

# **SNAICC 2024-25 PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION TO THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT**

January 2024

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## **Acknowledgement**

SNAICC shows respect by acknowledging the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and their continuing connections to land, waters and communities. SNAICC head office is located on the lands of the Wurundjeri People of the Kulin Nation, and SNAICC operates nationally. SNAICC acknowledges Traditional Owners of all lands and waters across this continent, and pays respects to Elders past and present. We acknowledge and respect their continued connection to Country, care for community and practice of culture for generations uncounted.

## **About SNAICC**

SNAICC is the national non-government peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. We work for the fulfilment of the rights of our children, to ensure their safety, development, and well-being.

SNAICC has an active membership of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-based child care agencies, Multi-functional Aboriginal Children's Services, crèches, long day care child care services, pre-schools, early childhood education services, early childhood support organisations, family support services, foster care agencies, family reunification services, family group homes, services for young people at risk, community groups and voluntary associations, government agencies and individual supporters.

Since 1981, SNAICC has been a passionate national voice representing the interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. SNAICC champions the principles of community control and self-determination as the means for sustained improvements for children and families, which has been at the heart of SNAICC's work — whether on child protection and wellbeing or early childhood education and development. Our work comprises policy, advocacy, and sector development. We also work with non-Indigenous services alongside Australian, State and Territory Governments to improve how agencies design and deliver supports and services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

As the national peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, SNAICC consults with and is informed by its member organisations and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders to ensure the experiences, needs and aspirations of our leaders, our sector and ultimately, our children and families are the foundation for our submissions and recommendations.

## Executive Summary

Within Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children experience greater vulnerability than non-Indigenous children as demonstrated by their overrepresentation in the child protection and youth justice systems and worse health and education outcomes. This greater vulnerability has been created by the continuing impacts of colonisation that have caused generations of harm and trauma for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children experience the vulnerabilities that come from being children alongside the vulnerabilities created by colonisation, which compound across the social determinants of health and wellbeing. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's rights are critical for healing from the ongoing legacy of colonisation and for the continuation of the world's longest surviving cultures.

Successive governments have committed to addressing these inequities, most recently through the 2020 National Agreement on Closing the Gap. Despite these commitments, the Productivity Commission's first review of the National Agreement shows that governments are not adequately delivering the changes needed to make a meaningful difference in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander life outcomes.

SNAICC calls on the Australian Government to bring to life the commitments they have made through the National Agreement on Closing the Gap by investing in the policy reform, programs and structural change needed to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families to heal and to thrive. Some of the proposals below would also help alleviate cost of living pressures felt by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families by increasing service supports and lowering the cost of early education and care.

SNAICC is calling for the following proposals to be funded by the Australian Government in its upcoming Budget:

1. Establish a National Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People
2. Abolish the Activity Test and provide a minimum early childhood education and care entitlement of at least 30 hours per week for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.
3. Introduce a new funding approach for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led ECEC and integrated early years services
4. Provide ongoing funding for ECEC backbone services through SNAICC Early Years Support
5. Fully resource *Safe and Supported: the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021-2031*
6. Create a new national program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led prevention and early support that will reverse the trend of children entering out-of-home care

7. Invest in keeping Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, children and young people safe from domestic and family violence.
8. Invest in the viability and membership engagement capacity of SNAICC as Peak body, and a national voice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

## Strategic Context

### Self-Determination

SNAICC advocates for the full enactment of self-determination in all legislation, policies, and strategies. Self-determination describes the right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to autonomy and self-governance.<sup>1</sup> The United Nations Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous People under UNDRIP connects the capacity of Indigenous peoples to meet their children's needs with their ability to exercise self-determination<sup>2</sup>.

The Australian Government has taken important steps towards recognising the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to self-determination in matters relating to children. *Safe and Supported: The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021-2031* commits to progressive systems transformation that has Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination at its centre and defines self-determination as:

*a collective right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to determine and control their own destiny. It is a right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to exercise autonomy in their own affairs and to maintain and strengthen distinct political, legal, economic, social and cultural institutions.*<sup>3</sup>

For too long, governments have decided what works and what doesn't for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities without delivering meaningful and tangible positive change for our children and families. Enacting self-determination is critical to designing and implementing effective policies that achieve better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

### National Agreement on Closing the Gap

In July 2020, the Australian Government, all state and territory governments, and the Coalition of Peaks signed the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (National Agreement). The National Agreement seeks to overcome the entrenched inequalities faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, pushing for equality in life outcomes for all Australians.

The National Agreement is built around four Priority Reforms to change the way governments work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, organisations, and people across the country. The Priority Reforms are based on what Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been saying for a long time is needed to improve the lives of our people, and have been committed to by all Australian, state and territory governments.

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<sup>1</sup> SNAICC 2022, 'The Family Matters Report 2022: Measuring trends to turn the tide on the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care'. Retrieved from: <https://www.familymatters.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/20221123-Family-Matters-Report-2022-1.pdf> pg. 90.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Human Rights Council 2021, 'Rights of the Indigenous child under the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples'. Retrieved from: [G2121979.pdf \(un.org\)](https://www.unhcr.org/refugees/files/2021/02/G2121979.pdf), pg. 2

<sup>3</sup> Department of Social Services 2021, 'Safe and Supported: the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021-2031 (the National Framework)'. Retrieved from: [https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/12\\_2021/dess5016-national-framework-protecting-childrenaccessible.pdf](https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/12_2021/dess5016-national-framework-protecting-childrenaccessible.pdf), pg. 51.

The Priority Reforms must inform all government action including legislation, policy, and practice, whether these actions are targeted for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples or impact them as part of the general population. The Priority Reforms are listed below.

**1. Formal Partnerships and Shared Decision Making**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are empowered to share decision-making authority with governments to accelerate policy and place-based progress on Closing the Gap through formal partnership arrangements.

