



Analysis of the alignment of draft Closing the Gap Targets with SNAICC positions and priorities

SNAICC Brief January 2019

This document provides an analysis of the draft Closing the Gap targets outlined in the December 2018 COAG statement in relation to SNAICC's inputs and priorities for the Closing the Gap Refresh.

Background

SNAICC has been engaged at key points throughout the consultation phase of the Closing the Gap 'refresh' process, including by:

- providing a [comprehensive submission](#) on issues of concern and recommendations for key targets;
- participating in consultation forums and meetings on proposed targets and indicators;
- submitting a joint letter to the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet with members of the National Forum for Protecting Australia's Children to reinforce SNAICC's priorities calls for the Refresh, with support of numerous NGOs and a number of state and territory governments;
- meetings with relevant politicians and departments to discuss the 'refresh' and key priorities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, including the need for a national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Strategy.

SNAICC key calls have been for:

1. an additional Closing the Gap target to eliminate the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home by 2040, with the following indicators:
 - the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care;
 - full compliance with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle;
 - substantiation and re-substantiation rates;
 - rates of referral to early intervention supports following substantiation; and
 - reunification rates with family or kin.

with inputs including:

- increased proportionate investments in prevention and early intervention services; and
 - increase investment in community-controlled services (design and delivery of services) across the intervention continuum.
2. strengthening the current target on early childhood education to close the gap in the early childhood development domains contained in the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) by 2030, with indicators on:
- development outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, as defined by the AEDC;
 - access to early childhood education, including expansion of the current target to include three year olds, rather than the current narrow focus on 4 year olds; and
 - access to Aboriginal early years services, including for children from birth to 2 years in areas of particular vulnerability.

SNAICC has also advocated for the expansion of targets to include health, housing, disability, family violence and justice. In this regard, SNAICC endorses the submissions of the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples ('National Congress'), NACCHO, First Peoples Disability Network (FPDN), the Change the Record Coalition and NFVPLS.

Proposed Approach to Governance and Oversight

The governance arrangement for the framework, as described in the December COAG statement, nominates different levels of government as having lead responsibility for specific targets. Actions for each target will be set out in jurisdictional action plans, noting that there may be variation among jurisdictions. This is different than the approach outlined in earlier consultations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak bodies. In previous drafts, each target was accompanied by a series of proposed indicators for measuring change. It is unclear from the COAG Statement whether the finalised targets will be accompanied by national indicators. This is an issue of vital concern as SNAICC has consistently emphasised that targets need to be underpinned by meaningful indicators of success, including indicators that relate to the drivers of child protection intervention. For example, efforts to eliminate over-representation must be reflected in the provision of preventive services, reduced substantiations of harm and increased reunification of children with family and kin. Without these indicators, reductions could be pursued, for example, through measures such as adoption or permanent care that can cause harm to children's identity and cultural connections.

The proposed governance structure minimises responsibility of the Commonwealth in key areas of importance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. According to the Statement "the lead jurisdiction....is responsible for monitoring reports against progress and initiating further action if the target is not on track...jurisdictions' trajectories will vary and may have different end-points" (p. 3). Without any form of federal leadership, there is concern that states and territories might simply develop action plans that align with their current policy agenda and do not necessarily bring about substantive change in policy and practice. Promisingly, the Statement does indicate that jurisdictional action plans will be developed in

partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This will be essential for ensuring that action plans bring about holistic and comprehensive change, however, the process and accountability for partnering are not specified.

Monitoring and evaluation of CTG will be overseen by the newly appointed Indigenous Commissioner at the Productivity Commission every three years. While this form of accountability is encouraging, it doesn't respond fully to the calls for broader accountability to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples that SNAICC and others have advocated for. There will additionally be a need for formalised roles for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to oversee and guide monitoring and evaluation at the state and territory level through each jurisdiction's CTG committee, and nationally. There are valuable precedents in the children and families policy space at the state level that could be considered. For example, the Aboriginal Children's Forum in Victoria and Queensland's First Children and Families Board, provide oversight and monitor implementation of reform agendas in their respective jurisdictions.

