



SNAICC
National Voice for our Children
(Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation)
Melbourne Polytechnic
Level 7, 20 Otter Street
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RAPID RETURN TO CHILD CARE SUBSIDY TO LEAVE ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CHILDREN AND FAMILIES VULNERABLE

SNAICC is concerned that the Federal Government's recent announcement to roll back support for early childhood education and care (ECEC) services impacted by coronavirus (COVID-19) will have negative short and long-term impacts on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early years services, our children and families.

The Early Childhood Education and Care Relief Package, coupled with the JobKeeper support package, was welcomed by early years services and families in supporting them through this difficult time with free child care and funding direct to services.

However, the recent announcement by Minister for Education, Dan Tehan, of a return to business as usual fails to acknowledge that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families require additional support through the long-term recovery from COVID-19. It is a missed opportunity to address the fundamental system changes that are needed to improve outcomes for our children.

The phase out of all relief measures by 4 October is out of step with the Federal Government's own statements regarding the long-term impact of COVID-19 on the economy.

The Minister's announcement that JobKeeper will end for early childhood sector workers on 20 July is also highly concerning.

SNAICC CEO Richard Weston says,

"Workers in the ECEC sector are already underpaid and under-valued for the vital contribution that they make to the education and development of our future generations. They now face even more uncertainty in a sector that will continue to feel the social and economic impacts of COVID-19 for years to come."

The announcement of transition payments of 25% of pre-COVID-19 subsidy income up until 27 September is a positive commitment in supporting our vital early years services and will allow some services to remain viable. However, attendance rates are likely to be unpredictable and many services will be vulnerable to financial losses and difficulties to retain staff if they can no longer access JobKeeper.

"With the announcement of free child care, some of our early childhood services have also reported that there has been an increase in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families enrolling their child into an ECEC service for the first time and that some children experiencing vulnerability have attended for more hours," Mr Weston adds.

“It is crucial that we maintain this engagement with our children and families, and it is worrying that with no measures to support these families, children will lose access at a time when they are facing financial difficulties due to the pandemic.”

The relaxation of the Child Care Subsidy Activity Test until 4 October announced by the Minister only applies to families who met the requirements before COVID-19. The measures don't support families who were out of work before the pandemic, and who will now find it even more difficult to gain employment due to the impacts of COVID-19.

The Activity Test unjustly excludes some of the most vulnerable children from early learning based on their parents' levels of work or study. This exclusion will only be worse as families face increased unemployment over the coming years.

Mr Weston continues,

“The Activity Test is a major barrier to families and children accessing early childhood education and care, and SNAICC has long called for it to be scrapped. The system should be focused on supporting our children to thrive – it shouldn't only be about providing child minding for working parents.”

SNAICC urges the Federal Government to reflect on the damaging impacts the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is having on our young children, families and the services that support them.

We call on the Government to develop long-term reforms to support early childhood development and address the needs of vulnerable children who can benefit most from early education.

Long-term reform measures should include:

- A minimum 30 hours per week of free or 95% subsidised child care for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children as a measure to Closing the Gap in ECEC attendance and outcomes for our children.
- An end to the activity test that excludes vulnerable children and families.
- A dedicated funding program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ECEC services that recognised their unique role to provide culturally strong integrated supports to children, families and communities.
- A local workforce development initiative to fund and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander traineeships and attainment of qualifications.

The Minister's short-term plan to return to business as usual is not good enough for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Mr Weston concludes, “The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the Government's current user-pays funding model as ineffective. Our children deserve to have easy access to early childhood education and care so they have the opportunity to realise their full potential.”

“The new Closing the Gap Agreement that aims to achieve better early childhood outcomes for our children will be undermined if we can't support our children and families now and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic.”

– Richard Weston, SNAICC CEO

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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.

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