**2. Building the Community Controlled Sector**

There is a strong and sustainable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sector delivering high quality services to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across the country.

**3. Transforming Government Organisations**

Governments, their organisations and their institutions are accountable for Closing the Gap and are culturally safe and responsive to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including through the services they fund.

**4. Shared Access to Data and Information at a Regional Level**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have access to, and the capability to use, locally relevant data and information to set and monitor the implementation of efforts to close the gap, their priorities and drive their own development.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Australian Government, 'Closing the Gap Priority Reforms'. Retrieved from: <https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/national-agreement/priority-reforms>

## **Focus area: Child rights and wellbeing**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people have a distinct set of rights which include the rights owed to all adults and children as well as unique rights as Indigenous Peoples. These rights are drawn from international human rights frameworks.

These rights need to be protected and upheld by governments through implementation in legislation, policy and practice and supported by robust accountability mechanisms that centre the rights and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. However, even when there are policies and legislation in place designed to improve life outcomes or protect children's rights, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children rarely enjoy these equitably. Given the vulnerability of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's rights, SNAICC supports national efforts to strengthen the discourse and protection of human rights in Australia. SNAICC supports the introduction of a federal Human Rights Act that would compel all governments to consider the human rights impacts of legislation, policy, and practice in a way that the current frameworks do not.

In addition to these frameworks, SNAICC is calling for the funding of explicit mechanisms that will increase focus and accountability for upholding the rights, wellbeing and safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

### **Establish a National Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children need a dedicated National Commissioner to highlight their needs and rights and hold governments and other agencies accountable. All governments have committed to strengthening government and sector accountability for their role in upholding the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and achieving the Closing the Gap targets. A National Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People, independent from government, fully resourced and empowered by legislation, will address the gap in accountability created by the current incomplete patchwork of accountability mechanisms across the country. In particular, it will address the gap that exists at a national level where there is currently no dedicated accountability mechanism for the Australian Government on its responsibilities and obligations to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

#### **Rationale:**

A dedicated focus on advancing the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people is essential to end the intergenerational cycle of disadvantage and progress equality for future generations. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people often fall through the cracks of the federal system – children are negatively impacted by 'buck passing' between the federal and state and territory governments, as well as between government



departments and agencies. The Productivity Commission’s recent draft report reviewing the National Agreement on Closing the Gap found a significant accountability gap that is created by there being no dedicated accountability mechanism that has all three of the following elements: independence from government, an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific focus and appropriate statutory powers.<sup>5</sup>

Dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children’s Commissioners have already demonstrated success in multiple jurisdictions, assisting in identifying and driving critical systems and practice transformation. Around half of Australia’s states and territories have established or committed to establish a dedicated Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, but there a significant need for a national role to address the lack of accountability and coordination on these critical issues at the national level.

A national commissioner will play a vital role in providing a dedicated voice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people and supporting strategies for more effective collaboration and coordination both between and within governments. They will be responsible for ensuring accountability for the Australian Government, investigating, and shining a light on key child rights issues, monitoring progress of reforms and brokering solutions to persistent failures to protect our children’s rights.

Based on best practice state/territory models and international standards for human rights institutions, the National Commissioner’s office, in addition to core operational functions, will require resourcing and enabling legislation for accountability and reporting functions, data/research and evidence development, complaints investigation and handling and community and stakeholder engagement.

SNAICC has undertaken extensive research in partnership with King and Wood Mallesons to detail model options for establishing a National Commissioner, providing a strong evidence base for the value of the role and guidance for next steps for implementation.<sup>6</sup> The Options Paper proposes a recommended model for the National Commissioner, by outlining key requirements for the role, mapped to the United Nations Principles Relating to the Status of National Human Rights Institutions (the Paris Principles), and drawing on the elements of best practice from national and international models.

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<sup>5</sup> Australian Government Productivity Commission 2023, ‘Review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap Draft Report’. Retrieved from: <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/current/closing-the-gap-review/draft/closing-the-gap-review-draft.pdf> pgs.69-70

<sup>6</sup> SNAICC and King & Wood Mallesons 2020, ‘Options Paper: Models for a National Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People’. Retrieved from: <https://www.snaicc.org.au/call-for-a-national-commissioner-for-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-children-and-young-people-options-paper/>

Paris Principle	Key requirements for a National Commissioner
Entrenchment in law	The National Commissioner should be established via standalone federal legislation with sufficient detail to ensure a clear mandate and independence. This should include the National Commissioner's role, functions, powers, funding, lines of accountability, appointment mechanisms and term of office. If the National Commissioner is to be mandated to receive, consider or resolve complaints, the enacting legislation should set out the necessary functions and powers required for the National Commissioner to adequately fulfil this mandate.
Human rights mandate	The National Commissioner should be legislatively empowered to protect and promote the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in Australia. In particular, the National Commissioner should be mandated to consider the implementation of rights enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and other relevant bodies of the international human rights system. The National Commissioner should be empowered to conduct own-motion inquiries and investigations into any matter affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in Australia, including any violations of the rights of those children.
Cooperation with other human rights bodies	The National Commissioner should develop, formalise, and maintain working relationships with other domestic institutions established for the promotion and protection of the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, such as SNAICC.
Ensuring pluralism	Consistent with best practice in self-determination the National Commissioner should be an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person. The office of the National Commissioner should comprise staff representative of the diverse segments of Australian society, with consideration of gender, ethnicity, and minority status.
Selection & appointment of decision-making body	The establishing legislation should set out a clear, transparent, and participatory selection and appointment process for the National Commissioner based on identified and objective criteria that is publicly available. Consistent with best practice in self-determination, the legislation should also mandate that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people be involved in the selection process for the National Commissioner.
Independence from government	The National Commissioner should be independent from Government, be free from political interference and stipulate clear details relating to tenure.
Adequacy of funding	The National Commissioner should have both financial independence and adequate resources to perform the mandated duties.
Public reporting	The National Commissioner should be mandated to publish annual and special reports, setting out the National Commissioner's opinions, recommendations, and proposals with respect to matters affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. These reports should be publicly available and tabled with parliament, with requirements that the issues identified in these reports be discussed and considered by the legislature and responded to in a timely manner. Preferably, the National Commissioner should be entitled to table these reports in Parliament directly, as opposed to going through the Executive. The National Commissioner should also be empowered to follow up on any action taken in response to the recommendations contained in its reports.

