



Secretariat National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care

24 June 2016

VICTORIAN AND NEW SOUTH WALES GOVERNMENTS ANNOUNCE CRITICAL INVESTMENTS FOR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CHILDREN

SNAICC applauds state governments in Victoria and New South Wales for new child and family service investments announced over the last week. Both governments have committed to critical reforms to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

VICTORIA

In Victoria, Minister Jenny Mikakos has announced a \$2.82m commitment to an agenda “to empower Aboriginal community controlled organisations to lead in the delivery of services and supports for Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care.”

Significantly, the investment includes \$880,000 “to develop and implement a strategy to transition support services for Aboriginal children and young people who are involved with child protection to Aboriginal organisations.” This initiative promises to finally progress this key recommendation of the 2012 Report of the Protecting Victoria’s Vulnerable Children Inquiry.

The investment also continues the role of the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency to provide legal guardianship for Aboriginal children subject to a child protection order – building on a trial that has demonstrated strong outcomes in safely reuniting children with their families and communities. Additionally, the investment will fund Targeted Care Packages for Aboriginal children and young people, and a *Return to Country* program to help Aboriginal children in care stay connected to their culture.

SNAICC Deputy Chairperson, Sue Anne Hunter, welcomed the investment, commenting that: “Too many of our children are lost in the system – we need to bring them home so that they can be properly supported, safe and proud of who they are. Our community-controlled organisations are best placed to make sure that our children’s cultural needs are met, and to keep them safely connected to their families and communities.”

NEW SOUTH WALES

In New South Wales, Minister Brad Hazzard announced an important investment to reform the child protection system, better resource out-of-home care, and, critically, to provide family preservation and restoration services. This followed from the earlier budget announcement of \$15m over 4 years to support the state’s Aboriginal Children and Family Centres – critical integrated early childhood support services for our children and their families. SNAICC has long advocated the vital importance of supporting families to deal with the challenges that impact care for their children, and we are encouraged by the focus on family support through this investment.

Minister Hazzard’s announcement included a commitment to “addressing the over-representation of Aboriginal children in care through dedicating 50 per cent of the new intensive family preservation places for Aboriginal children and families.” SNAICC strongly welcomes this move, and implores the Minister to ensure these services are provided through community-controlled organisations that will be most effective to engage Aboriginal families and provide them with culturally appropriate supports.

Reflecting this view, SNAICC National Executive member, and AbSec CEO, Tim Ireland, responded to the announcement in an AbSec media statement, saying that, “Community-led responses that are tailored to the needs of local families are critical to addressing the over-representation of Aboriginal children in out-of- home care. AbSec is confident that this investment, if delivered through Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, will drive significantly improved outcomes for vulnerable Aboriginal children and families.”

SNAICC is concerned by an accompanying \$11.8m investment over 4 years to improve the rate of adoptions in New South Wales. While SNAICC welcomes and

calls for action to improve stability for our children in out-of-home care, we believe that an increased focus on permanent care and adoption primarily serves the interests of government to shift cost from the out-of-home care sector, rather than genuinely support the best interests of children. Evidence shows that our kinship carers are shouldering a huge burden of care across the country and need more – and not less – support to provide quality long-term care for children.

Adoption and other permanent care measures commonly fail to recognise that our children begin their out-of-home care journey with a permanent identity that is grounded in cultural, family and community connections – stable care requires the support and maintenance of that identity. Adoption may serve to sever connections for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, in breach of their human rights, and break bonds that are critical to their stability of identity while they are in care and later in their post-care adult life.

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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.

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