



SNAICC
National Voice for our Children
(Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation)
Melbourne Polytechnic
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SNAICC CALLS FOR URGENT TARGETED SUPPORT FOR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE SERVICES IN COVID-19 CRISIS

SNAICC acknowledges the Federal Government's recent announcement to support children, families and services impacted by the COVID-19 outbreak with the Early Childhood Education and Care Relief Package, coupled with the JobKeeper support package.

However, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early years services remain vulnerable in spite of the support package and have expressed concern about the complexities around the new measures.

The support package ensures Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families can access early childhood education and care (ECEC) at no cost, relieving the burden for families during this period of uncertainty.

Yet fundamental concerns remain about the new funding model and how the various types of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services can keep our children, families and communities safe during the outbreak.

Early childhood education and care services have been advised that in order to receive government assistance they must stay open.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison has provided a strong public health message that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people 50 years and over with underlying health conditions are vulnerable to COVID-19, and have been directed to stay home and self-isolate. In comparison, non-Indigenous people 70 years and over with underlying health conditions are given the same directive.

SNAICC raises the question of how the Government will ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees at these services will be kept safe to keep these centres running?

SNAICC CEO Richard Weston said,

“There is a worrying lack of access to essential products and cleaning supplies in regional and remote locations for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood services, which is essential to protect vulnerable community members and Elders.

“Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early years services are doing their best to implement strict hygiene practices but without access to basic cleaning products they are operating under dangerous circumstances.

“The Government needs to ensure that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander early years services have a secure supply of health and hygiene essentials in order to safely run their services and appropriately care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, staff and community.”

The package to support services with 50% of their total income is also flawed. SNAICC has heard from services that will not be able to operate on half of their usual income, with a limited number of educators.

Mr Weston continued, “It is unrealistic and unsafe for our services to be forced to operate on half of their usual income. And it may force our vital services to close their doors and lose their valuable workforce.”

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood education and care services act as fundamental hubs for vulnerable children by providing culturally safe wraparound support that ensures their safety, health and wellbeing. The services play a vital role in providing the supports our children, who are 2.5 times more likely to be developmentally vulnerable than non-Indigenous children when they start school, absolutely need.

Mr Weston said,

“Urgent action is required to provide for the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood education and care services.

“While the majority of our children and families are thriving, SNAICC has consistently highlighted the danger in mainstreaming Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services. The changes made to the early years sector funding model back in 2018 does not align well with the inherent vulnerability of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities.”

SNAICC calls for clearer guidelines and a direct point of contact about the temporary funding package, as well as special measures for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services such as access to essential supplies, special grants, and consideration based on their unique requirements.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shone a light on an ineffective funding model for early childhood education and care.

The Federal Government must acknowledge that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services are different, and deserve to be treated differently if we are to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families can thrive, maintaining their connection to culture, Country and kin.

ENDS/

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For more information visit 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.