**Cost:** \$5,209,500 million per annum, recurrent, indexed annually to CPI.

## Focus area: Early Learning and Development

Successive policy failures mean Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children experience disproportionate disadvantage in development and education outcomes in the early years. The AEDC shows that one in three Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are developmentally vulnerable in one or more domains compared to one in five children overall.<sup>7</sup>

There is evidence that children's participation in quality early learning environments positively impacts their life outcomes and supports them to realise their full potential.<sup>8</sup> Early childhood development programs provide opportunities for children to learn and develop within the context of the families and communities in which they grow.<sup>9</sup> This has an even greater impact for children who have, or are, experiencing disadvantage, positively impacting school achievement, employment and social behaviours.<sup>10</sup>

Investing in early learning has a critical role in preventing engagement of children and families with tertiary systems such as child protection and youth justice. These systems are costly and compound and perpetuate harm for children. Extensive evidence and Australia's National Framework for addressing child protecting intervention (*Safe and Supported*) point to universal supports, including early education and care, as critical to breaking intergenerational cycles of intervention and trauma for children and families.

Early learning environments play a crucial role to ensure families receive early and targeted supports to address complex needs. As a universal service offering they provide an ideal entry point that connects families to broader social support services. Evidence also demonstrates that quality early learning programs are parent and family focused and target improvements in the home learning and supportive environment for children.<sup>11</sup> Engagement and support for parents in their role of providing health care, education and parenting to their child is as essential in achieving positive child outcomes as early childhood education delivered directly to the children.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) 2021, '2021 AEDC National Report'. Retrieved from:

<https://www.aedc.gov.au/resources/detail/2021-aedc-national-report>

<sup>8</sup> Moore, T., Arefadib, N., Deery, A., & West, S. 2017, 'The First Thousand Days: An Evidence Paper'. Retrieved from:

[https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2017-09/apo-nid108431\\_1.pdf](https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2017-09/apo-nid108431_1.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Brennan, D. 2013, 'Joining the Dots: Program and Funding Options for Integrated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Services. Options paper prepared for Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC)'. Retrieved from:

<https://www.snaicc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/03244.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Black, M. M., Walker, S. P., Fernald, L. C. H., Andersen, C. T., DiGirolamo, A. M., Lu, C., ... Grantham-McGregor, S. (2017). Early childhood development coming of age: Science through the life course. *Lancet Series Advancing Early Childhood Development: From Science to Scale*, 389 (10064), 77–90. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(16\)31390-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(16)31390-3); Britto, P. R., Lye, S. J., Proulx, K., Yousafzai, A. K., Matthews, S. G., Vaivada, T., ... Bhutta, Z. A. (2017). Nurturing care: Promoting early childhood development. *Lancet*, 389(10064), 91–102.

<sup>12</sup> Bowes, J., & Grace, R. (2014). *Review of early childhood parenting, education and health intervention programs for Indigenous children and families in Australia*. Issues paper No. 8. Produced for the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse. Canberra, ACT / Melbourne, Vic.: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare / Australian Institute of Family Studies.

Ensuring the highest quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) services and other critical supports for our children and families is essential, requiring high levels of cultural safety within mainstream services, and increased availability of ACCO services. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ECEC services are particularly important as they work from the strengths of children's culture to build and reinforce positive self-identity while supporting the wellbeing of children and families experiencing vulnerability in the community. These services prioritise access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children not accessing, or unlikely to access, mainstream services, and through their unique features overcome many of the identified service access barriers our families experience. They are holistic and responsive to child and family needs, including integrated language development, speech and hearing supports, as well as broader health, family support, capacity building and early intervention.

### **Abolish the Activity Test and provide a minimum early childhood education and care entitlement of 30 hours per week for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.**

The Family Assistance Legislation Amendment (Cheaper Child Care) Bill 2022 guarantees all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children 36 hours per fortnight of care subsidised to 90% for all families earning \$80,000 or less. SNAICC recommends this entitlement be increased to 60 hours per fortnight, concurrent with increasing the subsidy to at least 95%, or preferably 100%.

SNAICC supports the calls of many leading experts and sector organisations for the provision of free universal early childhood education and care to build a more prosperous, equitable and sustainable future for Australia's children. We consider this proposal to be an interim measure which supports progress towards Closing the Gap targets until a free universal system is implemented.

#### **Rationale:**

International evidence suggests that consistent and early intervention between the ages of 0-5 years has the greatest positive impact on developmental outcomes, with some evidence to suggest that birth to three years may be the critical window for child development<sup>13</sup>. In addition, research suggests the need for high quality educational support prior to pre-school, particularly for children who have experienced disadvantage<sup>14</sup>.

The Australian Government is not on track to meet childhood development targets under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap by 2031, and the 2021 AEDC census noted a reversal in

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<sup>13</sup>Early Childhood Australia and SNAICC 2019, 'Discussion Paper Ensuring Equality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children in the Early Years'. Retrieved from: <https://www.snaicc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/SNAICC-ECA-Discussion-Paper-Feb2019.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> SNAICC 2019, 'SNAICC Submission to the Australian National Audit Office Examination of the Design and Implementation of the Child Care Package'. Retrieved from: [https://www.snaicc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/SNAICC-ChildCarePackageAuditSubmission\\_May2019.pdf](https://www.snaicc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/SNAICC-ChildCarePackageAuditSubmission_May2019.pdf)

the trend towards improvement in the developmental domains of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, with only 34.3% percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were on track in all five developmental domains, compared to 56.2% of non-Indigenous children.

