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## **SECTOR LEADERS CALL FOR NEW TARGET TO REDUCE INDIGENOUS CHILD OVER-REPRESENTATION IN OUT-OF-HOME CARE**

**Melbourne, Australia:** On National Close the Gap Day 2016, sector leaders are calling for a new Council of Australian Governments (COAG) target to urgently address the rising rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander over-representation in out-of-home care.

Members of *Family Matters: kids safe in culture not in care*, a national campaign to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the child protection system, aim to turn the tide on the continuing systematic removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from family and community

Coordinated by a committed group of Indigenous and non-Indigenous organisations and peak bodies, the campaign recommends a strategy which recognises the strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and organisations and the capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to raise their children safe, strong and happy in culture, not in care.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have grown up safe, well and cared for in their families, communities and cultural traditions, for thousands of years. Despite pervasive negativity in media and policy debates on child welfare, safe cultural care remains the dominant reality in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies.

Almost 95% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are cared for in their families of origin. Of the other 5% who are in alternative care, over half are cared for by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, who shoulder the greater burden of care within Australia's child protection systems, despite experiencing higher levels of social and economic hardship.

Yet, as communities across Australia celebrate National Close the Gap Day over 15,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children will spend the day away from their families and cultures. Figures from the [2016 Report on Government Services](#) show Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are now 9.5 times more likely to be in out-of-home care than non-Aboriginal children, with 35.6% of all children in out-of-home care identifying as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.

Reflecting on these figures, SNAICC CEO Gerry Moore commented: "Currently, more than one in every three children placed in out-of-home care in Australia identifies as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, and if recent trends continue, this rate will only rise. In a country where the core values of equity, social justice and a fair go for all are etched into our national identity, this is simply not good enough."

The principles of prevention and early intervention for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families are enshrined in current Australian federal, state and territory policy frameworks governing child safety and protection, including the [National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020](#), yet despite these commitments, the rate and



number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children removed from their families, culture and communities continues to rise at an alarming rate. So what more can be done?

The evidence is clear that the strengths to redress child wellbeing and safety concerns lie within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Research describes the value of unique Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child rearing practices, alongside the critical importance of continuity of cultural identity to the wellbeing of Indigenous children. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, growing up with their family and culture is a human right, crucial to assisting the healing process from intergenerational trauma caused by decades of injustice. The ‘gap’ in health and wellbeing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples will never be closed while fundamental rights remain unrealised.

The driving principles of the *Family Matters: kids safe in culture not in care* campaign 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. 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.

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