



Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care

MEDIA RELEASE

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Statement by SNAICC Chairperson Sharron Williams on Closing the Gap Day

Boost Indigenous early childhood funding — or risk failure on new school attendance target

The Australian Government must provide a substantial boost to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood education services if it is to meet its new Closing the Gap target on Indigenous school attendance rates and achieve sustained success in other target areas.

SNAICC welcomes the Government's new target and agrees with Prime Minister Abbott that closing the gap on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage cannot be achieved unless there is significant progress in education outcomes.

Improving school attendance rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children is certainly an important start. But measures under the new target should go far beyond simply marking names off school rolls.

To make meaningful progress, measures must also engage our children and families in the education system, which in turn must be more responsive to their needs and strengths. And there must be more focus on preparing children for school — having them healthy, confident and excited to learn.

SNAICC again asserts that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled education and care services — and their counterparts in the health sector — are at the core of efforts to nurture our children at a critical phase of their development and prepare them for success at school and beyond.

SNAICC is calling for an additional \$200m annually to build on the great work — often despite inadequate funding and resources — of our early childhood education and care services, including Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services, crèches, long day, outside school hours and mobile care services, and playgroups.

Under the model developed by SNAICC, the additional funding would come from a re-allocation of existing moneys to boost current services and also increase the number of services to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families in some of the most disadvantaged areas of Australia.

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

www.snaicc.org.au

There has been some significant investment in Indigenous early childhood education and care with the setting up 38 new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres (ACFCs) across Australia.

The centres represent a \$300m investment by COAG under a national partnership agreement with the states and territories — but that investment and the work of centres is being undermined by uncertainty over funding beyond 30 June 2014. We have a bewildering and totally unacceptable situation in which some ACFCs may need to cut back services or close their doors only weeks after officially opening.

All of our 300 community controlled early childhood services — and their counterparts in health — are doing a great job in improving participation rates and helping to raise healthy children who are ready to do well at school.

Our early childhood services are improving literacy and numeracy of children and helping to nurture their cognitive, emotional and social development, as well as providing much needed support to parents and other care givers.

SNAICC is encouraged by comments from the Deputy Chair of the Prime Minister's Advisory Council, Dr Ngiare Brown, that she will try to resist cuts to Indigenous education and health, knowing that any cuts will have a detrimental effect on efforts to close the gap on Indigenous disadvantage.

SNAICC also agrees with Dr Brown that funds could be better spent — we say by giving our early childhood (and health) services more funding certainty, more control and more responsibility to build on their proven track record of success.

Improving educational outcomes cannot rest solely on the work of our community-controlled services. Many other significant factors come into play, including the need for an engaging, responsive and culturally appropriate education system, and tackling the serious underlying social and economic issues impeding our children's development.

But our services are the engines to make real headway in closing the gap on education and health outcomes. Government must support them to provide the platform for sustained improvements in the lives of Indigenous Australians.

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