



Commissioner for Children and Young People  
Western Australia

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SNAICC – National Voice for our Children  
Family Plan Public Submissions  
Melbourne VIC

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Dear Sir/Madam

**SNAICC submission *Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Safety Plan Engagement***

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Safety Plan Engagement.

I welcome any opportunity to seek the valuable contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities, and organisations that will be centred in the development of the Family Safety Plan and more specifically, those with lived experience, including children and young people.

As Commissioner for Children and Young People in Western Australia (WA), I have a statutory responsibility under the Commissioner for Children and Young People Act 2006 (WA) “the Act”, to advocate for the views of children and young people to be heard in decision making that affects them. This role includes giving priority to, and having special regard to, the interests and needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

In undertaking these responsibilities, I must also have regard for the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (the UNCRC) which upholds the right of all children and young people to be protected from harm, to be safe, feel safe and be respected wherever they are, and to participate in making decisions that affect them.

*Question 1: What are the key priorities and actions the Family Safety Plan should focus on to create real and sustainable change for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families?*

Every child or young person has the right to be loved and to feel safe and supported. This involves positive family relationships and connections with other adults, along with personal and community safety.

Research indicates that being exposed to violence in any form can have a wide range of detrimental impacts on child development, mental and physical health and general wellbeing.

More specifically, the consequences of exposure to this kind of abuse present as long or short-term impacts, which can include poor physical health, secure attachment problems, learning and developmental problems, substance abuse, mental health issues and homelessness.<sup>i</sup>

We know that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are over-represented as both victim-survivors and perpetrators of family violence.<sup>ii</sup>

Concerningly, the individual specific needs of children and young people as victims in their own right are often not acknowledged as having the same the priority as adult victim/survivors. Family and Domestic violence and the leading cause of children's homelessness in the nation, yet options for victim/survivors to leave violent situations do not cater to children (and specifically boys over the age of 12). In regional, rural and remote locations access to services to address mental health, social isolation, physical health for children and young people are not available. This includes quality services who operate in trauma-informed ways.

Children and young people have advised us in many consultations that support services for children and young people are often not culturally appropriate, nor do they necessarily understand the context of trauma for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people experiencing violence.

A priority is ensuring that all children and young people impacted by family and domestic violence have supports provided to address their social, emotional, physical and cultural wellbeing.

For many children and young people, violence has become 'normalised' and it is critical when developing focused supports, these include child and youth friendly perpetrator services to stop the cycle of violence.

In 2020, the Australian National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) released a Report entitled "The PIPA Project: Positive interventions for Perpetrators of Adolescent violence in the home"<sup>iii</sup>. The report found that childhood trauma is a major contributor to adolescents' use of violence in the home (AVITH). It was also found that, apart from legal approaches, there was very little service support. In addition, those services that were available, were not equipped to respond constructive nor provide appropriate delivery models for adolescents when dealing with AVITH.

*Question 4: How can governments and mainstream services best support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (including workforce and clients), services and solutions?*

Children and young people through any form of exposure to or experiences of family and sexual violence are victim-survivors and MUST be at the centre of any responses to family violence on the ground. I fully support community led and localised solutions that incorporate the views and perspectives of children and young people in the development, monitoring and evaluation of culturally safe and equitable programs and policies that address those responses.

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan 2021-31 provides all the necessary steps and approaches to build a quality Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce in the health sector. This could be used as a template to expand services across the whole spectrum – social, cultural, emotional and physical wellbeing. Partnerships with Aboriginal Community Controlled organisations such as the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (NACCHO), Indigenous Allied Health Australia (IAHA), the Australian Indigenous Doctors Alliance (AIDA) and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers and Practitioners (NAATSIHWP) should part of the collective to address these requirements.

*Question 5: How should the service system respond to the intersectional needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities?*

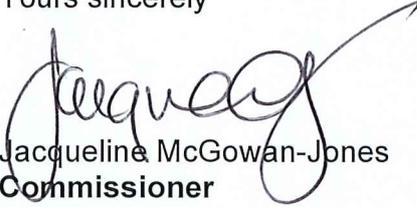
At a service system level, I am actively committed to the promotion of the rights of children and young people, to strongly advocate to actively seek participation in decisions that affect them, providing opportunities for meaningful engagement to elevate their voices, sharing views and perspectives whilst taking best interests into account in the development of policies and programs. I am committed to advocating systemic improvement, that is informed by evidence-based research and best practice.

Children and young people MUST be at the centre of responses to family violence solutions and decisions, policies and practices that affect and impact directly upon them. I support the opportunity to hear from children and young people around what safety and well-being looks like to inform the development of a National Action plan to address the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

In placing the child at the centre, the service system needs to collaborate and operate in a case management framework to support the child. The focus must be on ensuring the service system 'comes to the child' rather than a family already in crisis needing to follow a number of different routes to access the comprehensive and holistic supports for the family – including housing, financial, educational, therapeutic and other needs.

I look forward to a much-needed standalone National plan to addressing family violence in Aboriginal communities across the nation and grateful for the opportunity to provide a submission in the broader context of my advocacy for children and young people. If you have any further queries, please do not hesitate to contact Sharon Davis, Manager Policy [sharon.davis@ccyp.wa.gov.au](mailto:sharon.davis@ccyp.wa.gov.au).

Yours sincerely



Jacqueline McGowan-Jones  
**Commissioner**

7 November 2024

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<sup>i</sup> Hunter C 2014, Effects of child abuse and neglect for children and adolescents, National Child Protection Clearinghouse Resource Sheet, Australian Institute of Family Studies.

<sup>ii</sup> Cripps K (2023) *Indigenous domestic and family violence, mental health and suicide*, AIHW,.

<sup>iii</sup> Campbell, E., Richter, J., Howard, J., & Cockburn, H. (2020). The PIPA project: Positive Interventions for Perpetrators of Adolescent violence in the home (AVITH) (Research report, 04/2020). Sydney, NSW: ANROWS.