Introduction of the Child Care Package in 2018 saw a drop in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander engagement in ECEC, for a number of reasons including administrative complexity of engaging with the scheme and reduced access to a minimum 24 hours per fortnight of subsidised care for families who fail the activity test<sup>15</sup>. The increase to 36 hours subsidised ECEC access per fortnight for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families is a welcome policy change, but is insufficient to support the developmental needs of children. Whilst there is evidence to suggest that 60 – 80 hours per fortnight high quality ECEC produces positive impacts for children experiencing disadvantage, there is no indication whether lesser amounts of educational support will have similarly positive outcomes.<sup>16</sup>

In addition, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families do not meet activity requirements to qualify for more than the minimum 36 hours per fortnight of subsidised care. According to Impact Economics, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are 5 times more likely to access only 1 day of care as a result of the activity test, and many families disengage completely because of the small amount of subsidised care available. Fear of incurring debts because of incorrectly reported activity acts as further discouragement, particularly for casual workers with inconsistent hours.

SNAICC recommends the discontinuation of the Activity Test, which will extend the benefits to all Australian children experiencing disadvantage. Access to a minimum 60 hours per fortnight subsidised ECEC is an acceptable interim step to expedite government commitments to its Closing the Gap early childhood development targets. Without this entitlement, the most vulnerable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children whose families may be in precarious work or under – employed, have little chance of accessing the amount of educational and developmental support they need.

Further, investment in ECEC is likely to project significant returns both in the long and short term. Extensive international cost/benefit analysis highlights the long-term savings for Government of investing in early education for vulnerable children. Analysis of nine of the most comprehensive and credible international studies indicates that return on investment in well-

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<sup>15</sup> SNAICC 2019, 'SNAICC Submission to the Australian National Audit Office Examination of the Design and Implementation of the Child Care Package'. Retrieved from: [https://www.snaicc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/SNAICC-ChildCarePackageAuditSubmission\\_May2019.pdf](https://www.snaicc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/SNAICC-ChildCarePackageAuditSubmission_May2019.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> Early Childhood Australia and SNAICC 2019, 'Discussion Paper Ensuring Equality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children in the Early Years'. Retrieved from: <https://www.snaicc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/SNAICC-ECA-Discussion-Paper-Feb2019.pdf>

designed early years' interventions ranged from 75% to over 1,000% higher than costs<sup>17</sup>. Whilst the central issue of this proposal is the needs of children, it is also obvious that investment which increases the accessibility of childcare will enable increased parental workforce participation, and benefit the economy. Modelling undertaken by the Grattan Institute suggested that increasing childcare subsidies to 95% for low income families and flattening the taper rate would generate \$11 billion for an investment of \$5 billion.

The Grattan Institute proposed this measure as a preferred option to boost female participation in the workforce, rated against criteria of fairness, simplicity for parents, simplicity of administration, and cost/benefit to Government<sup>18</sup>.

### **Cost:**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children represent a relatively small proportion of the population and a substantial proportion of this cohort is currently accessing ECEC. Introducing a guaranteed minimum number of subsidised hours even at an increased level of subsidy is a modest investment. The proposed measure is highly targeted: it is likely to have the greatest impact on the most vulnerable children and positively impact Closing the Gap targets.

The costing of this budget measure is complex and requires resources not available to SNAICC. Costing considerations include:

- A significant number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families already accessing child care would likely increase their hours of access when the measure is introduced.
- Implementation of the measure will need to be accompanied by support to develop the sectors and workforce to provide additional quality and culturally safe education, and promotion of community take-up. While there will be some immediate take-up, it is likely to increase steadily towards parity over a number of years in line with sector development.
- There will always be a significant number of families who do not need and choose not to utilise the full 60 hours per fortnight.
- Removal of the Activity Test will have a positive impact on the budget bottom line, because of the reduced complexity of administration.

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<sup>17</sup> UK Department for Education and Wave Trust 2013, 'Conception to age 2 – the age of opportunity'. Retrieved from: <https://www.wavetrust.org/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=474485e9-c019-475e-ad32-cf2d5ca085b0>

<sup>18</sup> Wood D, Griffiths K, Emslie O, 2020, 'Cheaper childcare: a practical plan to boost female workforce participation Grattan Institute Report no 2020-11'. Retrieved from: <https://grattan.edu.au/report/cheaper-childcare/>

## **Introduce a new funding approach for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led ECEC and integrated early years services**

ACCO-led integrated early years services provide the wraparound, holistic supports needed in their communities ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families can access the services they want and need when they want and need them. However, current funding approaches do not reflect the full cost of this service delivery or support ACCOs to deliver the services most needed in their communities.

The Australian Government should commit to leading the design and implementation of a national, systemic and sustainable approach to funding ACCO-led integrated early years services, partnering with states and territories and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, with a focus on ensuring equitable access and coverage across the country. A new funding model should:

- incorporate block- and needs-based funding as core features, enabling services to provide a range of integrated supports matched to the needs of their communities, including ECEC, family support, allied health, disability support, child and maternal health, and cultural and community programs.
- provide long-term certainty for sustainable service provision alongside flexibility to adjust funding regularly to account for changes in community needs and costs of inflation over time, and
- explicitly and systematically provision for backbone support to ensure ACCOs have necessary supports for business, practice, policy and workforce development.

The new funding model for ACCO integrated early years services should be funded and delivered through a co-contribution model between Federal, State and Territory Governments with clear roles, responsibilities and long-term funding security established through a national policy framework embedded within a national partnership agreement.

### **Rationale**

The connection and accountability that ACCOs have to community makes them uniquely placed to identify the services and supports that are most needed or wanted on a local level. When a need in the community is identified, ACCOs respond to the need by connecting services together to provide wraparound support that prioritises cultural care and connection.

