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POPULATION OF ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CHILDREN REMOVED BY CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEM WILL TRIPLE BY 2035 MAJOR NEW REPORT WARNS

Canberra, Australia: The already alarmingly high numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children being removed from their families will triple across the next two decades unless there is an urgent and concerted effort by government and the community to tackle the problem, the inaugural *Family Matters* report reveals.

Launched on Wednesday at Parliament House in Canberra, the report highlights that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are almost 10 times more likely to be removed by child protection authorities than non-Indigenous children. Right now, approximately 15,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are living away from their homes, too many separated from their families and culture.

To address this national crisis the Family Matters coalition – a 150-strong contingent of prominent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, noted academics and other groups – is calling for a comprehensive national strategy to be adopted by state and federal governments.

Family Matters Co-Chair and CEO of [SNAICC – National Voice for our Children](#), Gerry Moore, said the current approach from government was not targeting the root causes of the problem, which is growing rapidly. Just 17 per cent (\$700 million) of overall child protection funding is spent on support services for families, he said, meaning the bulk (\$3.5 billion) was being spent reacting to the problem, rather than preventing it.

“We are deeply shocked by the projection of current trends showing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care will almost triple by 2035 – this is a stark warning that we need a new approach,” Mr Moore said.

“The Family Matters campaign demands a COAG strategy to urgently address this national crisis.”

The report also reveals the primary cause of removal centres on poverty and family violence. It also exposes the significant role discrimination plays, with Indigenous families having appreciably lower access to services that support child safety, development and well-being.

Family Matters Co-Chair and [QATSICPP](#) CEO, Natalie Lewis, said while the safety of children was paramount, the current situation was blatantly unfair to Aboriginal children and their families.



“It is discriminatory, and it is all of our responsibility to work together to ensure all children are afforded the best chance to grow up nurtured and cared for connected to their family and culture,” Ms Lewis said.

“The consequences of not doing this are profound: devastating families; deepening intergenerational trauma; severing children’s cultural bonds; triggering poor life outcomes; and eroding culture and community.”

“Aboriginal children have grown up safe and well cared for in family and culture for thousands of years – we have the answers and the evidence to raise our children safe and in culture,” said Ms Lewis.

The report also details state specific data, revealing the worst performance by Western Australia with the highest rates of over-representation (16.2 times) and lowest take-up of evidence informed solutions. Victoria shows the most promise, investing in significant measures to improve Aboriginal child safety and well-being.

The *Family Matters* campaign is calling for:

1. A comprehensive COAG strategy to redress the causes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child removal and improve child safety and well-being, backed by strong targets
2. A minimum of 30 per cent of all investment in child protection be channelled into prevention and early intervention
3. A new federal program for effective and culturally safe reunification programs across Australia
4. State-wide Aboriginal family led decision-making programs
5. A federal program to trial local community strategies to redress local risks for children and mediate child protection intervention, and
6. State-based commissioners and peak bodies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in all states and territories.

Ms Lewis said: “We are now approaching the 20th anniversary of the seminal *Bringing Them Home* report and, while many of our communities are thriving, the stark findings and projections in this report cannot be ignored.”

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For more information visit: <http://www.familymatters.org.au/>

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