



Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care

MEDIA RELEASE

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Former New Zealand Children's Commissioner to speak at SNAICC National Conference

Professor Cindy Kiro — New Zealand's first female and only Maori to have been national Children's Commissioner — will be a keynote speaker at SNAICC's Fifth National Conference in Cairns from 4 to 6 June.

Professor Kiro, head of the education faculty at Victoria University in Wellington, will participate in a forum on Indigenous youth rights dealing with strategies for improving the protection of youth and children.

"What I'll be talking about is the need for more integrated health and social services as a step towards strengthening the protection of children's rights," Professor Kiro said on the eve of the conference.

Professor Kiro said that disadvantaged Maori and Pacific Islander (Pasifika) children would suffer in the future if the New Zealand government fails to invest in their wellbeing now.

She said that improving child protection outcomes would depend on the government's commitment to addressing the social causes of child poverty.

"In New Zealand, child poverty is a huge problem and unfortunately, Maori and Pasifika children suffer disproportionately from poverty and its effects," Professor Kiro said.

"What we're seeing now is a clustering of effects, where major social determinants contributing to their poorer health and educational outcomes are not being properly addressed."

Professor Kiro said poor housing had major impact on the health of Maori and Pasifika children.

"We're seeing lots of Maori children suffering disproportionately from respiratory illnesses. It's been found that, in a lot of those cases, overcrowded living conditions were a significant contributing factor," she said.

Professor Kiro emphasised the need for integrated services for working with Indigenous communities because of the failure of 'siloed' services to provide adequately — "especially if these are treated as marginal such as with Maori Affairs or Aboriginal Affairs" — and for much greater government investment in Indigenous children's services and programs.

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

“The danger is the ongoing marginalisation and under-resourcing of services for children who actually need far more,” she said.

“Governments need to show leadership and foresight by investing in children now, and by having services focused on early intervention. If there is a failure to invest now, services won’t be as preventative as they should be.

“The future of these children will be seriously undermined and that will just hurt the country in the long run.”

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