

MEDIA RELEASE

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Child protection systems not keeping our children safe

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's national peak SNAICC says a new report demonstrates how child protection systems are conveyor belts into the youth justice system for far too many vulnerable young people.

The latest AIHW report, *'Young people under youth justice supervision and their interaction with the child protection system 2022u23'* has highlighted the traumatic experience for 'crossover kids' - children in the youth justice system who have also been in the child protection system.

The report revealed that almost two-thirds of young people who had been in the youth justice system during 2022–23 had also had an interaction with the child protection system in the last 10 years and that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are significantly more likely to experience this crossover. The report makes it clear that a longer time in care and a higher number of care placements were directly correlated with a higher likelihood of future incarceration

Catherine Liddle, CEO of SNAICC said the from the latest AIHW report shows the system is failing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

"Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children are 26 times more likely to be in the youth justice system with prior involvement in child protection according to this report – with the overrepresentation of our children in OOHHC continuing to rise, this is a truly confronting statistic," Ms Liddle said.

"The interconnectedness of the youth justice and child protection systems highlights a systemic failure and the strong need for culturally appropriate supports to divert at-risk children from further involvement with child protection and the justice system.

"When children are separated from family, community and culture, the risk of adverse outcomes for their health, development and wellbeing increases. We need to see more investment in supporting families, preventing child removals, and supporting cultural connections for children who are in care."

"There are very few intervention, prevention or diversion programs that stop a child from being in one system and entering another.

“These are issues the new National Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People can highlight and add their weight to recommended actions to interrupt this unacceptable trajectory and increase the safety for our children in these systems.

“These children face complex and interconnected challenges, including a heightened risk of negative outcomes due to their involvement in both systems. They are the most vulnerable of our vulnerable children yet, rather than meeting them with support, our systems are reacting in increasingly punitive ways.

“Investing in culturally appropriate supports can not only reduce criminalisation rates but also promote overall wellbeing and resilience among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in contact with the child protection system.

“By failing to address the underlying issues or provide adequate support and intervention, child protection systems are contributing to a cycle of criminalisation and systemic disadvantage for our children.”

END

For all media queries, please contact Charlie Bowcock on 0417 042 308 or media@snaicc.org.au.