

MEDIA RELEASE

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More effort needed to place children with family

States and Territories must put greater efforts into ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children entering child protection are placed with relatives or kin connections if they are serious about closing the gap.

Data released by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) reveals that only 47% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children entering out-of-home care (OOHC) in 2023–24 were placed with relatives.

Catherine Liddle, CEO of SNAICC – National Voice for our Children said that figure was unacceptably low.

“When less than half of our kids in care are placed with kin, it’s clear the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (ATSICPP) is not being fully respected or implemented,” Ms Liddle said.

“These aren’t just numbers, that statistic represents thousands of children’s lives and this system is failing them.

“We know when children are able to maintain family and cultural connections they have better outcomes in health and education, interrupting the trajectory between child protection and juvenile justice systems.”

All Australian states and territories have legislated a commitment to prioritise placing kids with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander relatives and kin.

“In addition to poor adherence to the ATSICPP and despite us knowing that the vast majority of reunifications worked well in 2022-23, this update also shows an underwhelming effort from child protection systems to reunite children with their families,” Ms Liddle said.

The AIHW report also revealed that close to 60,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children came into contact with child protection systems over the year. Emotional abuse, often linked to exposure to family and domestic violence, was the most common reason for substantiation.

“When emotional abuse is the leading reason for intervention, we must recognise what that really means - children are being removed because of the violence experienced by their mothers, aunties

and grandmothers,” Ms Liddle said.

“This reinforces the urgency of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led solutions to end family violence and increase early intervention services to protect our families.

“Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations are best placed to work with our families and have the solutions that work to turn these statistics around.

“Governments and child protection systems need to get serious about the commitments that they have made because the efforts being made now simply aren’t enough.”

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

Background:

Child protection Australia 2023–24: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from the AIHW found:

- Emotional abuse was the most common type of primary abuse (52% or 6,600) for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who were the subject of a substantiation assessment.
- When entering out-of-home care, only 47% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were placed with relatives or kin.
- Only 35% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children leaving out-of-home care were reunited with their family. This is despite data showing that 85% of children who were reunited with their family in the previous year (2022-23) did not return to OOH in 2023-24.

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 components include both prevention of entry into out-of-home care and reunification to ensure culturally connected placements and to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities to participate in child protection decision-making.