

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

**29 November 2023**

### **ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CHILDREN AND FAMILIES PAYING THE PRICE FOR GOVERNMENT INACTION, REPORT FINDS**

An annual national report has found child protection systems are failing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, exposing them to ongoing harm and trauma at increasing and unacceptable rates.

SNAICC – National Voice for our Children today released the 2023 Family Matters Report, highlighting progress towards achieving the outcome that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people grow up safe and cared for in family, community, and culture.

Tragically, that goal seems to be further out of reach, with the Family Matters report finding the numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care (OOHC) continue to grow.

At 30 June 2022, there were 22,328 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care (OOHC), with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children 10.5 times more likely to be in out-of-home care than non-Indigenous children. This is an increase in both the number and over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in care.

SNAICC CEO Catherine Liddle said the current trend was completely unacceptable, calling on all governments to take substantial and immediate action to keep children safe and turn around the rising tide of family separations.

“Removing our children from family, culture and community causes ongoing harm, and too often does not lead to safer outcomes,” Ms Liddle said.

“It is devastating that less than half of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in care are living with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers, which is a sharp decline from over 65% ten years ago.

“The over-representation of our children in out-of-home care is increasingly frustrating because we have the evidence and the solutions to turn this around.

“This report shows the immediate and effective impact Government can make by appointing a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children’s Commissioner. It is critical this Commissioner has the legislative power to investigate and make recommendations on issues impacting our children.

“The report also calls for the Commonwealth, States and Territories to co-invest in a new national program for ACCO family support services that shifts responses towards prevention and early support services that will help to reduce child removals.

“It’s time we change the story and do things differently if we want to see brighter futures for our children.

Current trends indicate that the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap’s* Target 12 (to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care by 45% by 2031) will not be met. A substantial transformation of child protection systems and practice is needed to change course and achieve this target.

“Closing the gap for our children requires genuine effort from Governments and mainstream organisations to transform the way they work with us.

“With increased ACCO leadership, models like the Connected Beginnings Program are changing these outcomes for the next generation by leveraging the expertise of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to support children and families with school readiness and educational support to close the gap.

“We have seen positive changes with non-Indigenous organisations like Life Without Barriers starting to transition the care of around 900 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children to community-controlled organisations.

“The transfer of authority to ACCOs to make child protection decisions in some jurisdiction is also having a huge impact, increasing reunifications and connecting children to family, community and culture.

“The National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children 2021–2031, Safe and Supported, offers a framework for protecting children that was designed with us. The Framework and its Action Plans require substantial new resources and dedicated effort to be fully implemented.

“We know community designed and led initiatives produce better outcomes for our children.”

SNAICC urges all governments, State, Territory and Federal, to take urgent action on the evidence and solutions outlined in the 2023 Family Matters Report or risk causing further harm to generations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

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**Background:** *The Family Matters report is an annual report that highlights progress towards ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people grow up safe and cared for in family, community and culture. Eliminating the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care within a generation, by 2040, is a core part of achieving this goal.*

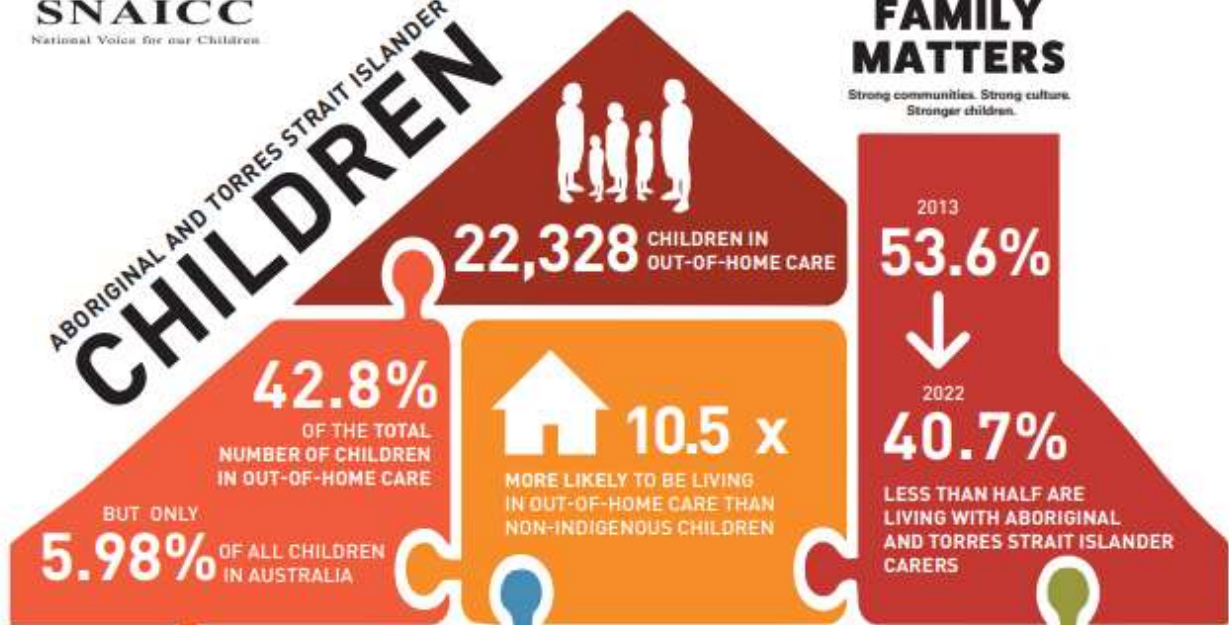
*The report describes data relating to children’s interactions with child protection systems and provides a projection of how over-representation is likely to increase over the next 10 years if current conditions are maintained. It analyses and presents data relating to the structural drivers that contribute to children and families encountering the child protection system (including trauma, systemic racism, socio-economic disadvantage, access to safe and stable housing, exposure to family violence, access to disability supports and substance use) and identifies barriers and opportunities in responding to issues impacting children’s development, wellbeing and safety.*

