

MEDIA STATEMENT

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“Back what we know is working” SNAICC calls for urgent action on Closing the Gap

On Closing the Gap Day, the national peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children has issued a stark warning: progress is stalling or reversing across the majority of targets impacting children, and governments must back what is proven to work.

At the halfway point of the agreement, which expires in 2031, the latest Closing the Gap Dashboard update has confirmed that progress for children is stalling or going backwards across key targets.

Catherine Liddle, CEO of SNAICC – National Voice for our Children said governments must urgently recommit to delivering the Priority Reforms under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap and continue backing programs and approaches that are proving to work for children and families.

“There is a wealth of programs that are working on the ground to close the gap for our children, yet government backing is haphazard and often short term.

“The Connected Beginnings and Early Years Support programs are evidence of community-based and controlled approaches that work yet support is inconsistent and insecure.

“The update also paints a troubling national picture. No jurisdiction is making progress across all targets related to the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, with the Northern Territory failing every single child-focused target,” Ms Liddle said.

“We have seen positive change in areas such as land rights, where governments have involved Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as partners in decisions about our lives.

“We need to see that same approach across all sectors because this isn’t a pick and choose game. By failing to work with us, governments are contributing to cycles of child removal, criminalisation and systemic disadvantage for our children.

“We don’t need a new plan. We need governments to keep their word and fully implement the Priority Reforms, working in genuine partnership with our communities as the experts in our own lives.

“They also need to commit to what’s working and back the evidence with long-term support.”

The latest data shows a deeply concerning shift in birthweight outcomes, which have moved from being on track to now showing no improvement from the baseline year, a continuing backward trend in developmental outcomes and school readiness and worsening outcomes for children in out-of-home care (OOHC).

"The shift in birthweight outcomes from improving to stalling is devastating. It shows that systems are not delivering the support our families need from the very beginning.

"The continued decline in developmental outcomes should be a wake-up call. When children are falling behind in social, emotional and cognitive development, it tells us the system is failing them.

These are critical foundations for life. When children miss these milestones in early education, they risk starting school already behind their peers or with undiagnosed developmental delays that make it significantly harder to thrive.

"We know what works. Investment in ACCO-led early childhood education and care is the missing piece of the puzzle.

"Programs like Early Years Support are already proving their value - independent evaluation shows they are effective, trusted, and strengthening our community-controlled sector. The answer is to scale what works."

For every data point, the peak body warns, there is a child, often interacting with systems of state care, whose life outcomes are being shaped by these failures.

Governments across the country have dropped the ball on our children, and the consequences are being felt every day," Ms Liddle said.

END

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