

MEDIA RELEASE

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LACK OF ACTION FAILING ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CHILDREN

“Closing the Gap starts with our children, but the latest Productivity Commission data shows we haven’t even reached the starting blocks.”

The latest data release from the Productivity Commission shows all Governments must move urgently on their commitments if there is to be real progress on improving life outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

SNAICC CEO Catherine Liddle said the sluggish pace and lack of drive from government to really change the way they do business with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations was frustrating progress.

“The cost of this lack of action is directly felt by our children, who continue to be removed from their families at unprecedented rates, who continue to be vastly over-represented in the youth justice system,” Ms Liddle said.

“If we keep going on this trajectory, we are never going reverse the trajectory of our children entering out-of-home care and continuing on a path to youth detention and adult incarceration.

“To be absolutely clear, these are not the failings of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people or culture. These are fairly and squarely the failures of the systems that impact us the most being built without us, to work against us.

“We know what works, the evidence is there that involving us as partners in decisions about our lives and our children makes the difference. What’s missing is the will of governments to fully enact the Priority Reforms under the Closing the Gap Agreement that will drive change.

“We don’t need a different approach to Closing the Gap, we don’t need a second, third or fourth way. We just need all governments to keep their word and look at the evidence as to what works to change our life outcomes.

“I usually try and find a glimpse of light in these grim reports, but it’s difficult to find a positive slant on what this data tells us about the lives and experiences of our children and families.”

Data headlines

- In 2023, the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care was 57.2 per 1,000 children. For non-Indigenous children, the rate was 4.7 per 1000 children
- SNAICC analysis shows that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are 10.8 times more likely than non-Indigenous children to be in out-of-home care, or subject to a third-party parental responsibility order.

- The rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care has worsened since 2019, rising from 54.2 to 57.2 per 1,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in 2023 in out of home care. The Productivity Commission estimates that by 2031, the rate will be 63 per 1000 children
- Target 3 is on track to increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children enrolled in Year Before Full time Schooling early childhood education to 95% by 2025. However preschool enrolment data does not address preschool engagement and outcomes for children which need to be better understood and measured.
- Overall, Australia is not on track to meet Target 11, which aims to reduce the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people (10-17 years) in detention by at least 30 per cent by 2031
- In the five years to 2022-2023, the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in detention on a given day in Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia has reduced. Rates of overrepresentation in the Northern Territory, the ACT and Queensland have worsened over the same period
- It is encouraging that new supporting indicators have been included in the dashboard relating to aspects of implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (ASTICPP), noting that significant development is required to improve the scope and quality of data on ATSI CPP implementation.
- New data in 2024 shows there was an increase in the overall number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-focused integrated early years services – Indicator 3b – from 151 services in 2022 to 155 in 2023. But the overall increase in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-focused services was predominantly due to a rise in government and/or non-Indigenous controlled services.

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