

Secretariat National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care, SNAI CC

Improving access to Childcare for Indigenous Families.

- Briefing paper for Commonwealth Child Care Reference Group

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Overview

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children remain significantly under represented in all forms of Commonwealth funded child care and over represented in our state based systems of child protection. Put simply the challenge we all face is improve access for Indigenous children to early childhood education services, including child care, and provide Indigenous children with a better start in life. Investing now in the early years will greatly assist in keeping Indigenous children out of the child protection and juvenile justice systems in later years.

In relation to child care and pre school education access by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families falls well behind that of the rest of the Australian community. Of even greater concern is the fact that access by Indigenous children to these services is declining.

Based on the 1999 Child Care Census and according to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare there are approximately 7000 Indigenous children participating in some form of Commonwealth funded child care.

Service Type	MACS	Long day care	Occasional care	Mobiles	OSSHC	FDC	Other	Total
Indigenous Children								
Number	1207	3766	89	199	858	792	57	6968
%	17.3	54.0	1.3	2.9	12.3	11.4	0.8	100

Source: *The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples 2001. AIHW. cat no 4704.0*

The Federal Government's National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy recognises that,

" The number of Indigenous pre-school aged children rose dramatically between 1991 and 1996. However at the same time, the number in pre school stayed roughly the same at around 8,000. Thus the participation rate dropped from almost 53% to around 41% in 1996, a substantial reduction.."

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are the only group in the Australia for whom participation in pre school education is falling.

Currently less than 5,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 6 weeks to 5 are participating in centre based child care throughout Australia. Whilst Indigenous children comprise 4.2% of all children aged 0 - 12 they make up only 1.5% of the children aged 0 -12 in Commonwealth funded child care. They are therefore significantly under represented in Commonwealth child care.

Specifically according to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, AIHW, Indigenous children are still over six times more likely to be removed from their families than other Australian children. The key causes the AIHW note include:

- higher rates of poverty
- inadequate housing and living conditions
- inter-generational effects of previous separations from family and culture
- cultural differences in child rearing practices, and
- lack of access to support services.

Thus in summary it can be said that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are six times more likely to be removed from home by the child welfare system but less than half as likely as other children to receive assistance through centre based child care or pre school education.

Community based services are currently the major providers of child care for Indigenous children with Indigenous services strongly favoured where they are available. This preference stems from a number of factors including the historical legacy of previous child welfare practices which resulted in the widespread forced removal of children from their families and communities from their lands. Over the past hundred years Indigenous communities have fought to win back control over the welfare and care of their children. It is in this context that Indigenous community based and controlled services are seen by communities as providing the most appropriate mechanism for the delivery of child care and other services for families and children.

Managing community based services presents particular challenges for Indigenous communities given the harsh socio-economic circumstances which confront the families live in those communities. High levels of poverty, unemployment, family violence and child abuse, substance abuse and family breakdown combined with low levels of participation in post compulsory education mitigate against effective community based management. The common experience of services such as the Multi-functional Aboriginal Children's Services, MACS, is that the families they work with are likely to be directly affected by any or all of the above factors.

Over the past fifteen years the Multi-functional Aboriginal Children's Services, MACS, have proved to be the most sustainable model for the provision of child care within Indigenous communities. In recent years others models of community based service provision have developed although the limit on MACS funding has left communities with no option but to meet their child care needs in some way other than establishing a MACS service. SNAICC's view is that the breadth of the MACS service model with its emphasis on supporting families with children in a multitude of ways makes it the most broadly applicable service model for providing child care within Indigenous communities.

With this as a background SNAICC recommends that the Commonwealth commit to a significant and sustained program of expanding available child care services and programs for Indigenous children.

Specifically this should include:

- increased Commonwealth funding for the development of additional Multi-functional Aboriginal Children's Services, MACS
- increased Commonwealth funding for the provision of additional child care places within the existing Multi-functional Aboriginal Children's Services, MACS
- establishment of a national resource agency as a partnership between SNAICC and the Commonwealth to ensure that existing and new services are actively assisted with ongoing management and program development and secondly to assist communities with the development of proposals to develop new services.

