



SNAICC  
National Voice for our Children  
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## **SNAICC CALLS FOR URGENT ACTION TO SUPPORT ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE IN COVID-19 CRISIS**

SNAICC – National Voice for our Children calls on the Federal Government to take urgent action to protect early childhood education and care services impacted by the COVID-19 outbreak, and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and services.

Unlike schools, early childhood education and care services are yet to have been forced to close under state and territory government regulations. However, some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early years services have made the decision to close temporarily due to decreased attendance and in order to protect vulnerable community members and Elders. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are particularly vulnerable to COVID19.

It is crucial that for as long as this pandemic lasts, the Federal Government suspends the Child Care Subsidy system of funding and instead directly funds our services. The Child Care Subsidy system is inadequate to deal with the reality facing our early years services, families and communities. The sector and the government’s administrative and funding mechanisms are overwhelmed and unable to respond to this fast moving pandemic.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood education and care services, such as Multifunctional Aboriginal Children’s Services (MACS) and Aboriginal Child and Family Centres (ACFCs) are fundamental hubs for our families, as they provide culturally safe wraparound supports that ensures the safety, health and wellbeing for our children and communities. These services play a vital role in supporting our children, who are 2.5 times more likely to be developmentally vulnerable than non-Indigenous children when they start school.

Central to the existence of our services and the education of our children is a strong team of early years educators. However, many of our services have already had to let staff go during this crisis due to the Child Care Subsidy system and lower attendance rates not providing adequate income. Federal and state governments must fund our services to retain their staff. When this crisis is over services need to be able to re-open with their strong teams of early educators.

SNAICC CEO Richard Weston explains, “This is having a devastating impact on our services. If they don’t receive the Child Care Subsidy, they’re unable to pay staff, and many services have had to let staff go and close or are at a point nearing collapse.”

Hardship has been experienced by our early education services at a variety of levels.

Mr Weston said, “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early years staff are getting abused at supermarkets because they need to buy lots of stock to look after our kids. In some of our rural and remote locations there is no toilet paper, gloves or cleaning supplies in town, and the prices of fruit and vegetables have tripled. The precarious Child Care Subsidy funding system means services can’t even afford to buy basics and are having to go without.”

However, Mr Weston said, “Despite the immense challenges our services are facing, through their tireless commitment, dedication and passion they are continuing to do excellent work for our children and families.”

“Our early years services have shared with us countless examples of the creative ways they are educating our children remotely, including through the creation of live digital videos and activities.”

SNAICC has been participating in discussions with the Department of Education to bring these issues to its attention. In spite of its best intentions, it appears that the government is struggling to respond to the sector’s needs.

SNAICC urges the Federal Government to recognise the importance of our services in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in early childhood education and care, during and after this crisis.

Mr Weston concludes, “Our early years services go above and beyond for our children, and are just as important as schools. We must put in place immediate measures to support them to ensure they can continue their valuable work for our children and families when this crisis is over.”

**ENDS/**

For interviews with Richard Weston or one of our early years service members, please contact:

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For more information visit [www.snaicc.org.au](http://www.snaicc.org.au)

***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.