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MIXED BAG FOR CHILDREN IN LATEST CLOSING THE GAP DATA

The latest data on Closing the Gap outcomes shows a mixed result in terms of reaching targets for children and young people.

Data released today by the Productivity Commission shows two of three targets are on track, but the number of children starting formal schooling years assessed as being developmentally on track has declined alarmingly.

SNAICC CEO Catherine Liddle said it was heartening to see more children enrolled in early years education at a rate exceeding their non-Indigenous peers.

The Productivity Commission data shows that in 2021, 96.7 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were enrolled in preschool programs for the year before school.

“While this is excellent news, it’s very concerning to see the numbers of children starting formal schooling years assessed as being developmentally on track decrease markedly” Ms Liddle said.

“This demonstrates pretty clearly that focusing just on children being enrolled in pre-school isn’t working for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. All the evidence shows that we need to focus earlier on children aged 0-3.

“It’s those first three years that are so critical to setting children up for the best start in life.

“It’s why SNAICC has been calling for fundamental reform to early childhood education and care. The current model is failing to ensure our children are on track when they start school.”

With the Federal Government making early years reform a priority, any changes must take into account the unique needs and barriers that face Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

“It’s also positive to see the rates of our young people ending up in detention are declining.

“But the figures are still awful – an Aboriginal young person is still almost 18 times more likely to be in detention than a non-Indigenous young person.”

The Productivity Commission has also released new data developed by SNAICC on the number of integrated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early years services.

It shows a small increase from 86 to 99 community-controlled integrated early years services between 2016 and 2021.

“This will help because these services are developed by community to meet the needs of community. But much more needs to be done to grow and enable their role,” Ms Liddle said.

“We need a dedicated program to build and increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander integrated early years services because we know these services work for children and families.”

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