

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **Report Reveals Underfunding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led Child Protection Services Despite Growing Need**

An annual report has revealed that despite the growing over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the child protection system, the organisations proven to get the best results in cultural support, reunification with kin and connection to culture receive the least amount of funding.

The 2024 Family Matters Report, released today by SNAICC – National Voice for our Children, shows Aboriginal community-controlled organisations (ACCOs), only receive 6 percent of government funding despite Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children making up 41 percent (22,908 in total) of children in out-of-home care (OOHC).

According to the report, this comes at a time when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children’s likelihood of being in OOHC reaches a record high of 10.8 times the likelihood for non-Indigenous children.

SNAICC CEO Catherine Liddle said Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have never been more likely to be in OOHC, yet the community-controlled sector, which is most likely to keep those children safe and cared for at home with family, and connected to kin and culture, continues to be woefully underfunded.

“This report shows the immediate and effective impact the ACCO sector is having in connecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children with kin and culture. It shows how services are working to prevent and intervene in child removal and work to keep vulnerable children and families safe, supported and connected,” Ms Liddle said.

“However, what the 2024 data tells us is despite the positive trend among ACCOs, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children continue to enter and stay in the system at such a rate that they are grossly over-represented at every point of intervention.

“This over-representation grows as family interventions become more intrusive at each stage of the system, pointing to a systemic failure to respond and support children and families rather than issues driven at a community level.

This year’s report echoed years prior, indicating without substantial change in the way all governments work with Aboriginal organisations, 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 percent by 2031) will not be met.

“In fact, this target is going backwards. In 2022–23, we saw the rate of child removals exceeded exits, reversing a previously positive trend,” Ms Liddle said.

“What’s most disappointing is that the solutions to these challenges are clear, and they have been articulated by communities for decades.”

The latest data also shows only 15 percent of government funding in child protection is going towards early intervention and family support services while 85 percent goes towards the delivery of OOHC services.

“Investment in ACCO’s is critical to closing the gap on target 12, as is investment in early intervention and family support services. The reason the gap is widening is simple - Federal, State and Territory governments are not investing in the programs and projects that work to close it.

“Governments must get serious about transforming the way they do business with ACCOs by transferring authority and adequate resourcing that will keep families together and prevent the landslide of children entering the misnamed protection system.

“Our sector, communities and families are sick of seeing our children removed. The number of children who are crossing over from child protection into youth justice systems is increasing, yet there continues to be a focus at the tertiary end of responses.

“We have major NGOs committed to transitioning out-of-home care and support services to ACCOs through the work of Allies for Children. It is way past time for governments to do the same.”

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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. The report describes data relating to children’s interactions with child protection on 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 and identifies barriers and opportunities in responding to issues impacting children’s development, wellbeing and safety. Find the report here - <https://www.snaicc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/241119-Family-Matters-Report-2024.pdf>