

# **Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care, SNAICC**

## **Response paper for the Broadband Redevelopment**

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Attachment One:	Socio-economic data on the health and well being of Indigenous people.
Attachment Two:	Child Care Workforce Issues Think Tank - Recommendations relating to professional development and training for the Indigenous child care sector.
Attachment Three:	Indicative list of priority areas for new Indigenous child care services and location of MACS by ATSIC Region with possible new service locations

## **List of enclosed documents**

1. Copy of SNAICC survey distributed to MACS about the Broadband
2. Recommendations from the National MACS project report prepared by SNAICC in 2000
3. SNAICC briefing paper on Indigenous child care issues presented to the Commonwealth Child Care Reference Group in December 2002
4. SNAICC Response to the Broadband Redevelopment Response paper

## **1.0 Background on SNAICC**

SNAICC, the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care, is the national peak body in Australia representing the interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. Whilst in 2003 SNAICC will celebrate the 20th anniversary of the election of its first national executive and the opening of its national office it is only in recent years that we have begun to work more closely with child care and pre school services.

Initially SNAICC was comprised of the Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Agencies, AICCA's, which work in the area of children's rights, child welfare, foster care and family support. However SNAICC now operates from a much broader membership base of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community based child care agencies, Multi-functional Aboriginal Children's Services, family support services, foster care agencies, link up and family reunification services, family group homes, community groups and voluntary associations, long day care child care services, pre schools, early childhood education services and services for young people at risk.

Three years ago SNAICC re-wrote much of its constitution and created additional positions on its National Executive for community based Indigenous services working in the fields of pre school education and child care. Since that time the majority of the Commonwealth funded Multi functional Aboriginal Children's Services, MACS, have joined SNAICC with a MACS or other Indigenous child care service from each State and Territory represented on our national executive.

In addition to these members SNAICC has a network and subscriber list of over 1200 community groups, mostly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, but also significant numbers of non Indigenous community based services and individuals with an interest in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and children.

SNAICC is governed by a national executive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people drawn from our members and operates from an office located in Melbourne with two part time staff.

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## **2.0 Overview and Summary Recommendations**

SNAICC is pleased to be able to provide this response for the Broadband redevelopment. As the national peak body representing the interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children we are intimately involved in the issues under consideration. In addition given the markedly low and in our view grossly inequitable access to Commonwealth funded child care which Indigenous families experience we are committed to securing a fairer share of child care for Indigenous families.

For too long myths, (such as the notion that Indigenous families do not want child care), and policy inertia at the Commonwealth level have combined to stall the development of accessible child care options for Indigenous families. SNAICC, the Department of Family and Community Services, ATSIC and others all share responsibility for this policy inertia. The lack of affordable, appropriate, local community controlled and quality child care services for Indigenous families has severely restricted access. Child care policy as it relates to Indigenous families has been frozen in time with little or no movement in policy or programs for over fifteen years – when the current Multifunctional Aboriginal Children’s Services, or MACS, were first established.

Thankfully in more recent years there have been signs of a policy thaw and renewed interest in the child care needs of Indigenous families. This is apparent in the work of the newly established Commonwealth Child Care Reference Group, the priorities of the National Children’s Services Forum and the concern for Indigenous issues expressed at the recent Child Care Workforce Issues Think Tank. Both the Commonwealth Child Care Reference Group and the National Children’s Services Forum have in the past 12 months identified expanding access to child care for Indigenous families as the most urgent and highest priority for the child care sector.

The major outcome SNAICC seeks from the Broadband redevelopment is the translation of interest in improving access to child care for Indigenous families into actions and commitment including more child care places and services.

### Summary Recommendations:

#### **Recommendation One: Policy objective for Indigenous child care**

That Commonwealth adopt the following statement as the policy objective for Commonwealth funding of child care for Indigenous families.

