

Statement to Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC)
Re: Territory Families update to inform the 2018 Family Matters Report

Consistent with the *Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory*, the Northern Territory Government recognises the vital role of Aboriginal organisations in supporting Aboriginal people and is committed to working in partnership to reduce the disproportionately high number of Aboriginal children and young people in care, and to enable Aboriginal people to play a greater role in the planning, design, management and delivery of services for Aboriginal children, youth and families.

Universal and targeted services

Territory Families recently introduced a service to refer vulnerable families for earlier support and reduce the need for statutory intervention. Additionally, in 2017-18 Territory Families made a new commitment of \$100,000 to Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory to commence the service design for an early intervention family support service for Aboriginal families who are identified as at risk by Territory Families and/or who self-identify as needing support in their parenting. Thereafter Territory Families has committed \$800,000 per annum for an Aboriginal Controlled Health Service to deliver this service in at least one location commencing in 2018-19 for a three year period. A further \$11.4 million has been committed over four years from 2018-19 to fund the staged establishment of eleven Child and Family Centres, building on the existing six centres. They will be able to adopt “recognised entity” status, enabling them to support children and families engaging with the child protection system. The criteria for selecting operators of the Centres will be developed to preference Aboriginal controlled organisations.

Participation, control, and self-determination

The Northern Territory Government supports Aboriginal self-determination and has introduced Local Decision Making (LDM) as a 10 year plan to transfer power back to Aboriginal communities. In line with this approach, Territory Families will introduce Family Group Conferencing, firstly developing a model in 2018-19 in partnership with Aboriginal controlled organisations, children and families; and then implementing the model from 2019-20, expanding to up to 350 conferences over the first three years. Meanwhile, Territory Families is continuing to fund and work with Aboriginal Peak Organisations NT and the SNAICC to create and build Aboriginal-led and managed out-of-home care services in the Northern Territory. At the same time, promising community-led practices are emerging – for example, community leaders in East Arnhem Land, with support from Territory Families, established the Mikan Community Reference group in 2017. The Mikan group provides direct advice to Territory Families on the care and protection of Yolgnu children and is working with the East Arnhem office to help reduce the risk of child abuse and neglect in the local community.

Culturally safe and responsive systems

Territory Families is finalising its Cultural Security Framework to ensure that the agency’s activities, behaviours, policies, and standards promote the highest level of cultural competence. The Strategy recognises the need to integrate and embed Aboriginal cultural worldviews and values across the child and family welfare sector. The Government has also committed to a \$4.2 million grant program for Aboriginal organisations to find and support Aboriginal families to safely care for Aboriginal children in out-of-home care, building on the success of an existing partnership with Tangentyere Council to pilot a kinship mapping and training program within Central Australia. An additional investment in the expanded use of interpreters will also help ensure families can engage in planning and reunification in their first language.

Accountability

A Tripartite Forum has been established, with representatives from the Commonwealth and Northern Territory governments, and the community sector, particularly Aboriginal-controlled organisations, to guide implementation of the reforms resulting from the Royal Commission. The forum is chaired by Donna Ah Chee, a highly respected Aboriginal woman with a long career in the human services sector and met for the first time on 23 July 2018. The Forum will meet four times per year and deliver an annual report to the Territory and Commonwealth governments as well as peak agency boards.