



SNAICC
National Voice for our Children
(Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation)
Melbourne Polytechnic
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12 February 2020

SNAICC WELCOMES ANNOUNCEMENT OF INDIGENOUS EARLY CHILDHOOD STRATEGY

SNAICC – National Voice for our Children welcomes today’s announcement that the Federal Government will be developing an Indigenous early childhood strategy in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

While the majority of our children are thriving in their families, communities and cultures, the 12th Closing the Gap report, released today, finds many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families experience multiple forms of disadvantage that make our children vulnerable in their early years.

SNAICC CEO, Richard Weston commented,

“Many of our communities are affected by a range of adverse experiences from poverty, through to violence, drug and alcohol issues and homelessness. Without an opportunity to heal from the resultant trauma, its impact can deeply affect children’s brain development causing life-long challenges to the way they function in the world. It is experienced within our families and communities and from one generation to the next. We need urgent action to support better outcomes and opportunities for our children.”

The announcement by Minister for Indigenous Australians, Ken Wyatt, of a whole-of-government Indigenous early childhood strategy sends a clear message that the status quo is not working for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. The new government commitment reflects and recognises the tireless efforts of SNAICC’s members who have been working to support our children and families and calling for early childhood policy reform for decades. Mr Weston said,

“We commend the government’s recognition that placing our children at the centre of the next phase of the Closing the Gap is critical to achieving equality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

“SNAICC has long called for a national strategy to improve outcomes for our children. Community engagement and leadership will be critically important to developing an effective strategy. Our families, children, and communities need to be empowered to have a greater say over their lives.”

There has been very little progress across the targets – employment, school attendance, life expectancy, child mortality rates, and literacy and numeracy show little improvement. The report finds that the target to have 95% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander four-year-olds enrolled in early child education in 2025, which was achieved in 2017, has slipped backwards to 86.4% in 2018. The report also indicates that the lowest attendance rates are in very remote areas, highlighting the importance of tailoring responses to the needs of remote communities.

In 2018, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child mortality rate was twice the rate for non-Indigenous children and approximately one in four Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Years 5, 7 and 9 are below the national minimum standards for literacy.

Access to quality, culturally safe services, including maternal and child health, family support, and early childhood education and care, are essential for supporting children's development. This is particularly true for children who experience disadvantage early in life.

SNAICC Chairperson, Muriel Bamblett, represents SNAICC on the Coalition of Peaks and the Joint Council for Closing the Gap. Ms Bamblett commented,

“The findings of the report demonstrate an urgent need to focus efforts on building service systems that support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to grow up safe and well, with every opportunity for success.

“We welcome the commitment of the government to work with the Coalition of Peaks to design and deliver the programs and services that are needed to close the gap. The commitment of the Federal Government to the Closing the Gap reform priorities is critical.

“In the new Closing the Gap agreement, these priorities will focus on partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, building our community-controlled services, ensuring the cultural safety of mainstream services and improving data to make sure it is relevant and measures what matters to outcomes for our communities.

“Our culture, Country and community are part of who we are, and it is so important for our children to feel connected to culture and community. Our services go above and beyond to fight the disadvantage that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children face and support our families. We must be at the centre of efforts to improve the lives of our children.”

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For more information please visit www.snaicc.org.au or contact:

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About SNAICC – National Voice for our Children:

SNAICC – National Voice for our Children is the national non-governmental peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. We work for the fulfilment of the rights of our children, in particular to ensure their safety, development and wellbeing.

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 has 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 Board of Directors made up of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled children and family services.

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