

MEDIA STATEMENT

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Peak Body Calls for Immediate National Response to Youth Justice Crisis

The National Peak Body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children, SNAICC - National Voice for our Children, has declared at a Senate Inquiry today that we are witnessing a crisis in youth justice and child protection that warrants an immediate and urgent national response.

Today, SNAICC's CEO, Catherine Liddle, gave evidence to the National Inquiry into Australia's Youth Justice and Incarceration System, warning that tough-on-crime policies only serve to respond to media perceptions while continuing to harm children, entrench criminal behaviours and ultimately leave communities less safe.

SNAICC argued for the development of a nationally coordinated action plan with the states and territories to urgently reform failing child justice systems and reorient the system away from carceral, punitive and inhumane responses, to responses which support children and families early.

"There are steps the Federal Government could take right now that would have an immediate effect on the numbers of our children being incarcerated in youth justice," Ms Liddle told the Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs.

"We know early intervention to prevent child removal will prevent our children from entering youth justice systems.

"It is well within the responsibility and jurisdiction of the Commonwealth Government to change the way Australia's incredibly expensive child protection and youth justice systems are funded to encourage policies like community-led prevention and early intervention services that keep children with their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kin.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are 26 times more likely than non-Indigenous children to be among these so-called 'crossover kids', and despite making up only 5.7% of this country's 10–17-year-old population, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children comprise 63% of children in detention.

"Governments need to step up and honour their commitments. They must be brave and face down populist responses in favour of policies that will work to make children and communities safer," Ms Liddle said.

“We are letting our national and state policy be driven in response to media perceptions of youth crime waves, not what the evidence shows is an appropriate or safe response to children who need support.

“While we recognise that criminal justice policy is set by the states and territories, our recommendations and messages ask for an activist approach from the Commonwealth government to lead a nationally coordinated reform agenda.

“In a crisis, you cannot keep dismissing child justice as exclusively a state and territory issue.

“We strongly urge the Australian Government to take forward these recommendations with urgency equal to the seriousness of the crisis.”

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