*The objective of Commonwealth funding of child care for Indigenous families is to support family functioning within Indigenous communities by assisting Indigenous families to meet the cultural and developmental needs of their children.*

#### **Recommendation Two: National Indigenous Child Care Strategy**

*That the Broadband Redevelopment make provision for a National Indigenous Child Care Strategy as recommended by and consistent with the Commonwealth Child Care Reference Group.*

#### **Recommendation Three: Community based service provision**

That the Broadband funding program provide resources for the retention of existing Indigenous community based and controlled child care services and the development of new services which are flexible, multifunctional and responsive to local needs.

#### **Recommendation Four: Resource agencies and management support**

That the Broadband Redevelopment address recommendations from the 2000 National MACS report relating to Resource and Management Support agencies specifically by supporting the establishment or continued operation of Indigenous Resource and Management Support agencies in each State and Territory.

#### **Recommendation Five: Staff training and professional development**

That the Broadband Redevelopment seek to implement the recommendations from the Child Care Workforce Issues Think Tank relating to professional development for the Indigenous child care sector.

#### **Recommendation Six: Indigenous Child Care Accreditation**

That the Broadband resource the child care accreditation system to in collaboration with SNAICC and local services develop an accreditation pathway for Indigenous child care services recognising their multifunctional orientation and the importance of service flexibility.

#### **Recommendation Seven: Legislated Indigenous child care program**

That the Broadband Redevelopment develop options for consideration in the deliberative stage for the establishment in legislation of an Indigenous child care program funded through an annual appropriation which provides growth funding and is based on a minimum appropriation calculated to overcome the shortfall in CCB flowing to Indigenous families due to their lower levels of access to CCB.

#### **Recommendation Eight: Expansion of the number of Indigenous child care services**

That the Broadband Redevelopment, in recognising the inequitable level of access of Indigenous families to Commonwealth funded child care and the high level of need within Indigenous communities for addressing the developmental needs of children, make provision for the establishment of not less than an additional 35 community based Indigenous child care services – indicative cost \$10M.

#### **Recommendation Nine: Indigenous consultations and deliberation.**

That the deliberative stage of the Broadband Redevelopment include a specific focus on the needs of Indigenous communities and collaboration with relevant stakeholders including SNAICC.

### **3.0 Broader social and economic context**

Child care is not provided in a vacuum but within communities, which have differing strengths and weaknesses, and to families which have been formed out the legacies of history and the contemporary circumstances which confront them. The available socio-economic data clearly indicates that the health and welfare of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and children is significantly less than that of other Australians.

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 (HREOC 1997). 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 and 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 Indigenous families must try and raise their children without access to a Commonwealth funded child care service – this has to change.

Note: Attachment One provides an overview of key socio-economic data on the health and well being of Indigenous people.

#### 4.0 Access to child care for Indigenous families

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children remain significantly under represented in all forms of Commonwealth funded child care. 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. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are the only group in the Australia for whom participation in pre school education is falling.

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..”*

This decline is affecting both child care and preschool education services and will gather pace due to the age structure of the Indigenous population which has almost twice the proportion of children as the broader population (ABS 1998). Combined with higher birth rates the result is that the Indigenous population is increasing rapidly with the few existing Indigenous child care services unable to keep pace with increasing demand. To even maintain the current low level of participation in Commonwealth funded child care will require a sustained increase in child care places for Indigenous families – almost half of which are currently provided through the Broadband.

As a direct outcome of the poor social and economic circumstances which cripple many Indigenous communities and families Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are significantly over represented in our state based systems of child protection (AIHW 2001). Indigenous children are in fact over six times more likely to be removed from their home for reasons of abuse or neglect.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, AIHW, in reporting that Indigenous children are over six times more likely to be removed from their families than other Australian children, note the following causes:

- 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.

Such a position would suggest that Indigenous families should be the highest priority for access to child care given the positive contribution quality child care can make to child development and well being. Sadly though Indigenous children are three times less likely to have access to Commonwealth funded child care than other children.