The actions and decisions of governments, communities and non-government organisations taken at this time will impact greatly on the future of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Increased expenditure on child care and early childhood development must be seen as an investment which will return to families, communities and governments not just long term savings in financial terms but long term benefits in the health and welfare of Indigenous children and young people.

Over the past several decades there have been significant improvements in the health and education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. This has been achieved through the

efforts of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, governments and other sections of the community working together.

These achievements must now be extended through an increased commitment to early childhood development commencing with a major expansion of the Commonwealth's commitment to provide accessible child care for Indigenous families and children.

Development of Indigenous community based children's services

Historical context - the forced removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

Since the earliest days of colonisation Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were subjected to harsh, discriminatory, racist and profoundly damaging policies of state intervention into the lives of their families (HREOC 1997a, Austin 1993, Butler 1993b). Throughout the nineteenth and most of the twentieth century control and forcible removal of children from their families became the dominating intervention in child welfare practice, often motivated by the desire to eliminate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by preventing their children from being raised as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (Cummings 1990, Briskman 2001, Van Krieken 1991). These policies and practices gave rise to what has become known as the *Stolen Generations* with calls for a national apology and compensation to those affected featuring as prominent political issues in recent years (HREOC 1997a, Ridgeway 2001).

Child removal and the economic, social and political segregation of Aboriginal people throughout Australia, for a period of a hundred years or more, laid the foundations for the unemployment, poverty, homelessness, poor educational access and family dysfunction which Indigenous people experience today. Arrangements for the welfare of Indigenous children today need to recognise the racism, abuse, violence and cruelty which has been practiced against them in the past. When we fail to recognise how the past lives on we allow the injustice of the past to continue.

Protection Policies and Child Removal

The book *I can see the old home so clearly* provides a detailed account of the Commonwealth Government's Aboriginal protection policies, which authorised the removal of Aboriginal children of mixed descent from their families throughout the Northern Territory in the first half of the 20th century. (Austin 1993)

The 1909 *Northern Territory Aboriginals Act*, established a legal hierarchy of races: Europeans, Asians, Aborigines of mixed descent and other Aborigines and provided for the removal of Aboriginal children from their families. The legislation did not differentiate between Aborigines and 'half-castes' and, under the legislation, the Chief Protector of Aboriginals was made the legal guardian of every Aboriginal child regardless of their circumstances. Within designated areas local protectors were appointed as the local guardians of children with these positions usually filled by members of the Police force (Austin 1993, page 37).

Barbara Cummings in her book, *Take this child: From the Kahlin Compound to the Retta Dixon Children's Home*, provides an equally detailed account of the protection period but from the perspective of an Aboriginal woman whose mother had been removed as a child. She outlines the development of the Aborigines Inland Mission, (AIM), the establishment of compounds, reserves and missions for the control of Aboriginal people and the relationship between legislators and missionaries in giving effect to policies of child removal.

Policies of forced removal and detention were applied in all States and Territories and were applied to whole communities - not just children.

In 1911 the site for the Kahlin compound in which all of Darwin's Aboriginal people would be forced to live was chosen and in 1913 a 'half-caste' home was opened within Kahlin compound for children and, in the same year, a tin shed infamously known as the Bungalow, was erected in Alice Springs to house 'half-caste' children from in and around Alice Springs (MacDonald 1995).

In the early part of the twentieth century church and government missions or reserves were opened and operated in every State and Territory. Conditions in the missions, reserves and compounds were harsh and children were only to be trained for domestic, pastoral and low skilled areas of employment. This was consistent with the racist belief that Aboriginal people, mixed descent or not, were not capable of anything more, and conveniently corresponded to fulfilling the economic needs of the colonial State for these forms of labour (Cummings 1990, HREOC 1997)

Throughout Australia the interference, intervention and control over the lives of Aboriginal people implemented through legislation and ordinances extended to curfews, restrictions on movement, restrictions on marriage, censoring what films and literature Aboriginal people could access, exclusion from school and exclusion from employment.

