



Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care

MEDIA RELEASE

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Funding of early childhood education and care services a critical issue at SNAICC National Conference

The long-term funding and sustainability of vital Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander integrated early childhood and family support services will be a major issue for discussion at SNAICC's Fifth National Conference in Cairns from 4 to 6 June.

SNAICC Deputy Chairperson (Early Childhood), Geraldine Atkinson, said the uncertainty about the future of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services was reaching a crisis point.

"Our services are central in efforts to give our children a strong start and to close the gap on intergenerational disadvantage," Ms Atkinson said.

"However, despite their proven worth, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood and family support services have been underfunded for years and face an uncertain long-term future."

The Australian Government is currently reviewing the Budget Based Funding Program, which funds 269 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood services nationally, including long day care centres, out of school hours care, crèches, mobile children's services, playgroups and Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services (MACS).

"These centres have been providing culturally strong, strengths based services to our communities most in need for decades. Many of the services will be featured at the conference for the amazing work they do for our children," Ms Atkinson said.

However, funding shortages forced many to move from vibrant multifunctional community hubs meeting the needs of children and families to agencies operating more as mainstream child care centres.

The Government recently announced an extension of funding for services to June 2014, while it completes a review of the BBF program.

Ms Atkinson said the new 38 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres being established across Australia face similar stress and uncertainty.

**SNAICC: The national peak body for Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander children**

These centres are funded under a National Partnership Agreement between the Australian Government and state-territory governments and there is no indication of further funding beyond June 2014 at this stage.

“It means that once again the promises to our families and communities — and their expectations that their needs will be met — may be shattered again. Enough is enough.”

Ms Atkinson said the sector was calling for a culturally-strong, sustainable and effective funding model for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander integrated early childhood and family support services.

“Schools are funded for a decade — how can our services be expected to provide high quality service where funding each year is insecure?” she asked.

Only with longer term funding and a program that values and supports community controlled services that have proven to best understand and respond to community needs will things change.

She said the importance of investing in the critical early years could not be overstated.

“Our services give children a solid platform at a critical stage of their lives — helping them to transition to school, to develop their social and creative skills and to become confident young people proud of their culture and identity. They also provide diverse supports to families to assist them to raise their children healthy, strong and proud.

“We cannot talk of “closing the gap” unless it involves the meaningful participation of our services. We look forward to engaging with services and other stakeholders at the SNAICC conference to share our experiences and plan for the road ahead.”

**Media inquiries: Frank Hytten, SNAICC CEO, on (0432) 345 652;
Emma Sydenham, SNAICC Deputy CEO, (0415) 188990
Giuseppe Stramandinoli, SNAICC Media Officer,
(0419) 508 125**