In the context of ECEC and integrated early years services, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families value culturally safe early learning for their children to support their child's cultural identity, knowledge, and connection, and to foster a strong sense of belonging and identity. ACCO early years services strongly value and embed this culture within their services, providing the holistically focused approach to learning and development required to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. ACCOs are also uniquely placed to provide high-quality, culturally safe programs consistent with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural ways

of child rearing, including practices such as storytelling, play-based learning, lifelong learning, and collective education with multiple care givers.<sup>19</sup>

Current funding approaches do not meet the needs of ACCOs and, by extension, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. Consultations and research undertaken by SNAICC have highlighted a broad range of features of the Commonwealth Child Care Subsidy (CCS) and associated Child Care Safety Net that discourage and limit engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in early years education and care and contribute to funding challenges for ACCOs. A summary of these challenges is below.

- **Administrative barriers:** The CCS creates administrative complexities for both families and services. Families experience challenges to enrol, access subsidies, and engage with Centrelink. ACCOs invest substantial resources to support families with administrative processes with no allocated funding to provide this support.
- **Funding not matched to holistic supports required:** While ACCO early years services aim to provide outreach and holistic supports that address multiple barriers for families to access learning and development services, subsidy funding is narrowly targeted to limited educational supports.
- **Stigma and fear of accessing Additional Child Care Subsidy (ACCS):** Requiring a child to be “vulnerable or considered to be at risk of harm, abuse or neglect” is a stigmatising definition that makes parents fearful of contact with culturally unsafe statutory systems and discourages families from accessing the additional support available.
- **System orientation barriers:** The CCS funding model promotes a perception and reality of services being primarily or only available for working families and discourages the participation of the most vulnerable children and families.
- **Market failure:** The market-based funding model is ineffective to ensure services reach and are tailored for the most vulnerable children and families who stand to gain the most from consistent access to early years services. The model also perpetuates childcare deserts in many areas where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children reside.

In addition to the Commonwealth Child Care Package, ACCOs access funding from multiple other sources. Each funding stream has different aims, objectives, eligibility criteria, compliance obligations and reporting requirements dependent on the funding department and/or jurisdiction. This mixture of funding streams across departments, agencies and jurisdictions creates the following challenges:

- **Inequitable funding:** There are often large disparities in funding between ACCOs funded through state-funded integrated early years programs in some jurisdictions, and those that receive more limited funding through the CCCFR program.

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<sup>19</sup> SNAICC, Ashton, A., Hawting, J., Harrison, J. 2011, ‘Growing Up Our Way: Practices matrix’. Retrieved from: <https://www.snaicc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/02802.pdf>



- **Administrative burden:** Services often have to manage multiple and different reporting and acquittal processes to comply with the requirements of each funding source. These rarely have consistent formats, information requirements or reporting periods.
- **Difficulty securing funding:** Competitive grant and tender processes disadvantage ACCOs, especially smaller ACCOs, because larger non-Indigenous organisations have the advantage of economies of scale that can mean lower costs of delivery but not culturally safe or responsive services. Smaller ACCOs also have limited resources to dedicate to grant and tender processes, that are often time intensive and require analysis of data and evidence to secure the continuation of successful existing services.
- **Lack of funding certainty:** Funding contracts are too short (less than 5 years), constraining ACCOs from building relationships and setting up programs based on the underpinning principles that are fundamental to their success.
- **Restrictive use of funding:** Grant and program funding is often awarded under strict programmatic guidelines, meaning that funding can only be used under pre-determined activities and timeframes. In most cases these guidelines do not cover the type of support that ACCOs know are most useful and effective within their communities. ACCOs are doing some of the most impactful work for children and families unfunded because current funding approaches are not built around and do not reflect the full cost of service delivery.
- **Lack of 'backbone' support:** Funding across programs do not include backbone support for ACCO business, policy, workforce and program development. This has been felt more acutely across multiple jurisdictions since the discontinuation of the Indigenous Professional Support Unit program.<sup>20</sup>

Current ways of working are leaving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children behind. Patchwork and piecemeal funding results in inequitable access to services, with the children and families most in need most often missing out.

To address the ongoing, systemic disadvantage faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, there must be a renewed commitment to investing in the early years through the community-controlled sector. There must be a national, systemic approach to funding led by the Australian Government, partnering with states, territories and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families have equitable access to the supports and services they need to thrive both in childhood and throughout their lives. This will require a complete transformation of existing funding arrangements in line with the Priority Reform Areas of the National Agreement with a focus on

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<sup>20</sup> Early Childhood Australia and SNAICC 2019, 'Discussion Paper Ensuring Equality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children in the Early Years'. Retrieved from: <https://www.snaicc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/SNAICC-ECA-Discussion-Paper-Feb2019.pdf>

shared decision-making (Priority Reform 1) and building the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sector (Priority Reform 2).

A renewed, national, systemic and sustainable approach to funding ACCO-led integrated early years services will ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families have equitable access to the holistic, culturally safe, wraparound supports that allow them to thrive both in childhood and throughout their lives.

**Cost:**

\$236 million per annum (recurrent).

## **Provide ongoing funding for ACCO early years services backbone support to be provided through SNAICC Early Years Support**

SNAICC Early Years Support has delivered an effective pilot program of backbone support, providing services to early years ACCOs in New South Wales, Western Australia and Victoria. SNAICC EYS is positively impacting the viability and growth of ACCO-led services within these jurisdictions. Current funding arrangements for SNAICC Early Years Support come to an end in December 2024.