Indigenous claims over the welfare of their children

Critical to the elevation of these issues to national prominence has been the work of Indigenous people through mechanisms including the national peak advocacy body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, SNAI CC, the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (Briskman, 2001).

In 1991 SNAI CC became the first national Indigenous organisation to demand a national inquiry into the *Stolen Generations*. Following a campaign of sustained advocacy from SNAI CC and others, in 1995 the Commonwealth Attorney General established the terms of reference for a national inquiry to be conducted by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, HREOC. The report of that inquiry, *Bringing Them Home*, concluded that;

between one in three and one in ten Indigenous children were forcibly removed from their families and communities between 1910 and 1970. (HREOC 1997b, page 4)

SNAI CC's current advocacy forms part of a long struggle by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities to regain control over the destiny of their children. The issue of Aboriginal children's rights was prominent in the demands of the first Aboriginal political organisations in the nineteen-twenties.

In 1927 the New South Wales based Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association sent the NSW Premier a petition which called on the Government to,

"..restore to us that share of our country of which we should never have been deprived"

and requested that,

" The family life of the Aboriginal people shall be held sacred and free from invasion and that the children shall be left in the control of their parents." (Goodall, 1982 as cited by Briskman, 2001)

In 1938, Bill Ferguson and J. T. Patten signed a declaration calling for the abolition of the Aboriginal Protection Board and the,

"repeal of all existing legislation dealing with Aborigines".

Amongst other reasons for this call, they mentioned the Boards' powers to apprentice children and to;

"assume full control and custody of the child of any Aborigine (Goodall, 1982as cited by Briskman, 2001)".

The fourth term of reference of the HREOC inquiry was to examine the contemporary removal of Indigenous children. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are still far more likely to be removed from their families than non Indigenous children through the child protection systems of Australia's states and territories (AI HW 2001). In the past ten years this continued over representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the child welfare system has been formally recorded by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, AI HW (Johnstone, 2000). The removal of Indigenous children from their families continues at an alarming rate with many still being placed with non Indigenous foster families. The AI HW note that nationally Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are approximately six times more likely to be removed from home for welfare related reasons than non-Indigenous children (AI HW 2001).

With the ongoing removal of Indigenous children from their families for welfare related reasons continuing at six times the rate of other Australian children the debilitating effects of family breakdown and separation are likely to continue into the next generation.

The First Aboriginal Child Survival Seminar

In 1979 the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency, VACCA, convened the First Aboriginal Child Survival Seminar, in Melbourne. The seminar is now recognised as one of the most significant milestones in the development of Indigenous community controlled organisations to promote the welfare of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

At the time the then Victorian Minister for Community Services, the Hon Brian Dixon, referred to the seminar at a meeting of all Welfare Ministers stating that;

" All of us, as Welfare Ministers, are from time to time criticised in the media in terms of the resources that we can make available for personal welfare services: but if ever a group required even more positive discrimination, it is the Aborigines. I think that this national conference, which is the 23rd to 26th in April in Melbourne, is going to present some pretty terrifying statistics. I just hope we are ready for what is going to occur and that we have some understanding of the sort of extra resources that we need. (Jackson, 1979)

Whilst the seminar was primarily focussed on child welfare issues it covered a range of key themes including:

- Aboriginal adoption and foster care
- Juvenile justice and child welfare
- The health and development of Aboriginal children
- Access to child care and preschool education
- Aboriginal community development
- The Native American situation and Indian Child Welfare act
- Expansion of Aboriginal Child Care Agencies to cover all communities in all States and Territories
- Differing needs of rural and urban based Aboriginal communities
- The need for Commonwealth Government agencies to work more directly with Aboriginal communities to assist them to develop children's services and family support programs.

