



16 November 2020

REPORT REVEALS ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CHILDREN CONTINUE TO BE SEPARATED FROM FAMILIES AND CULTURE AT ALARMING RATES

The rising tide of over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children removed from their families continues at an alarming rate, with the majority of those children permanently separated from their parents.

The Family Matters Report 2020, launched today, reveals that our children continue to be removed from family and kin at disproportionate rates – disrupting their connection to community and culture.

Family Matters Chair Sue-Anne Hunter said,

“Our children are 9.7 times more likely to be living away from their families than non-Indigenous children, an over-representation that has increased consistently over the last 10 years. It is time to completely change this broken system that is not working for our kids.”

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children represent 37% of the total population of all children that have been removed from their parents – a staggering 20,077 children – but represent only 6% of the total population of children in Australia.

Without urgent action, the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care is projected to double by 2029.

The report reveals a concerning trend towards permanent placement and a rise in adoptions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

A worrying 81% (16,287) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care are living permanently away from their birth parents until the age of 18 years.

In 2018-19, there were 19 adoptions. Of these, 95% of adoptions of our children have been to non-Indigenous carers, and all occurred in New South Wales and Victoria.

Ms Hunter continued,

“The majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are thriving, supported in family, community and culture.



“Permanently removing our children from their family and ties to community is not the answer to a happy, healthy and safe upbringing. We have learnt from the Stolen Generations that removal leads to continued disadvantage and intergenerational trauma for our children.

“Connection to culture is crucial for our children to develop their own sense of identity, connection and belonging.”

Since 2013, the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care placed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers has dropped significantly from 53.6% to 43.8% in 2019.

“With less than half of our children living with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers, that connection to family and culture is further removed,” Ms Hunter said.

By the age of five, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are 2.5 times more likely to have developmental vulnerabilities, and 28% less likely to attend early childhood education and care than non-Indigenous children.

The impacts of reduced household income and access to safe and healthy housing affects the capacity of families to provide safe and supportive care for children. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families are 10 times more likely to live in social housing than non-Indigenous families, and nearly one in three (31.4%) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are living below the poverty line.

The new *National Agreement on Closing the Gap* was signed in 2020 and includes a target to reduce the rate of over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care by 45% by 2031.

This target can be met by increasing prevention and early intervention supports to families, and by supporting families to safely reunify when children have been removed.

The report highlights states and territories that are leading the way to enable self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in child protection including through family-led decision-making programs and the delegation of child protection services to Aboriginal community-controlled organisations.

Family Matters commends the appointment of Aboriginal commissioners in Queensland, South Australia and Victoria but calls for a national commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people to ensure oversight of child protection services and a focus on protecting children’s rights.

“Our families face extraordinary challenges every day. The impact of institutional racism and poverty often leads to unjust outcomes for our children and families.



“By investing in Aboriginal-led solutions, closing the gap on education and employment outcomes and supporting our families with essential early intervention and prevention services, we can work towards ensuring our children have the best opportunities to live happy and healthy lives.

“The choices we make for our children today will shape their tomorrow. Our kids have a right to be supported. Investing in their future must take priority.”

– Sue-Anne Hunter, Family Matters Chair
Wurundjeri and Ngurai illum wurrung

The Family Matters Report 2020 calls for:

1. A national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children’s strategy that that is aligned to achieve the Closing the Gap target to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care by 45% by 2031, by addressing the causes of child removal.
2. Increase investment in universal and targeted early intervention and prevention, including family support and reunification services.
3. Invest in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled integrated early years services through a new specific funding model and program designed to meet the needs of our children and families.
4. Prioritise and increase investment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service design and delivery by community-controlled organisations in line with self-determination and the aspirations of communities.
5. Establish and support independent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family-led decision-making models in every state and territory, for all families across all significant child protection decision-making points.
6. End the policy and practice of adopting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from out-of-home care and engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to create an alternative system of promoting stability and permanency for children, instead of using permanent legal orders.
7. Establish a commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children nationally and in every state and territory.

Read the full report at www.familymatters.org.au

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For more information and to speak to a Family Matters spokesperson, please contact:

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About Family Matters

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.

The Family Matters campaign aims to eliminate the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care by 2040.

The Family Matters Report 2020 will be launched on Monday 16 November 2020 online at 3.30pm AEDT.

Register to attend at: [Family Matters 2020 report launch](#)

Join us on social media and find out at www.familymatters.org.au