

MEDIA RELEASE

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New report shows widening gap in reunification rates among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children in OOHC

A new report has revealed what Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families have been saying for decades – that our children who enter child protection systems are far less likely to be reunified with their families than non-Indigenous children.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) report shows that national reunification rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out of home care have declined over the last five years.

Catherine Liddle, CEO of SNAICC – National Voice for our children said supporting the Aboriginal community-controlled (ACCO) sector has never been more critical in the wake of this data release.

“It’s devastating that our children are increasingly less likely to be reunited with their families. This is a consequence of a lack of supports to help these children return home,” Ms Liddle said.

“Evidence shows that once an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child enters the system, if their placement is supported by an ACCO, they are far more likely to maintain positive connections to their community, identity and culture, as well as more likely to be reunited with kin.

“This data demonstrates that governments at the federal, state and territory levels must not only continue but also accelerate their investment in the ACCO sector and their commitments to reform through the Safe and Supported framework for protecting children.

“They achieve this success because ACCOs are accountable to their local communities, deliver holistic services that are culturally safe, and are highly trusted by local families, which leads to stronger engagement in services.

“ACCOs are also more successful in ensuring children's safety and maintaining their connections while in care by adhering to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (ATSICPP).

“Without meaningful government investment in ACCOs and the Safe and Supported framework, progress on reunification will stall, and the disparity between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and non-Indigenous children will continue to grow.

“This is a system that is successful in removing our children and is fundamentally failing to support children and families to live together as they ought to.

“It’s past time for government action to reform this failing system and do better by our children and families.”

END

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

Background:

- The AIHW release shows that for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children on child protection orders in 2022-23, only 7.3% were reunified in that year, compared to 10.9% of non-Indigenous children on protection orders.
- Looking at the past 5 years of data, reunification for all children in care has been decreasing, which is of concern. In 2017-18, 15.3% of all children on orders were reunified, which has declined to 9.4% in 2022-23