



12 February 2016

## **FAMILY MATTERS – KIDS SAFE IN CULTURE NOT IN CARE**

### **LANDMARK FORUM HELD IN CANBERRA**

**Canberra, Australia:** Over 100 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous leaders met at Old Parliament House this week to discuss the ongoing, extraordinary rates of removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children into out-of-home care, leaving children separated from their families and their cultures.

All participants expressed collective outrage at the stark realities of child removal across Australia with poor outcomes consistently linked to poor departmental practice, leaving our kids vulnerable – a cultural shift of attitude is required.

Participants have called for urgent change to put an end to the despair and trauma perpetuated through a broken child protection system – a system that punishes rather than strengthens families; a system that betrays rather than protects children. Participants have also called for a renewed focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination, for our communities to be the driving force of change.

Victorian Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People Andrew Jackomos commented: “Rights are not discretionary, not debatable and not subject to available resources. Our culture is not a perk for our children; it is a right, a birthright ... our children’s rights cannot be traded by going into out-of-home care.”

SNAICC National Executive member, and CEO of Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak (QATSICPP), Natalie Lewis said: “Early intervention to support, heal and strengthen communities is what we need to reduce removal of our kids and ensure they are safe and well in family.”

The driving principles of the campaign, supported by leaders participating, include:

- **Strengthening Families:** Governments increasing support for families and communities, including through targeted and intensive support services, and Indigenous leadership in the design and delivery of integrated child and family services.
- **Self-determination through participation:** Government embedding processes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in decision-making for the care and protection of children – through guardianship models, family and kin decision-making and Indigenous support services.

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Communities also being supported to drive change within their own communities.

- **Healing:** Government recognition and support to address the deep trauma experienced by many of our communities, including through opportunities to develop our own healing approaches.

**Accountability:** Governments embedding accountability to Indigenous priorities into Australia's early childhood, early intervention, child protection and family support systems –including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander state/territory oversight roles.

Leaders at the forum established a framework for collaboration, pledged financial support and agreed to high-level strategic directions to drive change in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child safety and wellbeing. Leaders committed to:

- Building a coalition for change to lead strategy development and implementation;
- Securing national commitment to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child safety and to prioritise early intervention through Coalition of Australian Government (COAG) targets;
- Supporting and empowering communities to reduce child removal;
- Establishing and promoting a monitoring and reporting framework to measure government progress on key policy imperatives; and
- Supporting strategic state/territory based strategies that create precedents or embed innovation in Indigenous child safety law, policy and practice.

To capitalise on the momentum from the forum and harness the immense enthusiasm and passion shown by all participants, Family Matters working groups will soon be established in every Australian State and Territory.

National Coordinating Group members include:

- [Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat \(AbSec\)](#)
- [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation](#)
- [Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak \(QATSICPP\)](#)
- [Australian Council of Social Service \(ACOSS\)](#) and, [Families Australia.](#)



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### **About Family Matters**

Family Matters works to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are safe in their family and culture, and not in care. The key Family Matters goal is to eliminate the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Australia's child protection systems within a generation (by 2030).

[The Family Matters website](#) was launched in May 2015 by the Victorian Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. A national strategy will be announced in early 2016, providing details on the formalisation of a national strategic alliance to guide governance, strategy and campaign oversight from this week's forum.