A major contemporary social policy challenge in Australia is to 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. Such an approach would be entirely consistent with the directions for policy and programs envisaged in the Federal Government's draft National Agenda for Early Childhood.

## 5.0 Broadband funding of child care for Indigenous families

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	OSSH C	FDC	Other	Total
<b>Indigenous Children</b>								
Number	1207	3766	89	199	858	792	57	<b>6968</b>
%	17.3	54.0	1.3	2.9	12.3	11.4	0.8	<b>100</b>

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

In relation to child care 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.

Of those Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who do participate in Commonwealth funded child care almost half access child care in a service or program funded under the Broadband. The dependence on Broadband funding as the major vehicle for the delivery of child care to Indigenous families is quite unique. For other families Child Care Benefit is likely to be the primary funding mechanism which provides access to child care. The Broadband redevelopment couldn't be more critical in determining the level of access to child care which Indigenous families will enjoy in the short to medium term.

Equally broader social and economic policy objectives of improving the health and well being of Indigenous children cannot be realised, unless and until, Indigenous children have much greater access to quality child care and other preschool services. The outcomes from the Broadband redevelopment will have a substantial bearing on the long term health and well being of Indigenous children – more so than for any other children in Australia.

## 6.0 Indigenous child care – policy objectives

SNAICC would argue that the Broadband redevelopment should occur within a commonly understood and agreed set of policy objectives which underpin Commonwealth funding for child care and for the Broadband itself. The Broadband forms part of a total Commonwealth commitment to child care and the policy objectives of the Broadband are to some extent determined by the general policy orientation of the Commonwealth's in relation to child care.

We note that the Resource Document sets out some possible objectives for the Broadband funding program and we provide comment on these further below. SNAICC believes that given the core function

of the Broadband is to support access to child care it is also important to consider the primary objective of government in funding child care itself.

Over the past two decades supporting labour force participation has been the driving influence in child care policy in Australia. However this objective has been and remains of less relevance to Indigenous communities than other sections of the community. For Indigenous families the purposes of child care, or reasons why families utilise child care, are often significantly different than the purposes of child care for non-Indigenous families. Indigenous Australian's typically have severely restricted access to the labour market or live in rural and remote communities which have virtually no labour market at all. As such supporting workforce participation has been a lower order priority for Indigenous child care services albeit still an important priority.

The role of child care from the perspective of Indigenous communities has focussed more heavily on providing young children with developmental support in an environment which enhances and supports their Indigenous culture. This broader purpose is reflected in the broader roles anticipated for the most common Indigenous child care services, the Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services, MACS. This can include providing respite care for the high number of Indigenous families involved in providing foster care for other Indigenous children.

The MACS provide Indigenous children with the opportunity to experience and express their culture as part of everything that happens within their programs and services. This central focus on the child and their Indigenous culture, as opposed to parental workforce participation, acts as an important counter balance to the dominance of the mainstream Western culture and decades of policies and practices which sought to diminish the contact between Indigenous children and their culture. MACS seek to meet the workforce participation needs of Indigenous families whilst attending to the cultural and other developmental needs of Indigenous children. Unlike most other long day care child care services MACS are also intended to focus on children up to the age of 18. In reality their program funding has tended to narrow their activities with long day child care becoming their predominant service. However the MACS do work, in both a funded and unfunded capacity, to address a much broader set of needs of children and families. This too is an important difference between the MACS and most other child care services. Their focus on families and children extends beyond the individual families accessing the centre at a given time and includes acting as community leaders to promote positive parenting and the importance of valuing young children. Typically MACS services work in areas such as child abuse prevention activities and cultural days for Indigenous families and children.

More recently other Indigenous child care services funded from other parts of the Broadband have also developed with this broader and more comprehensive orientation. SNAICC would hope that Broadband redevelopment will work to encourage service flexibility and ensure that the title Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services is one that could be applied to all Commonwealth funded Indigenous child care services.

In summary SNAICC believes it is important that the policy objectives of the Commonwealth child care program and the Broadband program recognise that the purpose of child care for Indigenous communities is much broader than supporting workforce participation.

