



Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care

MEDIA RELEASE

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Statement by SNAICC Chairperson, Sharron Williams

Government must reject push towards mainstreaming in Indigenous Affairs — or visit policy failures of the past

SNAICC calls on the Australian Government to completely reject the Commission of Audit's recommendation to implement a voucher-based program to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children with the costs of education.

The proposed change — and the Commission's push for a greater role for mainstream early childhood services — would steer the delivery of services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander citizens away from community control.

If accepted, the recommendations would again assign a passive role to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in planning and delivering services to improve their quality of life — a lack of engagement that is at the heart of the major policy failures in Indigenous affairs since the 1970s.

The voucher system being touted is a simplistic and paternalistic idea totally lacking in social context. Family finances is not the only issue that is hampering access to and participation in quality education services by our children and families. There are many factors inhibiting education outcomes, including a lack of basic services, particularly in remote communities.

The report fails to recognise and appreciate the strengths of existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood services, such as those funded under the Budget Based Funded and Aboriginal Child and Family Centres schemes.

These services are already addressing intergenerational disadvantage by delivering culturally-appropriate, integrated early years services that empower and are directly accountable to their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, children and communities.

Investment into mainstream services alone fails to appreciate the critical importance of Indigenous-specific services in enabling access to and participation of families and children in vital services, including education and health, and the importance of community-controlled services in building the capacity of our communities.

SNAICC has developed a proposal, in consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early years services, which outlines a comprehensive and integrated model for the delivery of early years services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

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

communities across Australia. The model streamlines current approaches and would result in more efficient, targeted and appropriate service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Presumably Prime Minister Abbott will also have serious doubts about some of the Commission of Audit's main recommendations on Indigenous affairs.

Alluding to flawed past approaches in his Closing the Gap report in Parliament in February, Mr Abbott said: "Even as things began to change, a generation or two back, our tendency was to work "for" Aboriginal people rather than "with" them."

"We objectified Aboriginal issues rather than personalised them. We saw problems to be solved rather than people to be engaged with."

SNAICC calls on Mr Abbott and his government to embrace engagement and partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. To invest faith and funding in Indigenous community-controlled services to deliver local solutions and close the gap on disadvantage — and deliver value for the taxpayer's dollar.

SNAICC welcomes the Commission of Audit recommendations that look to reduce duplication in the delivery of services and programs to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander citizens. Clearly it's an absurd situation when small communities like Toomelah have over 70 service providers. However, Indigenous-specific services must be recognised for the value they add, rather than classified as duplicating mainstream providers

SNAICC also agrees with the commission that Indigenous affairs should remain a shared responsibility between the Australian and state-territory governments, and welcomes the plan to establish new bilateral agreements that clarify responsibilities between jurisdictions and make governments more accountable for delivering services to Indigenous citizens.

However, SNAICC is concerned at the audit report's recommendation that the Australian Government cut funding to the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples. As SNAICC has noted previously, the funding cuts further disempower our people. Congress has a vital role to play in monitoring the progress of governments to close the gap, and — as a democratically elected body — truly representing the diverse needs and interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait citizens across Australia.

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