SNAICC proposes that the Early Years Support program be funded to transition to an ongoing core service offering for ACCO early years services across all jurisdictions and National Unit, that will:

- support ACCOs to deliver core early years services by providing business and administrative guidance
- support ACCOs to grow their service offering, capacity or coverage in line with community need
- identify opportunities for the establishment of new ACCOs in line with community need
- identify opportunities to transition non-ACCO early years services to ACCOs
- create communities of practice for ACCO early years services to allow them to share information, learnings and opportunities for collective impact
- understand and respond to the ACCO early years sector's workforce challenges through targeted support and identification of best practice initiatives
- broker new partnerships for the sector within their relevant jurisdictions, and
- gather qualitative and quantitative data and amplify ACCO perspectives to inform Australian, State, Territory and local government policy reform and initiatives relevant to the sector with a focus on high priority issues such as workforce.

### **Rationale**

Despite playing a vital role in improving life outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, ACCOs face many operational challenges and barriers to accessing adequate and appropriately targeted funding to perform and grow their vital role. ACCOs operate within a mainstream policy, regulatory and administrative environment that hinders their ability to operate in a way that meets the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

There is a need to improve the viability of existing ACCOs, facilitate the expansion of ACCOs' service offerings in line with community need and to establish new ACCOs in areas where there is unmet community need and service shortages. Facilitating this growth and expansion requires a combination of funding reform, policy change and bespoke, on the ground support for services.

There is a clear and pressing need to grow the ACCO early years sector to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are able to access the services and supports they need to thrive.

Through the National Agreement all governments have committed to take action to build the community controlled sector (Priority Reform Two). This commitment is reinforced in the Early Childhood Care and Development Sector Strengthening Plan which includes specific actions aimed at building and growing the ACCO early years sector:

- Support, develop and resource community-based workforce development initiatives led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood education and care services (Action A5)
- Support for the Aboriginal community-controlled ECEC sector through expansion of existing programs and services (Action C3)
- Direct supports for quality governance development for ACCOs provided through peaks (Action D2)
- Increased Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled service delivery (Action E2)
- Reduce service gaps and establish new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled integrated early years' services in locations of high Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population with high child vulnerability (Action E4)
- Develop a national and state/territory intermediary model to strengthen and represent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ECEC community-controlled services (Action F1)

The need to grow the ACCO early years sector was also recognised recently by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) in its September 2023 Childcare Inquiry Interim Report. The report recognised that current child care market forces are driving supply to more advantaged areas and that market forces alone are 'unlikely to ensure equitable educational and or developmental outcomes across all children and households.' The ACCC recommended consideration of 'sustaining and expanding supply-side support options for Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations that provide childcare and additional support services for First Nations children, parents and guardians'.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, the Productivity Commission Inquiry into ECEC draft report highlighted the funding struggles experienced by ACCOs, noting that 'ACCOs require a sustainable funding model, which recognises their knowledges and expertise to deliver the ECEC priorities of their communities'.<sup>22</sup>

SNAICC has undertaken recent research and consultation with ACCO early years services, government representatives and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders leaders and organisations on the importance of ACCO-led early years services, current barriers and challenges and potential policy and system solutions. Consultation participants have continuously reiterated the importance of ACCO-led early years services and identified a range of barriers to the viability and growth of these services.

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<sup>21</sup> Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, 'Childcare Inquiry 2023'. Retrieved from: <https://www.accc.gov.au/inquiries-and-consultations/childcare-inquiry-2023>.

<sup>22</sup> Australian Government Productivity Commission, 'A path to universal early childhood education and care Draft report', p3. Retrieved from: <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/current/childhood/draft>.

Identified challenges include, but are not limited to:

- insufficient and restricted funding that does not allow for flexible spending in line with community need
- ‘patchwork’ funding various sources that do not allow for holistic and integrated service provision
- workforce challenges such as recruiting, skilling up and retaining staff, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff
- high and complex community need
- service isolation
- complex regulatory environments, and
- burdensome administrative requirements.

There has been an identified need for support from backbone organisations to assist service leaders with functions such as local workforce development, data collection processes, and funding support.

Backbone (or intermediary) services for ACCOs in the early years sectors would support service leaders with functions such as:

- recruitment and retention in a sector with significant shortages,
- development of local workforce sustainability plans
- regulatory compliance readiness
- transition through accreditation and continuous improvement
- policy and program development
- data collection processes and building capacity around data sovereignty
- fundraising support, and
- building on local strengths and knowledge of early years ACCOs.

In addition to this bespoke support, there is also a need to ensure that the views and perspectives of these organisations are amplified and incorporated in policy, funding and reform decision-making at all levels of government.

### **Cost**

\$66,433,632 over 4.5 years (Jan 2025 – Jun 2029).

## Focus area: Supporting Child and Family Safety

### Fully resource *Safe and Supported: the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021-2031*

*Safe and Supported: The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021-2031* has been negotiated and agreed by all states and territories, the Australian Government, and by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders around the country. *Safe and Supported* must be fully resourced through targeted funding commitments in order to achieve the goals set out in the Framework.

#### Rationale:

*Safe and Supported* sets out a range of important priorities to keep children safe and to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the child protection system, including supporting increased investment into ACCOs, supporting the child and family services workforce, and improving data and full implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle.

*Safe and Supported* represents an important opportunity to increase the capacity across Australia to keep children safe and to reduce over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in child protection.

The Australian Child Maltreatment Study also demonstrated high proportions of young people in Australia who had experienced violence, abuse and neglect in childhood.<sup>23</sup> Concerted action and national leadership are needed to address this high prevalence of abuse and neglect, and to prevent future generations suffering the same levels of trauma and mistreatment.

However, most of the initiatives agreed by governments have not been backed up with funding commitments. The Australian Government must show leadership and commit the resources that are needed to keep Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children safe and with their families. Resources must be committed to ensure that the agreed priorities for *Safe and Supported* are progressed.

In line with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, the Australian Government must partner with the ACCO sector to deliver on the Principles and Focus Areas for *Safe and Supported*.