According to the written proceedings of the seminar,

" The desire of both black and white participants at the Seminar to develop a co-operative relationships which ensured the autonomy of Aboriginal organisations, underlay the discussions (Jackson, 1979). "

This spirit of co-operation, shared responsibility and the movement towards self determination were seen as the foundations of the earliest Aboriginal child welfare agencies such as Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency, formed in February 1976. In a workshop on Aboriginal Community Involvement the seminar recommended that the development of Aboriginal Child Care Agencies continue to be supported, with agencies to be directly funded and with the number and scope of agencies to be expanded to ensure state wide coverage in all States and Territories.

Significantly it recommended that these agencies be focused broadly covering family support, child care, preschool education, child welfare and primary prevention of family breakdown.

The seminar recommended that government funding include support for professional development, staff training, management support and financial administration and program development to ensure services were not set up to fail.

" Failure is ensured when funding is inadequate, and there is no backup in the initial stages let alone when it is required through two or three years in the development of that service.... The Departments tend to say, ' Here is the money - go and do something with it.' and when the results aren't all that productive they say, ' Oh well, what would you expect from Aboriginal people, they really don't know how to handle money, they don't know how to set up programs (Jackson, 1979)."

The seminar also recommended that a national committee be established with Commonwealth funding to pursue the outcomes from the seminar with the resources to coordinate and facilitate the development of Aboriginal Child Care Agencies across all States and Territories.

SNAI CC was formally established in 1981 in response to this recommendation although without the level of resources required to drive the development of Indigenous child welfare agencies across all states and territories.

The First Aboriginal Child Survival Seminar was an event which marked a turning point in the application of child welfare policy and practice to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. It was attended by over 200 delegates representing Aboriginal communities from across Australia and senior policy staff from State, Territory and Commonwealth agencies. In relation to child care and preschool education, whilst these issues were not the central focus for discussions, the expressed view was that child care and pre school services for Indigenous children should be broad, holistic and community based. Multi-functional Aboriginal Children's Services, MACS, developed – not as a direct response to the recommendations of the 1979 seminar - but consistent with the directions articulated at that time.

Development of Multi-functional Aboriginal Children's Services, MACS

The existing 37 MACS services have been in operation since 1987 when the MACS funding program was established within the broader Commonwealth Children's Services Program. Prior to that time a number of services were funded by the Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs including the existing MACS service at Mount Druitt in NSW.

MACS services operate with a broad service model and provide a range of services for Indigenous families and children. In 2000 SNAI CC prepared a national overview report on the current operation and functions of the 37 Commonwealth funded MACS.

The report found that the 37 MACS had been very successful in providing high quality early childhood services for Indigenous children and families.

Services provided by MACS

Typically MACS services will provide a range of programs to compliment the provision of centre based child care. This can include:

- ❖ long day care child care
- ❖ respite and emergency care for children at risk of abuse or neglect
- ❖ out side school hours and vacation care
- ❖ homework programs for school age children
- ❖ maternal and child health screening and support
- ❖ immunisation programs
- ❖ parenting programs
- ❖ cultural activities and programs
- ❖ kindergarten and pre school education programs
- ❖ cultural and recreational activities for young people
- ❖ health and nutrition programs for children

In 2000 SNAICC with funding from the Department completed a national report on the operation of the 37 MACS services. The National MACS project report noted that:

- the MACS provide an effective service model for the delivery of high quality child care, kindergarten and pre school programs
- there had been no expansion in the number of services for a decade
- that current services are unable to meet demand as the MACS funding program is effectively capped
- children who had regularly attended a MACS service were able to cope with the demands of primary school more easily than other Indigenous children
- services required urgent assistance with capital equipment and facilities,
- that the age structure of the Indigenous population meant that participation in child care and pre school education was currently declining as the growth in the population rapidly outstripped the number of places

Opportunities to expand of the number of MACS services

There are approximately 40 key Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population centres with a population of over 1,500 people with no existing MACS service. Tamworth with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population of 1600 currently has a MACS centre, Birrelee MACS, which is a 35 place centre with full utilisation and a waiting list of families needing childcare.

