

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children in NT least likely to be placed with family in Child Protection System**

New data from the Australian Institute for Health and Welfare (AIHW) shows Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the Northern Territory child protection system are the least likely to be placed with Aboriginal family of anywhere in Australia.

The data reveals that the vast majority of out-of-home care (OOHC) placements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the NT are not in accordance with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Placement Principle (the Principle).

Catherine Liddle, CEO of SNAICC – National Voice for our Children said when the Principle is fully applied, children have the best chance at growing up safe and strong in community and culture.

“We know when children are able to maintain connections they have better outcomes, interrupting the trajectory between child protection and juvenile justice systems,” Ms Liddle said.

The Northern Territory has one of the highest rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in care compared to non-indigenous children and one of the lowest rates of placements with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

All Australian states and territories have a legislated commitment that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in OOHC have a right to maintain a connection to culture and when they are removed from family, courts and child protection services must prioritise placing children with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander relatives and kin.

In contrast to moves in the NT, states like Victoria and Queensland have invested in implementing the Principle in recent years, strengthening legislation and handing over authority for many child protection decisions to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations.

While removal rates remain far too high, children in out-of-home care in Victoria are placed with their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family more often and are more likely to be reunified with their birth parents than anywhere else in the county.

“Despite the shockingly low commitment from the NT government to uphold the Principle as it is, the government is threatening to give the courts and child protection authorities greater

powers to ignore the principle when making decisions about the safety and wellbeing of our children,” Ms Liddle said.

“By watering down the Principle, the NT Government is disregarding an evidence-based framework designed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and endorsed by governments across Australia.

“The worst thing governments can do is ignore the evidence and dismantle the policies that are contributing to Closing the Gap.”

## **Background**

The AIHW’s Child protection Australia 2022–23: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children update found:

- 70% of OOHC placements of Aboriginal children in the NT are with non-relative, non-Indigenous carers, or in a family group home, residential care or independent living. This is significantly above the national average of 28% of placements not being in accordance with the ATSI CPP.
- Only 19% of placements were with Aboriginal relatives or kin. This is a decrease from previous years where placement with Aboriginal relatives or kin was around 25%.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (ATSI CPP):

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle is a framework designed to promote policy and practice that will reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the child protection system.

The principle was established to recognise the importance of safe care within family and culture to the best interests of children, as well as to ensure that the actions that resulted in the Stolen Generations are not repeated. Its five interrelated elements include prevention of entry into out-of-home care, partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to ensure self-determination, participation of families and children in child protection decision-making, placements that ensure cultural safety, and ensuring connection to family, community and Culture for children who have been removed.

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