



C/O SNAICC
National Voice for our Children
(Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation)
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NUMBER OF ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CHILDREN REMOVED HAS DOUBLED SINCE APOLOGY – COMMUNITY CONTROL KEY TO ADDRESSING DEVASTATING TREND

Canberra, Australia: Today, across Australia, over 17,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are living in out-of-home care, more than twice as many children than on this day in 2008 when the Parliament of Australia apologised.

Ten years ago today, the nation stopped as then Prime Minister Rudd apologised, on behalf of successive governments, for removing generations of our children from their families, communities and country, fracturing lives and causing untold trauma to our people.

The apology has not been followed by sufficient action to address the intergenerational impacts that continue to tear families apart today. The situation for our children and families has not just stagnated, but worsened.

The latest government data reveals Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are now 10.1 times more likely to be placed in out-of-home care than non-Indigenous children. That over-representation increasing from 6.6 at the time of the apology.

As a nation, we are on a very harmful trajectory. If the current national trend in child protection continues, the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children living in out-of-home care will triple by 2035.

“It’s clear that whatever strategy has been in place has failed – consistently so – and it is our children that bear the burden of the system’s inability to get this right,” says Natalie Lewis, Family Matters Co-Chair.

“Every review, inquiry, and report has been absolutely consistent, supported by national and international evidence, and yet we hear that these issues continue to confound our governments.

“Family Matters – echoing recommendations from the *Brining them Home* report 20 years ago – is an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led campaign, presenting evidence-based solutions to address the issues facing our families. Nobody is more invested in a new narrative for our children, families and communities than Aboriginal people.

“We know that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations are best placed to design and deliver necessitated local responses, yet support for these

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organisations is often fleeting.”

Some states have begun to genuinely invest in our communities to support healing for families and safe care for children. The Victorian Government is progressively transferring responsibility for our children in out-of-home care to Aboriginal agencies; in Queensland, the state government has recently begun a \$150 million 5-year investment in community-controlled family wellbeing services; and the New South Wales Government has committed to provide 30 per cent of targeted earlier intervention services through Aboriginal community-controlled agencies by 2020.

A refresh of the COAG Closing the Gap initiative is currently underway. To date a target and strategy to reduce the vast over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care has not been seen as a priority to improve the life outcomes of our people. This must change.

Family Matters is calling for new targets through the Closing the Gap refresh to eliminate over-representation in out-of-home care and address the gap in access to early childhood supports that help to keep children safe at home. Targets must be underpinned by a strategy that addresses the underlying causes of child protection intervention – including family violence, intergenerational trauma, drug and alcohol, mental health and disability issues.

“For decades we have been forced to watch as more and more money is wastefully invested where we know it will have minimal impacts,” says Ms Lewis.

“We hear consistent calls for increased focus and investment in prevention and early intervention, to make communities stronger and safer, yet funding for family support has remained below \$1 in every \$5 spent by governments on child protection related services for the last decade. We cannot continue to invest so heavily in responding to the problems rather than investing in the solutions.”

Accountability measures, including a target and strategy developed with and overseen by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, are necessary steps in ensuring our children can grow up safely and cared for in family, community and culture.

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For more information please visit www.familymatters.org.au or contact:

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