

MEDIA RELEASE

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Joint Council Commitment Marks a Turning Point for Target 12

The Joint Council on Closing the Gap has today taken an important step toward changing the trajectory for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people by agreeing to prioritise critical reforms under Target 12 under Closing the Gap.

Joint Council, being the most senior decision-making body under the National Agreement, has agreed to recommendations from government departments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders and committed to prioritise shifting investment to ACCOs, strengthening early intervention, delegating authority for decisions about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, and growing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce as the only pathways to genuine change.

As part of this, Joint Council has also agreed to strengthen oversight of governments' implementation of existing commitments.

Catherine Liddle, CEO of SNAICC – National Voice for our Children said by accepting these recommendations, the Joint Council has added weight, visibility and oversight to the work on Target 12.

“For too long, commitments have been made on paper while little has changed on the ground,” Ms Liddle said.

“This work is ultimately about what governments must do to better support our children to stay connected to family, culture and community.

“Joint Council stepping into a stronger oversight role means the whole system across every portfolio and jurisdiction is now on notice to deliver.

“It is an important step forward in ensuring governments cannot hide behind agreeing to strategies and not following through with them.”

Target 12 commits all governments to reducing the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care by 45 per cent by 2031, but this target is not on track. In 2024, 22,908 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were living in out-of-home care, accounting for 41 per cent of all children in these systems.

“The tidal wave of children entering care continues to grow at an alarming rate, and urgent attention and resources are needed to bring about the pace and scale of change required,” Ms Liddle said.

“Australian governments spent \$6.5 billion in child protection but only \$657 million on the early intervention supports that could prevent children entering the system in the first place. That imbalance shows exactly why the trajectory isn’t changing.”

We know this approach works. Examples in Victoria through VACCA’s Nugel program show that delegating statutory authority to ACCOs has seen almost double the reunification rate for children compared to cases managed by the Victorian department.

“Joint Council’s decision today is significant because it recognises that the evidence is already there – adding the weight and oversight needed to invest in the solutions that will make a difference in our communities.

“The commitment has now been made - it is up to governments to follow through.”

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