Major rural population centres, ie Indigenous population of 1500+ which could be priorities for a MACS centre would include Walgett, Bourke, Broken Hill, Coffs Harbour, Newcastle, Moree, Orange, Ballarat, Bendigo, Swan Hill, Mildura, Wodonga, Warrnambool, Cairns, Innisfail, Mt Isa, Hopevale, Rockhampton, Bundaberg, Toowoomba, Thursday Island, Townsville, Mackay, Thuringowa, Hervey Bay, Port Augusta, Bunbury, Port Headland, Derby, Kalgoorlie and Geraldton.

Major urban/metropolitan centres which would be priorities for a MACS centre would include Fairfield and Liverpool (Sydney), Canberra, (ACT), Dandenong and Healesville, (Melbourne), Ipswich, Gold Coast, Logan, (Brisbane), Salisbury and Hindmarsh, (Adelaide).

In addition to centre based care which can be provided through MACS centres additional mobiles services are also required for isolated and remote communities throughout Australia.

SNAI CC's considers that if funding were made available at least a further 35 MACS services could be established and operated within Indigenous communities to provide increased access to child care for Indigenous families.

Improving access to Commonwealth funded child care for Indigenous families

Like many areas of Government service provision the delivery of child care is in part driven by the capacity of particular communities to articulate their needs and develop viable proposals for new services and programs. It is note worthy that the most successful boost to participation in child care for Indigenous children came about when the MACS program was created with a specific funding allocation within the children's services program. This created the imperative to allocate those funds which in turn created the necessity for Departmental staff to engage with communities and develop new services.

When the MACS program was established in 1987 37 services were established within two years. In the 15 year period since the establishment of the MACS the development of other Indigenous community based centres has been very limited. According to information provided by the Department there are approximately 20 other Commonwealth Indigenous community based child care centres. SNAI CC believes this highlights the lack of a planned and coordinated approach from the Commonwealth to providing child care for Indigenous communities.

When one considers the socio-economic circumstances which confront Indigenous families and children it is not surprising that the Commonwealth is not inundated with proposals for the establishment of new services. Ironically Australia's Indigenous children are the most likely of all to experience severe difficulties in their early years but are the least likely of all children to receive Commonwealth assistance through child care.

In summary SNAI CC's view is that the low participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in formal child care is a result of a number of factors including:

- the lack of Indigenous services such as Multi-functional Aboriginal Children's Services, MACS, in most of the major Indigenous population centres throughout Australia
- the cost of formal child care proving prohibitive particularly in services which are not specifically targeted at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families
- continuing reluctance amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to access mainstream children's services
- demand for places within MACS being higher than their allocated places
- limited knowledge amongst Indigenous families of the importance of early childhood development and the positive role formal child care can play in the development of children
- the funding model of MACS and other child care services being too narrow and failing to take account of the child care needs of Indigenous families which may not be related to labour market or employment access
- mainstream services lacking knowledge, expertise and confidence in designing programs which are culturally appropriate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
- the rapid growth in the Indigenous population aged 0-5 outstripping any increase in child care places available to Indigenous families

To turn this situation around will require a more active and planned approach to the delivery of child care under pinned by specific funding allocations and a commitment from the Department to actively assist communities develop proposals for new services and programs.

Socio-economic profile: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families

This section of the paper provides some briefing on the socio-economic circumstances of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It commences with some preliminary information regarding the age structure of the Indigenous population which varies markedly from that of the broader Australian population.

Socio-economic indicators - Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander families/households

Age structure of the Indigenous population

Whilst the Australian population as a whole is said to be ageing the Indigenous population is comparatively young with a very high proportion of people under the age of 30. Jonas (2000) notes that the age structure of the Indigenous population is,

" typical of an underdeveloped country with more children and young people and fewer old people."

15% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are under the age of five whilst only 7% of the whole population is under the age of five. Other statistics (ABS 1998) include that: 28% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are under the age of 10, 40% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are under the age of 15, and 68% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are under the age of 30.

In 1996 as HREOC Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Mick Dodson, commented that incarceration rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people should to be considered with an awareness of the age structure of the Indigenous population in Australia.

