



Secretariat National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care

6 June, 2016

LABOR POLICY ON EARLY LEARNING SUPPORTS NATIONAL CLOSING THE GAP AGENDA

Canberra, Australia: SNAICC strongly welcomes Labor's announcement of a 15% increase in funding of Budget Based Funding (BBF) services and the Child Care Benefit from 1 January 2017, as well as significant investment in capital expenditure for BBF services and workforce development.

SNAICC welcomes Labor recognition that: "Improving rates of access to early education and care for Indigenous children is critical to **Closing the Gap**. Early education sets children up for life, but currently too many Indigenous children are missing out on the quality early learning that could give them the best start." Furthermore, SNAICC commends Labor for retaining the BBF program and 24 hours subsidised access for all children, without having to meet any activity test. These two factors provide a strong bedrock for access to early learning for Australia's most vulnerable children.

The BBF program, the specific program designed for areas where a user-pays model is not viable, will be abolished under the current (Coalition) Jobs For Families Child Care Package Bill (slated for implementation mid-2018). Currently 80% of services in this program are for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

SNAICC shares Labor's concerns that: "The Turnbull Government's proposed changes will end ongoing support for Budget Based Funded services and push them into the mainstream fee-based system. This is despite the Government's own review of BBF services in 2014 finding that 'only a small number of BBF services are likely to be able to transition'." ¹

Geraldine Atkinson, SNAICC Deputy Chairperson comments: "We commend Labor for its recognition of the value and importance of early childhood education and care, and that access to early learning is a right for all children, regardless of their parents' circumstances."

"Labor's policy recognises the evidence and the realities on the ground to provide a strong basis for improving access to early learning for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and particularly those experiencing vulnerability," Ms Atkinson continues.

Further positive policy announcements that SNAICC applauds include:

- The investment of \$25 million over three years from 2017 to upgrade BBF service facilities and increase places where needed.

¹ Department of Education, *Review of the Budget Base Funded Program – Final Report 2014*, p15



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- The support pledged for BBF services to become part of the National Quality Framework over time.
- Specific support for mobile services, which provide critical early learning opportunities in communities that would otherwise miss out on access to early education. This includes the further \$6 million pledged to expand mobile services into areas that currently do not have access to early childhood education (in addition to the 15% increase in support for all BBF services).
- The investment of \$150 million over 3 years to develop a new early childhood workforce development strategy.

Labor's policy is unclear, however, on the ability of new services to be included within the BBF program. The BBF program has taken on no new services for some time, which has resulted in the exclusion of many services in impoverished communities – including Aboriginal Child and Family Centres, for which there is a desperate need for support. SNAICC will engage with Labor to clarify this point and seek to ensure adequate supports for these services.

Ms Atkinson concludes: "The situation out there in many communities is desperate and we are wasting critical opportunities to ensure the next generation of children have the early learning benefits to end the cycle of poverty and disadvantage that too many of our people still experience. These policy commitments make significant strides forward towards fair and responsive early childhood policy for all children across Australia."

Please see link for full details of Labor Policy; Investing in Early Education & Care:
http://www.100positivepolicies.org.au/investing_in_early_education_care#_ftnref6

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For more information please visit <http://www.snaicc.org.au> or contact:
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About SNAICC:

SNAICC is the national non-government peak body in Australia representing the interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

Founded in 1981, SNAICC was established to engage in activities that promote and accommodate a strong voice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families.

Over the past 30 years SNAICC's efforts have resulted in many key milestones and achievements both in policy developments at state, territory and federal levels and in developing innovative and useful resources for the sector.



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SNAICC is governed by an influential National Executive made up of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled children and families' services.