



**Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care**

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

**13 February 2014**

**Statement by SNAICC Chairperson Sharron Williams**

### **The gap can only be closed in partnership with Aboriginal organisations and communities**

Following the Prime Minister's latest Closing the Gap report, SNAICC calls on governments to ensure adequate funding and the meaningful participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations to see sustainable improvements across all the Closing the Gap targets.

Prime Minister Abbott's report delivered yet another mixed bag of good and bad news on practical measures detailed in the National Apology to improve life expectancy, educational achievement and employment opportunities for Indigenous Australians.

The good news is very encouraging — Australia is on track to reduce Indigenous child mortality rates. This should be roundly celebrated along with the pivotal work of Indigenous community-controlled health organisations across the country to see this gap narrowed.

However, among the bad news, there's been very little improvement towards halving the gap in reading, writing and numeracy. The Prime Minister has vowed to lift Indigenous school participation rates in the next five years arguing that success on all closing the gap targets hinges on improving education outcomes.

SNAICC believes that to see sustainable improvements in education outcomes, including participation rates, new approaches are needed to improve our families' access to quality teachers and facilities and a curriculum that is relevant to their needs and builds on cultural strengths.

The issue needs a more holistic approach, in partnership with Aboriginal families and community-controlled services. For example, our early childhood education and care services — such as Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services (MACS) and Aboriginal Children and Family Centres (ACFCs) — are doing a great job in getting children ready for school and supporting families.

Our services are the key to getting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families engaged in the education process — by helping to nurture children at the most critical phase of their development.

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

Government must support these services by giving them funding certainty. And we need more of them across the country if we are to give our children the same access to quality early childhood services as enjoyed by other Australian children.

The Prime Minister's narrow focus on getting children into schools and people into jobs fails to acknowledge underlying problems that are preventing their engagement. Addressing poverty, inter-generational trauma, and family breakdown continue to be major challenges facing our communities.

It's hard to get to school and get a good job when you don't have decent housing, lack access to basic services, or you're disconnected from family, community and culture.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are almost 11 times more likely to be in out-of-home care than non-Indigenous children. This impacts on their broader health, social and economic outcomes and continues the trend of family separation that has been a major contributor to widening the gap.

To close the gap, and reduce the high number of our children in out-of-home care, state and territory governments need to place more focus on preventative measures and keeping children connected to family and culture. SNAICC looks to the Australian Government to provide leadership on this issue.

We commend Mr Abbott for his personal commitment to lifting Indigenous affairs to an unprecedented status in government and in the national conversation.

His and previous Australian governments have invested and continue to invest considerable resources in measures to improve the quality of life of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander citizens.

However, to ensure the maximum return on that investment — to see more good news than bad in future closing the gap reports — Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations must be the agents of change.

**For more information:**      **Frank Hytten, SNAICC CEO, on (0432) 345 652;**  
   **Emma Sydenham, SNAICC Deputy CEO,**  
   **(0415) 188 990**  
   **Giuseppe Stramandinoli, SNAICC Media Officer,**  
   **(0419) 508 125**