A more appropriate objective for Commonwealth funding of child care for Indigenous communities would be to support family functioning within Indigenous communities by assisting Indigenous families to meet the cultural and developmental needs of their children. Such an objective would encompass the role of

supporting workforce participation but would place this role in a broader and more relevant context. Formally recognising a more holistic policy objective for Indigenous child care would be consistent with the directions outlined in the draft National Agenda for Early Childhood and would provide a more appropriate policy framework for the development and delivery of new services and programs.

### **Recommendation One: Policy objective for Indigenous child care**

That Commonwealth adopt the following statement as the policy objective for Commonwealth funding of child care for Indigenous families.

*The objective of Commonwealth funding of child care for Indigenous families is to support family functioning within Indigenous communities by assisting Indigenous families to meet the cultural and developmental needs of their children.*

## **7.0 Improving access to 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 and sustained boost to participation in Commonwealth funded child care for Indigenous children came about when the MACS program was established 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 service proposals.

After the MACS program was established in 1987 37 services were established within approximately 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 approximately 20 other Commonwealth Indigenous community based child care centres have been established in the 15 years since the MACS were first established.

SNAICC believes this highlights that in the absence of central planning and coordination new child care services for Indigenous communities have developed in spite of the Department not because of the Department.

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 SNAICC'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
- the lack of any coordinated planning from the Commonwealth and the inappropriateness for Indigenous communities of developing child care services around supporting workforce participation

In relation to Commonwealth funded child care SNAICC recommends that the Broadband Redevelopment provide for the expansion of accessible child care for Indigenous families to a minimum benchmark level of comparable access to that enjoyed by other Australian families.

This would be consistent with the position adopted by the Commonwealth Child Care Reference Group which at its December 2002 meeting unanimously adopted the following recommendation:

***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 children 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.*

**Recommendation Two: National Indigenous Child Care Strategy**

*That the Broadband Redevelopment make provision for a National Indigenous Child Care Strategy as recommended by and consistent with the Commonwealth Child Care Reference Group.*

## **8.0 Community based service provision**

Community based services are currently the major providers of child care for Indigenous families with Indigenous controlled 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 their families and children. As noted earlier Indigenous community controlled services provide an opportunity for Indigenous children to learn about, experience and express their culture.

It has also been the strong preference of Indigenous communities to develop services which are broad and multifunctional in their orientation in order to remain responsive to the breadth of needs within families and communities. The multi-functional service model combined with the community controlled and managed organisational model provides the most flexible and responsive environment to deliver outcomes for families.

As noted elsewhere in this paper many Indigenous communities, particularly those in rural and remote areas, are crippled by chronic levels of intergenerational unemployment, poverty, inadequate housing and unreliable or non-existent basic infrastructure. Children born into these circumstances are likely to have the highest levels of need in terms of quality child care but these communities are under current policy settings and funding arrangements the least likely to attract a child care service. Certainly private for profit centres have no hope of being sustained in communities with little or no economic activity. The need to address broader issues than workforce participation and the economic circumstances of many Indigenous communities make government funded and community based services the appropriate option for Indigenous communities.

### **Recommendation Three: Community based service provision**

That the Broadband funding program provide resources for the retention of existing Indigenous community based and controlled child care services and the development of new services which are flexible, multifunctional and responsive to local needs.

## **9.0 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.

Whilst SNAICC recognises that they are but one type of service operating to meet the needs of Indigenous families they are the most prevalent and have operated for over 15 years. MACS services operate with a broad service model and provide a range of services for Indigenous families and children. In 2000 SNAICC 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.

As noted elsewhere as part of developing this response SNAICC surveyed existing services about the Broadband redevelopment. Based on that survey and the National MACs report we can provide the following information.