" This, (the age structure), has enormous consequences for the future of our people. Combined with the over representation of our young people in detention it means that by the year 2011 there will be a 44% increase in the number of our kids in detention (Dodson 1996)."

Dodson was highlighting the fact that a rapidly increasing Indigenous population combined with a high proportion of children and young people creates the scenario where the actual number of young people in detention will escalate dramatically.

In relation to other areas of government, such as child care, the current low levels of participation will be exacerbated by the increasing numbers of Indigenous children aged 0-5: the population is expanding more rapidly than the capacity of services.

Child and Family Welfare

According to the AIHW 2000/01 report *Child Protection Australia*, Indigenous children are over six times more likely to be removed from their families than other children and placed in out of home care. As outlined above key causal factors noted by the AIHW include:

- higher rates of poverty
- intergenerational effects of previous separations from family and culture
- cultural differences in child rearing practices, and
- a lack of access for families to support services

Family Separations - Children in Out of Home Care

Out of home care refers to the placement of children, with or without a child protection order in place, in the care of people other than their parents or guardians. Out of home care includes placement with relatives or kin and is generally distinguished by the fact that the carer receives some financial support for the care of the child(ren) from the relevant State or Territory Department.

The over representation of Indigenous children in out of home care reflects the higher incidence of family stress and family breakdown within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This is demonstrated by the rate ratio between Indigenous and Non Indigenous children in out of home care with the national figure showing Indigenous children removed from their families at 6.8 times the rate of other children.

Placement of Indigenous children with non Indigenous foster parents

Despite the acceptance of the Indigenous Child Placement Principle approx 22% of Indigenous children removed from their families are still placed with non Aboriginal foster parents. In Victoria the proportion placed with non-Indigenous carers is 44% whilst NSW had the lowest proportion placed with non-Indigenous carers; 13%. (AIHW 2001)

Life expectancy at birth

Life expectancy at birth among non Indigenous people was 76 years for males and 82 years in the period 1997-99 whilst in the same period for Indigenous people it was 56 years for males and 63 years for females. As noted by the AIHW this is similar to the life expectancy for non-Indigenous males in 1901-1910 and for females in 1920-22. (AIHW 2001)

Pre School Education

Between 1995 and 1999 access to pre school education for Indigenous children declined - for all other children it increased. This was due to the increasing Indigenous population, age structure of the Indigenous population and a failure to provide additional pre school places to meet growing demand.

Early school leaving

Young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were more likely to leave school early - one third had left school by age 15 or younger, compared to just 15% for all young people.

Unemployment rates

Unemployment persists at much higher rates amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people than the whole Australian community. As at February 2000 the unemployment rate amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people was 17.6% compared to 7.3% for all Australians. At the same time the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in employment was lower, 44% compared to 59%. The unemployment rate is highest for Indigenous people 15 to 19 year olds, 50%, and also very high for 20 to 24 year olds, 46%. (ABS 2000)

Nature of employment

26% of Indigenous people in employment were employed in the Community Development Employment Project, CDEP scheme, which is a *work for the dole* scheme provided through ATSIC. (ABS 2000)

Participation in the CDEP scheme grew rapidly from about 4,000 in 1991 to 30,600 in 2000. Increases in the employment of Indigenous people between 1991 and 2000 were largely the result of this growth in CDEP. (ABS 2000)

Annual Household income

20% of Indigenous households had an annual household income of less than \$16,000 per annum. A further 40% had household incomes of between \$16,001 and \$40,000. (ABS 1999)

Homelessness

Despite their small proportion of the total population Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make up 14% of all the clients under the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program and Indigenous families are 20 times more likely to be homeless than non Indigenous families.

Unaffordable and overcrowded housing

In 1995 17% of all Australian households were living in unaffordable or overcrowded housing or both. By comparison 38% of Indigenous households were living in these conditions.

Law and Justice

According to the Australian Institute of Criminology Indigenous children and young people are 21.3 times more likely to be incarcerated than their non Indigenous counterparts.

Source for all socio-economic data unless otherwise stated: Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), & Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) (1999). The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service (AGPS).

