



Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

**1 August 2013**

### **Our children's rights must be a priority for governments**

On the eve of National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day, SNAICC Chairperson Sharron Williams has called on governments to treat the rights and welfare of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children as a priority.

Ms Williams said urgent action was needed on the alarmingly high number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care, and called on the Australian Government to guarantee long-term funding for community-controlled early childhood education and care services to help close the gap on disadvantage.

Held on 4 August each year, National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day (NAICD) celebrates and honours the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in family and community and raises awareness of the critical issues they are facing.

The 2013 theme is *Right Here. Right Now. Our Rights Matter.*

"NAICD is held to tell our children that they are special and we care about them. It's also an important occasion to reflect on progress in protecting and upholding their rights," Ms Williams said.

"Our children have a fundamental right to be safe within family and community. And yet over 13,200 children are presently removed from their immediate families and in out-of-home care. They represent a staggering 33 per cent of all children in care. It's a figure that will continue to increase if preventative action is not taken," Ms Williams said.

SNAICC recently launched a national campaign, in partnership with other major agencies in the child welfare sector, to halve the number of Indigenous children in out-home-care by 2018.

"A major reduction in numbers — as SNAICC and numerous recent inquiries have pointed out — will be achieved if vulnerable children and families are given more immediate and intensive support to cope with serious issues they are experiencing," Ms Williams said.

She asked for greater leadership from the Australian and state-territory governments, including through targeted resources to make an impact.

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

Ms Williams said SNAICC called on state and territory governments to:

- work with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders in child protection to place Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family decision-making at the centre of ensuring the safety and wellbeing of children, and
- increase the proportion of government expenditure on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander developed and delivered prevention and early intervention services and to report on this annually.

SNAICC also urged the Australian Government to commit to a ten-year funding model for the approximately 300 Indigenous community-controlled early childhood services across Australia. These include long day care centres, out of school hours care services, Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services (MACS) and the 38 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and family services.

"Greater investment in early years will reap many benefits for our children, families and communities — and Australia as a whole," Ms Williams said.

"Our childhood services are critical in developing healthy, resilient children strong in culture and providing a successful transition to school. They also deliver family support programs and provide vibrant multifunctional hubs for communities.

"Our childhood services are the frontline in efforts to close the gap on disadvantage. They have shown what can be achieved if more control is placed in Indigenous hands.

"And yet their funding remains uncertain beyond June 2014."

Reflecting on this year's NAICD theme, Ms Williams said all Australians — Indigenous and non-Indigenous — had a role in the reconciliation process, and a responsibility to increase their awareness and advocacy on children's rights.

"How can each of us take steps to understand our cultures and our history, both before and after colonisation, and promote this understanding in our community?"

"How can you reach out to your local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community and build respectful relationships in the interests of our children? This is what we ask people to reflect on this weekend," Ms Williams said.

SNAICC has produced a range of resources, including child right posters and an educators guide, to help agencies with local celebrations across Australia. It will hold its national launch of NAICD in Melbourne on Sunday, 4 August,

For more information on National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day, visit: [www.snaicc.org.au/news-events](http://www.snaicc.org.au/news-events)

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