### 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

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
- training for Indigenous child care workers was a critical issue with services commonly unable to access staff with the minimum level of child care qualifications due to the severe shortage of Indigenous people with child care qualifications
- professional development was inaccessible as centres cannot afford to back fill staff who take time off for training and there are very few, relevant, on the job professional development or training opportunities

## Information from the SNAICC survey of MACS

The SNAICC survey indicated that services support Broadband funding for child care becoming more flexible to allow services to focus on areas such as parenting programs and support, child health and nutrition and respite care for children at risk.

Key issues which were identified included the lack of resources for capital works, major and minor, with this impacting upon the service that could be delivered. For instance centres may wish to run parenting programs or playgroups but as they operate from centres designed for the provision of long day care the facilities do not support a wider range of services. Thus service delivery for families is restrained by the constraints of facilities and assets.

In the survey all respondents highlighted the following as barriers to child care;

- The cost of child care/fees
- Lack of transport
- Families experiencing stress, conflict or violence
- Families struggling with substance/alcohol abuse issues
- No child care places available

The need for additional child care places at their centre was reported by all 36 of the 37 MACS during the compilation of the 2000 National MACS report and by all survey respondents as part of the development of this paper.

The most common major issues which impact on service management included the following.

- State licensing requirements/legislation
- Insufficient space, buildings and equipment
- Lack of qualified Indigenous child care staff

All respondents also indicated a preparedness to develop new services and programs including:

- Health and Nutrition programs
- Playgroups for new Mothers/Fathers
- Family support and parenting activities
- Community education on child development
- Cultural activities for local Indigenous children

Most respondents indicated that cultural activities for local Indigenous children were already a component of their service provision.

Over the past fifteen years the Multi-functional Aboriginal Children's Services, MACS, have proved to be the most sustainable and adaptable 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 either not meet their child care needs at all or to meet them in some way other than establishing a MACS service.

## **10.0 Resource agencies and management support**

SNAICC considers that this area should be a significantly higher priority within the Broadband with specific allocations made for the Indigenous services in each State and Territory.

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 is that the families they work with are likely to be directly affected by any or all of the above factors.

This impacts on every aspect of service delivery from the availability of volunteers who can work effectively on management committees to the support needs of children and families that access the service.

There are already a number of highly effective Indigenous management and support agencies operating in the sector with funding from the Broadband. However these agencies are not operating in all State and Territories and their funding arrangements suffer from a lack of certainty and recognition that the support needs of Indigenous services are often more complex.

### **Recommendation Four: Resource agencies and management support**

That the Broadband Redevelopment address recommendations from the 2000 National MACS report relating to Resource and Management Support agencies specifically by supporting the establishment or continued operation of Indigenous Resource and Management Support agencies in each State and Territory.

## **11.0 Staff training and professional development**

Opportunities for professional development are also hampered as services do not have the required funds to back fill staff and allow staff to participate in off the job training. This severely impacts upon access to professional development.

Issues relating to professional development and training were recently discussed at the Child Care Workforce Issues Think Tank. That forum developed a series of recommendations in relation to the training and professional development needs of the Indigenous child care sector. SNAICC has included a copy of the recommendations as Attachment Two. Whilst some of the recommendations of the think tank are beyond the scope of the broadband redevelopment some are clearly of relevance. In particular the recommendations relating to the professional development needs of the sector.

### **Recommendation Five: Staff training and professional development**

That the Broadband Redevelopment seek to implement the recommendations from the Child Care Workforce Issues Think Tank relating to professional development for the Indigenous child care sector.

## **12.0 Indigenous Child Care Accreditation**



SNAICC supports the principle of accreditation and the use of accreditation as a mechanism to develop minimum standards of service quality. In relation to Indigenous services, and in particular the MACS, most still sit outside the accreditation system and they remain one of the few types of Commonwealth funded child care which are not required to be accredited.

In the interests of children and families SNAICC believes that over time all Indigenous child care services should be accredited. However a central issue which needs to be addressed in order for this to occur is for the accreditation system to develop an accreditation pathway specifically for Indigenous community based services.

