STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT

*Family Matters* is Australia’s national campaign to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people grow up safe and cared for in family, community and culture. *Family Matters* aims to eliminate the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care by 2040.

**PURPOSE**

This statement reflects our intent to work collaboratively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their organisations to achieve the goal of the *Family Matters* campaign. This commitment requires all signatories to work in accordance with key principles, and to implement corresponding actions. The six core principles of the *Family Matters* campaign and actions in accordance with each principle are outlined in detail on the following page.

**PRINCIPLES**

We hereby commit to these six core principle and all corresponding actions:

- Applying a child focussed approach
- Ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations participate in and have control over decisions that affect their children
- Protecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children’s right to live in culture
- Pursuing evidence based responses
- Supporting, healing and strengthening families
- Challenging systemic racism and inequities

**PLEDGE**

We hereby commit to implementing this Statement.

Name: ____________________________________________

Organisation: ____________________________________________

Signature: ____________________________________________

Date: ____________________________________________
**PRINCIPLE 1: APPLYING A CHILD FOCUSED APPROACH**

We recognise that in all actions concerning children their best interests should be the paramount consideration and that ensuring their safety is essential. Advancing the best interests of children requires the holistic realisation of their rights, including rights to safety, family, housing, health, education, culture and participation. We understand that the best interests of an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander child can only be properly determined with the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Accordingly, we will:

- Ensure that the best interests of the child, informed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, is the paramount consideration in all decisions about the care and protection of children.
- Promote the inclusion of children’s voices in all decision that affect them.

**PRINCIPLE 2: ENSURING THAT ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLE AND ORGANISATIONS PARTICIPATE IN AND HAVE CONTROL OVER DECISIONS THAT AFFECT THEIR CHILDREN**

We believe that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have the strengths and the right to lead change for their own children. Governments and services should provide mechanisms and supports for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families, communities and organisations to participate in and drive decision-making about the safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Accordingly, we will:

- Build and transfer capacity to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations to provide services that respond to the needs of their communities.
- Ensure policies and mechanisms to facilitate the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families in all decisions that affect them.
- Recognise the role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to drive local solutions to local issues.

**PRINCIPLE 3: PROTECTING ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CHILDREN’S RIGHT TO LIVE IN CULTURE**

We recognise that for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, connections to their family, community and culture are critical to their wellbeing and positive self-identity. We also recognise the evidence that cultural and community networks support safety for children, and that continuity of cultural identity promotes healthy development. We believe that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have the right to practise their cultures with their families and communities.

Accordingly, we will:

- Promote and enable the full implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle in line with its intent to maintain quality cultural connections for children throughout their involvement with child protection systems.
- Develop the capability of organisations and staff to work in culturally safe and competent ways to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

**PRINCIPLE 4: PURSUING EVIDENCE BASED RESPONSES**

We believe that in responding to the issue of over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in child protection systems, our efforts should be based on the evidence of what works. This evidence base critically includes the knowledge, wisdom and experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Accordingly, we will:

- Respect and practically apply research findings on what is effective to respond to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, recognising the critical importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in research to the quality of the evidence base.
- Listen to the knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples on how best to respond to the needs of their children and families, including by resourcing and supporting community-led program evaluation and research.

**PRINCIPLE 5: SUPPORTING, HEALING AND STRENGTHENING FAMILIES**

We recognise that family is the foundation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children’s social, cultural and emotional wellbeing and is their most important life-long support. We acknowledge the unique need for healing supports to address the impacts of inter-generational trauma on families that has resulted from experiences of colonisation, the Stolen Generations and other discriminatory government policies. We recognise and respect the evidence that shows that early intervention is critical to heal and strengthen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to care for their children and ensure they thrive.

Accordingly, we will:

- Promote and drive increased early intervention supports for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and increased proportional investment in early intervention as compared to out-of-home care.
- Support and promote a priority to safely reunify Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children with their families wherever it is possible to do so.

**PRINCIPLE 6: CHALLENGING SYSTEMIC RACISM AND INEQUITIES**

We acknowledge that the current challenges facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families result from a history of injustice and racism that remains embedded within the laws, policies and practices of our society, systems and institutions.

Accordingly, we will:

- We will take actions to ensure law, policy and practice are designed to respond to the root causes of poverty and disadvantage for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- We will challenge racism where we see or experience it in laws, policies, procedures or behaviours.