



FAMILY MATTERS REPORT 2019 KEY FINDINGS BRIEF

How to use this brief:

- *The Family Matters Report 2019* will be launched in Canberra on Thursday, 17 October and we want you to help Australia take notice.
- Use these briefing notes for media releases and contact Mark Jeffery, media manager (0419 732 583 media@snaicc.org.au) to arrange an interview with a campaign spokesperson.
- Share *The Family Matters Report 2019* (available www.familymatters.org.au) and its findings as widely as possible on your social media platforms including **#FamilyMatters after 7.45am AEDT, next Thursday 17 October**.
- [Support](#) the Family Matters campaign by signing our [Statement of Commitment](#).

The disparities between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous children across child protection systems continue to increase dramatically. Without urgent action, the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care is projected to **double within the next 10 years**. In 2018, **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were 10.2 times more likely** to be residing in out-of-home care than non-Indigenous children.

WHAT IS FAMILY MATTERS?

Family Matters – Strong communities. Strong culture. Stronger children. 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.

OUR GOAL is to eliminate the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care by 2040.

Family Matters is led by SNAICC – National Voice for our Children and a group of eminent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders from across the country. The campaign is supported by a Strategic Alliance of over 150 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous organisations.

Since 2016, the campaign has released an annual Family Matters report that examines how Australia is faring in improving the safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal

and Torres Strait Islander children. It is clear from this year's report that without substantial efforts to refocus policy and investment on prevention and early intervention, children will continue to be at risk of separation from their families, communities and cultures.

KEY FINDINGS OF THE FAMILY MATTERS REPORT 2019

- The crisis of over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Australia's child protection systems continues to escalate at an alarming rate. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are **37.3%** of the total out-of-home care population, but only **5.5%** of the total population of children in Australia. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are now 10.2 times more likely to be removed from their families than non-Indigenous children.
- Data projections suggest that the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in care will more than double in the next 10 years if we do not change our course of action.
- In one year alone, there was a significant drop in the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care placed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers, from 49.4% in June 2017 to 45% in June 2018.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care are at serious risk of permanent separation from their families, cultures and communities. They are seven times more likely to be on permanent care orders until the age of 18. **In New South Wales, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are nearly twice (1.8 x) as likely to be on a permanent care order compared with the national average.**
- There are a number of examples of changes to child protection data reporting that weaken government transparency and accountability towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This includes deficiencies in the identification of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Tasmania resulting in the exclusion of key Tasmanian child protection data from the report.
- Some states (NSW, Victoria and WA) have excluded children on permanent care orders from their out-of-home care data, despite the fact that these children have been removed from their parents by the state. The 2,634 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who were made invisible in the data by this change, have been re-added to the data in *The Family Matters Report 2019*.
- The trauma associated with child removal is intergenerational. Children living in a household with members of the Stolen Generations, when compared with other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, were: 4.5 times as likely to have missed school without permission; 1.8 times as likely to have poor self-assessed health and 1.6 times as likely to live in household with cash-flow problems.

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children experience disadvantage across a range of early childhood vulnerability indicators. In Western Australia, 60.9% of children reported to a child protection service prior to birth are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Nationally, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are 2.6 times more likely to be developmentally delayed at the age of five and they attend child care services at half the rate of non-Indigenous children.
- Household income and access to safe and healthy housing have a substantial impact on the capacity of families to provide safe and supportive care for children. Nearly one in three (31.4%) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are living below the poverty line. Rental stress, defined as paying more than 30% of household income on rent payments, is one measurement used to assess affordability. The 2016 Census determined that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander householders are almost twice as likely to experience rental stress.
- A key premise of the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009 – 2020 is that redressing the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care requires an increased focus on prevention and early intervention. However, in 2017-18 only 17% of child protection funding was invested in support services for children and their families, while 83% was invested in child protection services and out-of-home care. This proportion has remained constant over the past three financial years.
- Despite significant government commitments to increase the role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisation (ACCO) child protection and family support services, investment remains limited across the country. In the Northern Territory, for example, service delivery continues to be dominated by non-Indigenous providers. Overall, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agencies in the Northern Territory received just 2.4% of funding spent on child protection, out-of-home care and family support services – comprising 1.8% of family support funding (a decrease of 5.2% since 2016-17) and 0.3% of child protection funding (a decrease of 10.7% since 2016-17). Queensland invested the most in ACCO service delivery of any state or territory providing data in 2017-18, including through a \$33.3 million annual investment in 33 ACCO Child and Family Wellbeing Services. Legislation in Queensland and Victoria includes strong requirements for the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities in child protection processes. Notably, legislation in both of these states provides for the delegation of statutory powers to ACCOs, creating the potential for enabling higher levels of self-determination and meaningful participation in child protection matters. Victoria has begun delegations to two Aboriginal agencies, with promising early results detailed in the report.
- Following Queensland's successful trial of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family-led decision-making in 2016-17, the Queensland Government has rolled out a Family Participation Program across the state, commencing in 2018 and providing funding to 15 ACCOs to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to participate in child protection decision-making.

Victoria continues its long-standing statewide program for Aboriginal family-led decision-making, which has strong involvement by ACCOs. The Australian Capital Territory has also trialled a new model of family group conferencing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, with promising early results.

THE SOLUTIONS

1. Development of a national comprehensive Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's strategy that includes generational targets to eliminate over-representation and address the causes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child removal.
2. Investment in quality Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled integrated early years services through a specific program with targets to increase coverage in areas of high Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population and high levels of disadvantage.
3. Establishment of state-based and national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's commissioners to enable improved government accountability and oversight.
4. An end to legal orders for permanent care and adoption for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, replaced by a focus on supporting their connections to kin, culture and community.

