

**Statement to Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC)  
Re: Territory Families update to information the 2019 Family Matters Report**

*Safe, Thriving and Connected: Generational Change for Children and Families* is the Northern Territory (NT) Government's implementation plan, addressing recommendations from the Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children and Young People in the Northern Territory (the Royal Commission). This is accompanied by a budget allocation of over \$229 million in new funding to strengthen early, targeted support for vulnerable families while also fixing the child protection and youth justice systems.

**Universal and targeted services**

Territory Families invested \$6.5 million in the construction of the Tennant Creek Child and Family Centre – the first of 11 new centres to be built across the Northern Territory over the next five years, investing in fund community-driven activities which support families with children aged zero to five years. In 2018 Territory Families launched the Family and Children Enquiry and Support (FACES) hotline. This has already resulted in more families accessing crucial supports before they hit crisis point. Through our partnership with Northern Territory Council of Social Service (NTCOSS) we are now expanding the NT Social Services Directory. This online tool provides invaluable information to families about where they can access support and assistance. Territory Families is also developing a community education campaign that will promote early support services, prompt families to ask for help before a crisis and remove the stigma associated with seeking help. Recognising the role of Aboriginal organisations in providing services to Aboriginal families, Territory Families has funded the Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance NT to co-design an early intervention service that can be delivered through Aboriginal medical services.

**Participation, control, and self determination**

Territory Families is continuing to work with the Mikan Reference Group in East Arnhem to effectively identify and support kinship carers. Mikan is a partnership between Territory Families and Yolngu community representatives in East Arnhem Land and provides advice to Territory Families on the care and protection of Yolngu children. Territory Families place-based staff are working closely with community elders, local authorities and relevant boards to increase local decision making in relation to concerns of safety of children and communities. This includes targeted workshops with Aboriginal community controlled organisations and staff about models and approaches to implement recognition for cultural authority groups or entities to be involved in this decision making.

Territory Families is progressing with the implementation of Family Group Conferencing in child protection matters, recognising the centrality of family decision making. Territory Families' re-invigorated Child Safety Coordination Groups provide important community input to child safety situations as well as advising Government on broader child safety reforms. The number of these collaborative, community-based child safety and coordination groups has recently been expanded, and they are now active in Batchelor, Borroloola, Daly River, Jabiru, Kalkarindji, Maningrida, Papunya, Wadeye, Wurrumiyanga, and Yuendumu.

**Culturally safe and responsive systems**

Territory Families developed and is implementing the Aboriginal Cultural Security Framework which shapes a whole of agency approach to building culturally proficient services, systems, and governance. Over 550 people have contributed to the development of the framework through departmental and external partner and community consultation. The Framework identifies how we can strengthen partnerships with Aboriginal people and communities, promote a workforce who encourage understanding and respect for cultural diversity and work towards a system where Aboriginal people are empowered to make decisions about Aboriginal families.

Territory Families partnered with Aboriginal led organisations to increase and support Aboriginal Kinship and Foster Care placements through a new \$4.2 million investment over four 4 years (2018-19 – 2021-22) building to an additional \$1.75 million per year ongoing from 2022-23. In 2018/19, \$450,000 was provided across three Aboriginal organisations (Tangentyere Council, Larrakia Nation and Ngurratjuta/Pmara Ntjarra Aboriginal Corporation) to deliver kinship carer scoping and support services. An additional \$200,000 was provided to Tangentyere to design a kinship carer support model for implementation across the Northern Territory. These services have contributed to an increase of 40 kinship carers looking after family from June 2018 to April 2019.

Territory Families worked in co-design with a range of stakeholders including Aboriginal community controlled health and legal services to develop the Care and Protection Amendment Bill 2019, which was introduced to the Legislative Assembly on 20 March 2019 and is due for debate in August 2019. The Bill explicitly recognises the importance of connection to family, culture, language and country for Aboriginal children by introducing new principles for consideration about the best interest of the child; imposing requirements that Government engage with and provide information to children and families in a manner and language they understand, if necessary through the use of interpreters; improving the rights of families and Aboriginal representatives to participate in care planning processes; ensuring care plans include cultural components; and that notice of court applications is provided to children and families in a language and manner they understand.

### **Accountability**

The Children and Families Tripartite Forum was established in 2018 and provides a forum for structured and sustained high level engagement between the Northern Territory and Australian Governments and community sector regarding children experiencing vulnerability, young people and families, and child protection and youth justice issues. The Forum held its first meeting on 23 July 2018 in Alice Springs and has held two further meetings on 15 October 2018 in Darwin and 31 January 2019 in Alice Springs. Membership of the Forum comprises representatives from the Northern Territory and Australian Governments, the Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory, NTCOSS; and North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency. The Forum is chaired by Ms Donna Ah Chee, as the Independent Aboriginal Chair.