The Australian Government must demonstrate national leadership and play a central role in initiating the transformational change that *Safe and Supported* has committed to, through

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<sup>23</sup> Mathews B, Pacella RE, Scott JG, Finkelhor D, Meinck F, Higgins DJ, Erskine HE, Thomas HJ, Lawrence D, Haslam DM, Malacova E, Dunne MP. [The prevalence of child maltreatment in Australia: findings from a national survey](#). Med J Aust 2023; 218 (6 Suppl): S13-S18.

resourcing the development of strategic policy frameworks, community-based initiatives, and supporting the development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community capabilities and cultural governance to lead in caring for children.

In addition to specifically funding early supports (outlined below) SNAICC calls on the Australian Government to resource the development of:

1. A national best practice and critical elements framework for delegation of statutory child protection authority to ACCOs, as agreed in Action 1a of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan 2023-2026. This framework is important to fulfilling self-determination and ensuring that consistent reform occurs across all jurisdictions.
2. A sector strengthening and market development strategy for Commonwealth-funded ACCOs, as agreed in Action 2a of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan 2023-2026. This strategy will help to increase the number of culturally safe, holistic services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families that are delivered by ACCOS.
3. A best practice framework for cultural awareness as agreed in Action 3.cii of the First Action Plan 2023-2026. This framework will help to build the capacity of the Child Protection and Family Support workforce, by ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives and experiences are embedded in their practice.
4. Disability supports delivered in partnership with ACCOs as agreed in Action 8 of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan 2023-2026. The Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability found that child protection systems are not meeting the needs of First Nations people with disability. The Commonwealth must address these gaps by accelerating its commitment in *Safe and Supported*, through directly engaging ACCOs to take forward community-based initiatives to increase responsiveness to children and families with disability.

To enable successful development and implementation of the initiatives outlined above, the Australian Government must resource and reinforce the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance structures needed for shared decision-making. This includes establishing community-led commissioning and the cultural governance to ensure strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural authority leading child safety and wellbeing at a community level. Resourcing evaluation, knowledge translation, and data capability within the ACCO sector, in order to enable data sovereignty, must be a priority for investment. The Commonwealth must also support the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership Group at a national level for informed and meaningful participation in shared decision-making.

**Cost:** The total cost of the initiatives outlined above is \$243.3 million over 3 years, including the Australian Government leading development of key policy frameworks and national implementation initiatives.

[Further commitments will be required, subject to development of agreed scoping and costing of activities and deliverables.]

## **Create a new national program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led prevention and early support**

Support at an early stage to address challenges for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families is essential to change the rates that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are removed into out-of-home care. Federal, state and territory governments need to collaborate to deliver this support effectively for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. A dedicated, national program to deliver early support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, led by ACCOs, is necessary to enable governments, services and communities to reverse the trend of increasing over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care.

### **Rationale:**

All governments have committed to the target in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care by 45% by 2031. This target is not only off-track, but the rate of over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care is increasing. Our children are now 10.5 times more likely to be in out-of-home care than non-Indigenous children.<sup>24</sup> Large scale reform efforts and investments in healing and strengthening families are needed to turn this around.

The *Safe and Supported: National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021-2031* and the first Action Plans under the Framework prioritise a national approach to prevention and early intervention, however there is little activity to support this priority. Resourcing for the Framework is extremely limited and will not support the kind of prevention activity that is needed to achieve its intended outcomes. Transitioning the child protection system towards prevention to address social determinants of child protection involvement, in accordance with Action 1 in the First Action Plan, will require additional investment into early support.<sup>25</sup> The First Action Plan identifies place-based and integrated approaches as best practice in early support. SNAICC calls for a minimum three-year commitment for an ongoing new place-based program of early

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<sup>24</sup> SNAICC 2023, 'The Family Matters Report 2023'. Retrieved from: <http://www.familymatters.org.au/>

<sup>25</sup> SNAICC (2023) *Family Matters Report 2023*, pp. 44-46.



supports. This will enable proactive and ongoing support to strengthen families and communities, and keep children safe.

Although there is strong evidence that early support is effective at supporting families to stay together safely, and at addressing underlying drivers of children being removed into out-of-home care, the vast majority of resources and effort in the child and family service system is focused on tertiary child protection intervention and out-of-home care.<sup>26</sup> So long as this is the case, child protection systems will not be equipped to meet the Closing the Gap target or to support children and families effectively.

The key drivers of child protection intervention sit across a broad range of federal and state responsibilities. These include intergenerational trauma, mental health concerns, poverty, family violence, housing and homelessness. Collective state, territory and federal investment and effort is needed to address those drivers.

At present, there are major gaps in availability and resourcing for early support services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families throughout the country. States and territories vary significantly in their funding and program arrangements for prevention and early intervention, family support and intensive family support services. In many jurisdictions the proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families accessing these services, and their investment in ACCOs, is disproportionately low compared to over-representation in out-of-home care.<sup>27</sup>

A significantly bolstered ACCO-led family services sector would provide families with culturally safe and responsive supports to address the barriers and challenges families experience in providing safe care for children. SNAICC estimates that approximately 130 ACCO providers (including regional offices of larger providers) are required to deliver quality family supports and begin to turn the tide on removals to out-of-home care. Family support providers are typically made up of a range of organisations with connected expertise across child protection, health, child development, and early education. There are significant opportunities to build on capacity already existing in these sectors to deliver the support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families need to care for their children.

**Cost:** \$84 million recurrent from the Australian Government, to be matched by state and territory governments, and indexed annually to CPI.

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<sup>26</sup> SNAICC 2022, 'The Family Matters Report 2022'. Retrieved from: <http://www.familymatters.org.au/>

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

## Keep Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, children and young people safe and free from domestic and family violence

The Australian Government must act decisively to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children are safe from domestic and family violence. Immediate action is needed to address gaps for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children, as longer-term transformation is progressed through a National Plan for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family safety.

