



SNAICC – National Voice for our Children
(Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation)
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REPORT HIGHLIGHTS ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CHILDREN INCREASINGLY DISCONNECTED FROM FAMILY AND CULTURE

SNAICC – National Voice for our Children is deeply concerned about the increasing number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care being placed away from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and carers, as revealed in a new report released by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) today.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle Indicators 2018–19 report measures progress towards implementing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle – a principle that aims to ensure the value of culture to the safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children is embedded in policy and practice.

The Principle aims to increase self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in child welfare matters. It has five elements – prevention, partnership, participation, placement and connection.

SNAICC has long called for improved reporting and measurement of implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle and is pleased to see this new data report released. However, the report highlights many gaps in the available data that need to be urgently addressed.

The report finds that at 30 June 2019 of the 17,979 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children living in out-of-home care, 63% were living with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander or non-Indigenous relatives or kin or other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander caregivers. Only 43.4% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care were living with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers, which has fallen from 47.9% over the two years previous.

Richard Weston is SNAICC's CEO and Co-Chair of the Family Matters campaign, to eliminate the over-representation of our children in out-of-home care.

Mr Weston says, "It is worrying that more than half of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are living without an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carer. These children are at high risk of losing connections to culture, family and community that are vital to their safety and wellbeing."

The AIHW report only reports against two of the elements of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle, "placement" and "connection", highlighting limitations in data.

Importantly, it does not account for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

who have been removed by child protection authorities and are living away from their parents and families. Over recent years child protection authorities have removed children who have been placed into “permanent care” with a third party (ordinarily a foster or kinship carer) from the count of children in out-of-home care.

This move has effectively made thousands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children that have been removed, invisible in the system, and is strongly opposed by SNAICC and many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations across the country.

The new *National Agreement on Closing the Gap* includes a target to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care by 45% by 2031. Currently Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are approximately 9.7 times more likely to be in out-of-home care than non-Indigenous children, when children on permanent care orders are included in the count.

The report also shows that only 19% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who were considered to have a possibility of reunification, were reunified, compared with 26% of non-Indigenous children.

Mr Weston says,

“Our children are not just numbers to be wiped off government books. We hope with the new Closing the Gap agreement, we can work with governments to ensure investment in prevention and early intervention is prioritised to support our children and families.

“We must increase our efforts to safely reunify children to their parents, otherwise the new Closing the Gap target could move quickly out of reach.”

The report also highlights that many vital data points cannot yet be measured against and require urgent attention. This includes access to prevention services, expenditure on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations and participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in ‘family-led decision-making’ in child protection.

“Through the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*, governments have committed to improve data so we can get a clear picture of how the system is impacting the lives of our children.

“We also must invest in Aboriginal community-controlled organisations to support our families and ensure culturally strong and safe supports keep our families together.”

– SNAICC CEO and Family Matters Co-Chair Richard Weston

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-government peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. SNAICC works for the fulfilment of the rights of our children in particular to ensure their safety, development and wellbeing.

Founded in 1981, SNAICC was called Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care until it was changed to SNAICC – National Voice for our Children.

About Family Matters

Family Matters is Australia's national campaign to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people grow up safe and cared for in family, community, and culture.

The Family Matters campaign aims to eliminate the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care by 2040.

The campaign is driven by a national Family Matters Leadership Group and supported by a Strategic Alliance.

The Family Matters Report 2020 will be launched online on
Tuesday 17 November 2020.

Join us on social media and find out at www.familymatters.org.au