Summary: Socio-economic data

The available socio-economic data clearly indicates that the health and welfare of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children is significantly less than that of other children in Australia.

Today in Australia Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have the same standard of health that other Australians experienced in 1910. Life expectancy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is 20 years less than for other Australians (AIHW 2001).

Problems such as overcrowded and inadequate housing, intergenerational poverty and unemployment, unreliable access to essential utilities such as clean drinking water and power and limited access to transport are more prevalent within Indigenous communities. Rural and remote Indigenous communities are disproportionately affected and are less likely than other Indigenous communities to have access to community and welfare services.

Personal income levels of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are the lowest in the country, whilst unemployment and dependence government subsidised employment programs, such as the Community Development Employment Program, (CDEP), for paid work are the highest (ABS 1998).

The chronic environmental health problems and poverty experienced in many rural and remote Indigenous communities place children at risk of major health problems including hearing impairment and malnutrition. These health problems create learning and developmental problems with as many as one third of primary school age Aboriginal children in remote Northern Territory communities reported as being unable to hear their teachers in class (Condon 2001).

The gross intervention and interference into the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families of the past has undermined the roles that Mothers, Fathers, Uncles, Aunties, cousins, grand parents and community elders can play today in raising children. At the same time the social and economic circumstances which confront Indigenous families trying to raise children are truly appalling.

Many in today's generation, having been raised in white foster care, missions or institutions, have been denied access to role models, cultural knowledge and wisdom regarding parenting and growing up children. Thus they face the task of raising their children with a minimum of knowledge passed on from the previous generation and in the most severe socio-economic circumstances in Australia. A disproportionately high number of these Indigenous families must try and raise their children without access to a culturally appropriate multi-functional child care service.

Summary

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have significantly lower access to child care and pre school education than other Australian children.
- Access to child care and pre school education is widely recognised as important element in promoting the development of pre school age children.
- There has been no increase in the number of Multi-functional Aboriginal Children's Services, MACS, since they were first established in 1987.
- The participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in pre school education is currently declining - they are the only group of children in Australia in this position.
- There are at least 40 major Indigenous population centres with no existing Multi-functional Aboriginal Children's Services, MACS.
- The rapid increase in the number of Indigenous children aged 0-5 will cause the proportion of Indigenous children accessing child care to decline further unless there is a significant and sustained increase in the number of Indigenous services and child care places
- Now is the time to increase Commonwealth expenditure on child care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.
- Providing Commonwealth funding for a major expansion of MACS and other Indigenous child care services should be a specific priority in the next Federal budget.

Recommendations

That the Commonwealth Child Care Reference Group give in principle support to the following proposals

A. Development of a National Indigenous Child Care Strategy

The development of a long term National strategy to increase access to child care for Indigenous children and families with a minimum bench mark of achieving equivalent access to child care for Indigenous to that of other Australian children within five years.

The national strategy to be drafted in partnership by SNAICC and the Department for the consideration of the Commonwealth Child Care Reference Group.

B. Expansion of MACS program/other services for Indigenous communities

The allocation of additional Commonwealth funding to provide, in the short term, for

- an expansion of the service provision of the existing 37 MACS to cover additional child care places, the provision of outreach and mobile services, specialist services including family support, parenting assistance and pre school support.
 - indicative cost \$4m per annum
- minor and major capital works needs of the existing 37 MACS services
 - indicative cost \$1m per annum
- an expansion of the number of MACS services by approximately 34 new services located in key Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population centres covering all ATSI C Regions.
 - indicative establishment costs \$18M
 - indicative operational costs \$9M per annum
- an expansion of other services providing child care for Indigenous communities such as family day care/occasional care/mobiles/innovative services

Attachment: Location of MACS by ATSI C Region with possible locations for new services

C. Establishment of a national resource agency to assist in the establishment and management of Indigenous child care services

The allocation of Commonwealth funding to establish and operate a national community based resource agency to work in partnership with Indigenous communities providing direct assistance in the establishment and management of Indigenous child care services.