**Conclusion and recommendations:** *Family Matters highlights the need for action and accountability to deliver solutions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. Data presented in the report highlight the need for transformative change and highlight the solutions that need systematic support and sustainable funding.*

*Critical to achieving better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families are accountability mechanisms that centre children. This is why SNAICC is calling for a National Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children that can be a voice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people and hold governments to account.*



ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER  
**CHILDREN**



ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER  
**FAMILIES**

**ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER FAMILIES:**

- EXPERIENCE INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA FROM THE STOLEN GENERATIONS
- ARE 11 TIMES MORE LIKELY TO ACCESS SPECIALIST HOMELESSNESS SERVICES
- EXPERIENCE LOWER EMPLOYMENT RATES AND LOWER LEVELS OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

**OUR CHILDREN:**

- AGED 0-5 YEARS ATTEND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE AT 65% THE RATE OF NON-INDIGENOUS CHILDREN
- 2.6 TIMES MORE LIKELY TO BE DEVELOPMENTALLY VULNERABLE IN TWO OR MORE CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT DOMAINS BY AGE 5

**A CYCLE OF DISADVANTAGE**



THE NATIONAL AGREEMENT

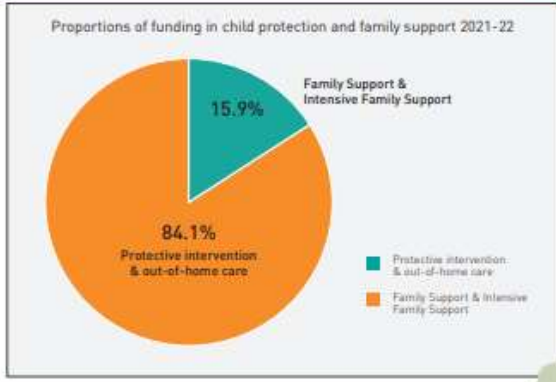
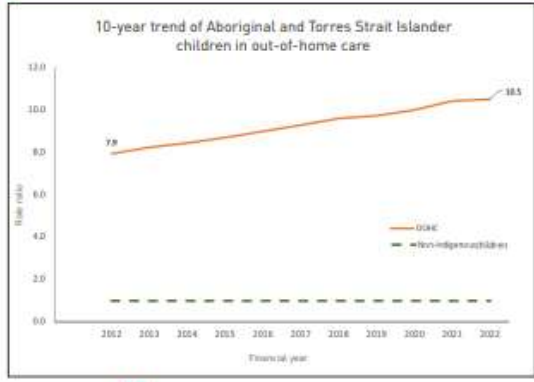
# CLOSING THE GAP NEW TARGET

BY **2031** **REDUCE** BY **45%**

THE OVER-REPRESENTATION OF OUR CHILDREN  
IN OUT-OF-HOME CARE

## TURN THE TIDE

PROJECTED TO INCREASE BY 39% BY 2033



# ABORIGINAL-LED SOLUTIONS

Family Matters calls for investment in community-led solutions and a national commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people to eliminate the over-representation of our children in out-of-home care

BLOCK	BUILDING BLOCK 1	BUILDING BLOCK 2	BUILDING BLOCK 3	BUILDING BLOCK 4
	<b>Access to universal and targeted services</b>	<b>Participation and control in decision-making</b>	<b>Culturally safe and responsive policies and practice</b>	<b>Accountable governments and services</b>
<b>SOLUTION</b>	Invest in community-controlled organisations to provide culturally safe early intervention and prevention services	Establish resourced legislative roles for participation of community-controlled organisations in all child protection decisions	Permanency planning that supports Aboriginal child rights. Invest in Aboriginal-led family reunification programs	Establish and resource commissioners and peak bodies for our children. Build partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to oversee data and outcomes for children
<b>EXAMPLE</b>	Aboriginal-led early intervention and prevention services and holistic integrated early years services such as MACS and ACFCs	Delegation of child protection decision-making (Qld and Vic.) and Aboriginal-led out-of-home care and kinship programs (eg NSW, Vic., NT and SA)	Keeping families together sooner, more often, and for longer, through community-led family reunification programs (eg Qld and Vic.)	Aboriginal commissioners for children in each state and territory (SA, Vic., Qld) and deputy guardian (NSW)

2023 REPORT CARD SNAPSHOT

	HEADLINE INDICATOR	BUILDING BLOCK 1	BUILDING BLOCK 2	BUILDING BLOCK 3	BUILDING BLOCK 4
	Over-representation in OoHC (rate)	Universal and targeted services	Participation, control in decision-making	Culturally safe and responsive systems	Accountability
ACT	14				
NSW	10.5				
NT	14.8				
QLD	9.2				
SA	11.4				
TAS	5.2				
VIC	17.3				
WA	19.1				

KEY: Very poor (Red), Poor (Orange), Promising/Improving (Yellow), Stronger practice/outcomes (Green)