population).³⁰ Children with disability are more broadly identified as an under-researched population in relation to child protection, despite experiencing a higher-risk of abuse and neglect than children without a disability³¹ and being significantly over-represented on a population group basis in the juvenile justice systems, and in the care and protection system (both as parents and children).³²

- Strategies for providing culturally appropriate and accessible early intervention and support services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children with disabilities and their families.³³
- Identifying the different experiences and understanding of disability for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.³⁴
- Targeted service responses for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people with disabilities.³⁵

2.5 Consultation, participation and workforce development

- The effects of a strong, well-resourced, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled service sector for children, including evidence that demonstrates the effectiveness of self-determination.³⁶
- Developing strategies for recruitment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the child and family service workforce.³⁷
- Defining good practice in cultural competence for non-Indigenous organisations and workers.³⁸

²⁹ Cashmore, J. and Ainsworth, F. (2004), *Audit of Australian Out-Of-Home Care Research*, 24-25.

³⁰ Available data is for people aged 18 years and over living in non-remote areas of Australia and experiencing a severe or profound core activity restriction: Commonwealth Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Key Indicators 2011 Report*, 4.85.

³¹ McDonald, M. et al (2011) *Protecting Australia's Children Research Audit (1995-2010)*, Australian Institute of Family Studies.

³² Aboriginal Disability Network of NSW, *Telling it Like It is: A report on community consultations with Aboriginal people with disability and their associates throughout NSW, 2004-2005, 2007*, Aboriginal Disability Network of New South Wales Incorporated, 1.

³³ Ibid, 27.

³⁴ Disability Policy and Research Working Group (2011) *National Disability Research and Development Agenda*, 14.

³⁵ Ibid, 20.

³⁶ McDonald, M. et al (2011) *Protecting Australia's Children Research Audit (1995-2010)*, Australian Institute of Family Studies, 42; Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (2011) *National Research Agenda for Protecting Children 2011-2014*, 8.

³⁷ Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (2011) *National Research Agenda for Protecting Children 2011-2014*, 8

³⁸ Ibid.

- Strategies for effective consultation with and engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, organisations and families for service design and delivery.³⁹

³⁹ See for example the detailed description of what good practice consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples requires in: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner (2011) *Native Title Report 2010*, Australian Human Rights Commission.