Closing the Gap Refresh Draft Targets

The COAG Statement, released on 12 December 2018, sets out fifteen draft targets that were agreed upon by COAG to go forward for further consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The following targets relate specifically to key priority areas identified in SNAICC's submission to the 'refresh' process:

1. *Increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children assessed as developmentally on track in all five domains of the AEDC to 45 per cent by 2028.*

SNAICC is supportive, in principle, of this target as it focuses more broadly on early childhood development outcomes. However, we are unsure if the 45 per cent rate is adequate because data on the percentage of children on track across all five domains is not publically available. SNAICC has contacted AEDC to source this information.

2. *95 per cent of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander four-year-olds enrolled in early childhood education by 2025.*

This is an existing target. SNAICC has consistently advocated for this target to be modified to include 3-year-olds and measured based on access, rather than enrolment. It is SNAICC's position that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 3 and 4 year olds should have access to 30 hours per week of early childhood education.

Achieving this target requires supporting and growing existing Aboriginal Children and Family Centres (ACFCs), Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services (MACS) and other critical early years supports, as well as developing new community-controlled services to address the 15,000 place gap in ECEC service participation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

3. *Significant and sustained progress to eliminate the over-representation of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care; **and/or***
4. *A significant and sustained reduction in violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children.*

It is concerning that COAG is considering whether it is necessary to include both a target to eliminate the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children **and** a target to eliminate violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children. These are issues that require separate, nuanced strategies. While violence against women and children certainly contributes to child protection involvement, it is unclear how a target to reduce violence will address other major drivers of child protection involvement, such as neglect.

The proposed targets are not sufficiently detailed. The reference to ‘*significant and sustained progress to eliminate the over-representation*’ does not provide a measurable target and the extent of the reduction should be specified. It is SNAICC’s perspective that the target and jurisdictional action plans should be grounded in the research and evidence-based solutions to over-representation proposed by SNAICC and the Family Matters Campaign.

The proposed child protection target has been designated as “state-led”. This approach conflicts with SNAICC’s position that the child protection target be underpinned by a comprehensive national strategy, with specific jurisdictional responsibility for different components identified in the development of the strategy. While the operation of statutory child protection systems is primarily a state and territory responsibility, the Federal Government maintains responsibility in relation to many of the key areas that are relevant to reducing the over-representation of children in care, including through the provision of funding for universal and targeted services.

SNAICC has advocated for the [Family Matters Roadmap](#) to be used as the basis for creating a policy and practice framework, an outcomes/evaluation framework and accountability mechanisms for a national strategy co-designed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations. The *Roadmap* outlines a number of key strategy components, including: the establishment of national and state/territory Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children’s Commissioners, proportionate investment in culturally appropriate investment in early intervention services for families; and legislated mechanisms for the delegation of child protection decision-making and related functions to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations.

5. *Increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population living in appropriately sized (not overcrowded) housing to 82 per cent by 2028.*

SNAICC is supportive of the addition of a housing target to address overcrowding. However, there are a number of other housing circumstances that impact the safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families that are not captured in the proposed target, including affordability, unsafe/poor quality housing infrastructure and homelessness. Indeed, research has found that structural problems and inadequate facilities have a greater association with

wellbeing outcomes for children than overcrowding.¹ In its current form, it is unclear how the proposed target will address this broader range of concerns.

6. *Reduce the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in detention by 11-19 per cent and adults held in incarceration by at least 5 per cent by 2028.*

SNAICC is supportive in principle of a justice target; however, we note that the proposed target differs from the advice of Aboriginal leadership. Peaks have called explicitly for a target to eliminate over-representation in imprisonment by 2040.

SNAICC is supportive of NATSILS and Change the Record's calls for a sub-target to end the imprisonment of children under 14 years by 2020. This is not currently include in the CTG agenda and is not supported by the current Commonwealth Government.

There are no draft targets focussed on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living with a disability. SNAICC advocated for the inclusion of a disability target, and endorsed the submission of FPDN, and their recommendations for a standalone target relating to access to the National Disability Insurance Scheme and disaggregation of CTG reporting data by disability.

¹ Biddle, N. (2011). 'Physical and mental health - Lecture 3, *Measures of Indigenous wellbeing and their determinants across the lifecourse*, 2011 CAEPR Lecture Series', Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University, Canberra.