### **Rationale:**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children experience high rates of domestic and family violence and are over-represented in the child protection and youth justice systems in Australia. While a National Plan to address family safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is under development, it is essential that government addresses immediate needs for the safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children.

Two immediate priorities are (1) the development of response and healing supports for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children affected by domestic and family violence, and (2) reform to funding for domestic and family violence responses in the Northern Territory to establish a needs-based funding model.

#### *1) Develop and strengthen responses and healing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children affected by domestic and family violence*

Children who have been affected by the trauma of domestic and family violence can face long-term impacts on their health and wellbeing. The Federal Government has committed to end violence against women and children in one generation so that children born today do not experience the same prevalence of domestic and family violence currently experienced nationally. A commitment to ending violence in one generation necessarily requires addressing the intergenerational nature of its impacts and making targeted effort to addressing the impacts of domestic and family violence on children. We know the impacts of violence on children's development, health and wellbeing continue into adulthood, and we have seen how generational cycles of violence unfold.

The *Healing Our Children and Young People: A framework to address the impacts of domestic and family violence* resource developed by the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak (QATSICPP) outlines how to engage children holistically in responses to domestic and family violence, and how to best support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children affected by domestic and family violence through child-centred approaches based on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, being and doing.<sup>28</sup> QATSICPP's research

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<sup>28</sup> Morgan, G. et al. 2023, 'Healing our children and young people: A framework to address the impacts of domestic and family violence'. Retrieved from: <https://www.anrows.org.au/resources/healing-our-children-and-young-people-a-framework-to-address-the-impacts-of-domestic-and-family-violence/>

highlighted the need for solutions that are responsive to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's identity and culture, prioritise safety, strengthen the safe support from family and community, strengthen spirit, and support healing.

Responses to the needs of children and young people have been included in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan for the *National Plan to End violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032* and need to be accelerated. Acting on the latest evidence about supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children affected by domestic and family violence, SNAICC recommends greater investment that aligns with the findings from the research led by QATSICPP in the establishment of child and youth centred domestic and family violence services that are healing focused, trauma-informed and culturally safe.

2) *Establish a responsive, needs-based model of funding for domestic and family violence supports in the Northern Territory*

Aboriginal women and children in the Northern Territory experience far higher rates of domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV) than in any other jurisdiction in Australia.<sup>29</sup> Northern Territory Coroner Elisabeth Armitage has been examining the Territory's DFSV system, hearing evidence of an overburdened and under-resourced response. The findings have demonstrated that systemic failures to both prevent and respond to harm are being caused by significant underfunding. The current model of federal funding based on population size does not meet the needs of the Northern Territory with the population spread across large remote areas, making access to services more challenging and costly to deliver, which current funding models do not address adequately.

SNAICC recommends that the Federal Government co-contributes to implementing the recommendations of the Northern Territory Coroner and further invest in need-based funding approaches to prevent and respond to DFSV in the Northern Territory, including culturally safe housing, violence prevention and education, trauma-based recovery and legal support.

**Cost:** \$50 million over 5 years for initiatives to support responses and healing to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children affected by domestic and family violence, and \$180 million over 5 years (including Australian Government funding any co-contribution by the Northern Territory Government) towards domestic and family violence responses in the Northern Territory.

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<sup>29</sup> The Equity Institute 2023, 'Evidence Snapshot: what we know about domestic, family and sexual violence in the Northern Territory – and what we don't'. Retrieved from: [https://www.equalityinstitute.org/media/pages/resources/evidence-snapshot-what-we-know-about-domestic-family-and-sexual-violence-in-the-northern-territory-and-what-we-don-t/6b0ee996d9-1686115013/nt\\_evidence\\_snapshot\\_eqi.pdf](https://www.equalityinstitute.org/media/pages/resources/evidence-snapshot-what-we-know-about-domestic-family-and-sexual-violence-in-the-northern-territory-and-what-we-don-t/6b0ee996d9-1686115013/nt_evidence_snapshot_eqi.pdf)

## **Focus area: Strong and effective peak body**

Through the Priority Reform Areas of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, governments have committed to building the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sector (Priority Reform Two). A strong community-controlled sector is characterised as having peak bodies “governed by a majority Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander board(s), which (have) strong governance and policy development and influencing capacity” and which have the capability and resourcing necessary to consult with governments and their membership around key policy and reform issues.

The Early Childhood Care and Development Sector Strengthening Plan highlights the need for peak bodies to effectively support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations which deliver common services and includes the need for adequate and sustainable funding for existing peak bodies (Action F3).

### **Invest in the viability and capacity of SNAICC as the national Peak Body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families**

Provide funding for SNAICC’s core policy, advocacy and sector development functions to support it to effectively deliver policy, advocacy and sector development functions as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled peak body for the early childhood care and development sector.

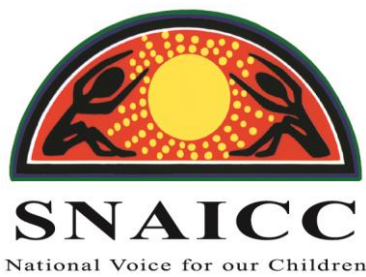
#### **Rationale**

As the national peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, SNAICC requires adequate and sustainable funding to deliver core functions to the early childhood care and development sector. In recent years, SNAICC has delivered these core functions of policy, advocacy and sector development to the extent possible through time-limited and restrictive project, contract, philanthropic, and programmatic funding.

SNAICC’s core functions are significantly under-resourced, which undermines the strength of the early childhood care and development community-controlled sector and, by extension, principles of self-determination.

For SNAICC to operate effectively as a peak body, it requires stable, ongoing investment in its core functions and in its capacity for member engagement to build the community-controlled sector, ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities and organisations can meaningfully participate in shared decision-making and advocate for the system change and reform required to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

**Cost:** \$4,349,833 per annum, recurrent, indexed to CPI.



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