D. Improved service planning for child care

The establishment of a planning mechanism/framework, by the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services, for ensuring equitable access by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to Commonwealth funded child care taking account of the age structure of the Indigenous population and the high proportion of children aged 0 – 5.

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Attachment One: - Location of existing Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services, MACS, by ATSI Region and possible priority locations for additional services

ATSI Region	Indigenous Population	Existing MACS Services	Location of Current Services	New Services Required	Priority Locations for new services
Queanbeyan	9,123	1	Wreck Bay	1	Woden
Bourke	7,344	0	n/a	1	Walgett/Bourke/Broken Hill
Coffs Harbour	25,058	1	Kempsey	2	Coffs Harbour/Newcastle
Sydney	34,286	5	Throughout metro area	1	Liverpool/Fairfield
Tamworth	10,711	1	Tamworth	1	Mooree
Wagga Wagga	18,047	4	Dubbo/Wagga Wagga	1	Orange
Wangaratta	10,395	5	Shepparton, Morwell/chuca/Bairnsdale, Lakes Entrance	2	Wodonga, Dandenong
Ballarat	11,079	2	Thornbury, Robinvale,	4	Swan Hill, Ballarat, Warrnambool, Healisville, Mildura, Bendigo
Brisbane	27,635	1	Woorabinda	3	Logan, Ipswich, Gold Coast
Cairns	14,712	0	n/a	2	Yarrabah, Cairns, Innisfail
Mount Isa	6,658	0	n/a	1	Mt Isa
Cooktown	5,635	0	n/a	1	Hopevale
Rockhampton	11,332	0	n/a	3	Rockhampton, Bundaberg, Hervey Bay,
Roma	8,804	1	Cherbourg	1	Toowoomba,
Torres Strait Area	6,064	0	n/a	1	Thursday Island
Townsville	14,678	1	Palm Island	3	Townsville, Mackay, Thuringowa
Adelaide	12,689	2	Elizabeth, Largs Bay	3	Mt Gambier, Noarlunga, Murray Bridge
Ceduna	1,867	1	Ceduna	0	n/a
Port Augusta	5,888	2	Wyhalla, Coober Pedy	1	Port Augusta
Perth	17,998	2	Thornlie, East Perth	1	Swan
Broome	3,423	1	Broome	0	n/a
Kununurra	4,088	0	n/a	0	n/a
Warburton	2,688	0	n/a	0	n/a
Narrogin	6,204	0	n/a	1	Bunbury

South Hedland	4,298	1	Roebourne	1	Port Headland
ATSIC Region	Indigenous Population	Existing MACS Services	Location of Current Services	New Services Required	Priority Locations for new services
Derby	3,958	0	n/a	1	Derby
Kalgoorlie	3,152	0	n/a	1	Kalgoorlie
Geraldton	5,006	0	n/a	1	Geraldton
Hobart	13,873	1	Moonah (Hobart City)	1	Western Tasmania
Alice Springs	4,449	1	Alice Springs	0	n/a
Jabiru	7,746	0	n/a	1	Maningrida
Katherine	7,122	1	Katherine	0	n/a
Aputula	7,518	0	n/a	0	n/a
Nhulunbuy	7,001	0	n/a	0	n/a
Tennant Creek	3,449	0	n/a	0	n/a
Darwin	8,992	2	Casuarina/Batchelor	0	n/a
Aust.	352,970	37		40	

Table Two: Location of existing Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services, MACS, by State and Territory and additional service requirements

State/Territory	Indigenous Population	No of existing MACS Services	Additional Services Required	Total
New South Wales	101,636	12	6	18
Victoria	21,503	7	6	13
Queensland	95,374	3	15	18
South Australia	20,421	5	4	9
Western Australia	50,699	5	6	11
Tasmania	13,929	1	1	2
Northern Territory	46,362	4	1	5

Australian Capital Territory	3,025	0	1	1
TOTAL	352,970	37	40	77

Note: Population Figures are 1996 census figures from ABS 'Population distribution, Indigenous Australians', ABS cat no 4705.0