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CALL TO MAKE EARLY LEARNING A PRIORITY FOR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CHILDREN

More than forty leading child welfare, education and research organisations have endorsed a new call by Early Childhood Australia (ECA) and SNAICC – National Voice for our Children, to ensure all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children receive quality early learning and family support.

Published today, the joint position paper, [*Working Together to Ensure Equality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children in the Early Years*](#), highlights the key issues that impede First Nations children from accessing early childhood education and care (ECEC), while further providing recommendations for improving outcomes.

‘The data we have tells us that our children are half as likely to attend a Child Care Benefit approved early childhood service than non-indigenous children,’ said Geraldine Atkinson, SNAICC Deputy Chairperson. ‘We’ve known for several years that 15,000 additional early learning places are needed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children’s enrolment to be level with the general population.’

‘Everyone who cares about child welfare in Australia is concerned that too many children are starting school with developmental vulnerability, and **that two out of five Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are vulnerable** when they start school; that’s twice the rate of vulnerability overall.’ said Samantha Page, ECA CEO.

‘This is a problem we can solve—it requires the political will to make sure that every single First Nations child has access to, and participates in, quality early learning for at least three days per week in the two years before school,’ said Ms Page.

‘The most important thing for our children to thrive is that we need ongoing support for culturally appropriate, community-controlled services, and help to improve the quality of those services and professional development for their staff,’ said Ms Atkinson.

‘We can see from the great results in high-quality Aboriginal Child and Family Centres, that families feel welcome, the children love to come, and they make a good transition to school,’ said Ms Atkinson.

‘Children and families are already benefitting from evidence-based, targeted family support services, like Families as First Teachers, Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY), Parents as Teachers (PAT) and Best Start (in WA),’ said Ms Page. ‘We want to see all First Nations families get this vital support in the early years because supporting parents in the home environment is as important as access to early learning services to improve outcomes for children.’

The joint position paper by ECA and SNAICC urges the Commonwealth Government to work alongside state and territory governments to take these actions:

1. Establish new early childhood development targets to close the gap in the AEDC domains by 2030,

- and an accompanying strategy—through the Closing the Gap refresh
2. Commit to permanently fund universal access to high-quality early education for three- and four-year-olds, including additional funding to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children get access to a minimum of three days per week of high-quality preschool, with bachelor-qualified teachers.
 3. Invest in quality Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled integrated early years services, through a specific early education program, with clear targets to increase coverage in areas of high Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, and high levels of disadvantage.

Further recommendations include:

- COAG to fund a targeted program to support evidence-informed, culturally safe, integrated early childhood and family-focused programs, across the nurturing care spectrum, in early education and care services that work with high numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

The paper and its recommendations are endorsed by peak bodies, children's education and care service organisations and major children's organisations who all support the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children including: Save the Children, National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO); UNICEF, Brotherhood of St Laurence; Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS); Murdoch Children's Research Institute; Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak (QATSICPP); Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) and many more.

See the full list of endorsing organisations in the position paper.

'The broad range of support for these recommendations shows the high level of agreement and concern that action needs to be taken to make sure that Australia improves our support for First Nations children to give them the best start in life,' concluded Ms Page.

[Read the Position Paper \(10pgs\)](#)

[Download the full Discussion Paper \(44pgs\)](#)

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