Currently services such as the MACS can only seek accreditation as a long day care service provider. The desire of the MACS to be truly multifunctional has seen the vast majority not seek accreditation as they do not want to be accredited as a long day care centre – but as a multifunctional service of which long day care may form a component. This option is not open to them however and the accreditation system has reinforced the ‘silo’ approach to child care. There have also been impacts from this in relation to access to training and professional development as much of the training effort funded under the Broadband has been directed towards meeting long day care accreditations standards. Thus much of the available training has been irrelevant to MACS and other Indigenous services.

The current accreditation system is yet another example of the false assumption that mainstream processes and systems can be imposed upon Indigenous communities and families. In order to progress accreditation for Indigenous services the accreditation system in collaboration with SNAICC and Indigenous services needs to develop an accreditation pathway which is relevant to Indigenous child care services and the families they support.

### **Recommendation Six: Indigenous Child Care Accreditation**

That the Broadband resource the child care accreditation system to in collaboration with SNAICC and local services develop an accreditation pathway for Indigenous child care services recognising their multifunctional orientation and the importance of service flexibility.

#### **13.0 Establishing a new funding program for Indigenous child care services**

SNAICC’s view is that the broad service model such as the model of the MACS and Innovative Indigenous child care services where emphasis is placed on supporting families with children in a multitude of ways is the most broadly applicable service model for providing child care within Indigenous communities.

However there remains a serious and substantial gap between the *service* model for MACS and the *funding* model for MACS. Further with the existing limitations on Broadband funding there has been no opportunity to either increase the number of MACS or other Innovations Indigenous services or to increase places allocated to the existing MACS services.

In effect the unavailability of resources within the Broadband has placed a ceiling on access to child care for Indigenous families at a time when the number of Indigenous children is increasing rapidly. This needs to be overcome and Indigenous communities need to have access to growth funds to allow for the development of new child care services and programs which can respond to increasing demand for child care.

SNAICC believes that the most complete option would be to develop specific legislation to outline the purpose and parameters of Commonwealth funding for Indigenous child care. This legislation could be put in place by amending the existing legislative framework. It should include the objective of Commonwealth funding for Indigenous child care, as recommended earlier by SNAICC, with a focus on supporting child development.

In relation to funding one option which might be pursued would be to make available a minimum annual appropriation for an Indigenous child care program. This appropriation could be set by a formulae, included in legislation, based on the total amount of funding which would flow from Child Care Benefit to Indigenous families if the proportion of Indigenous families receiving Child Care Benefit was equivalent to the proportion of all families receiving CCB. To some extent this funding model would redress the disproportionately low access to child care which Indigenous family's experience and their lower access to CCB. It would also provide a mechanism for growth funding rather than the Department having to seek budget appropriations for the Indigenous child care program on an annual basis. The formulae utilised to arrive at the annual appropriation for the program could also include a loading to take account of the complexity and costs involved in providing child care within Indigenous communities. Finally this type of arrangement would not remove the entitlement of Indigenous families to receive CCB.

### **Recommendation Seven: Legislated Indigenous child care program**

That the Broadband Redevelopment develop options for consideration in the deliberative stage for the establishment in legislation of an Indigenous child care program funded through an annual appropriation which provides growth funding and is based on a minimum appropriation calculated to overcome the shortfall in CCB flowing to Indigenous families due to their lower levels of access to CCB.

### **14.0 Expansion of the number of Indigenous child care 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 mobile services are also required for isolated and remote communities throughout Australia.

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

### **Recommendation Eight: Expansion of the number of Indigenous child care services**

That the Broadband Redevelopment, in recognising the inequitable level of access of Indigenous families to Commonwealth funded child care and the high level of need within Indigenous communities for addressing the developmental needs of children, make provision for the establishment of not less than an additional 35 community based Indigenous child care services – indicative cost \$10M.

Note: Attachment Three provides an indicative list of areas and locations which could form an initial list of priorities for new Indigenous child care services.

### **15.0 SNAICC response to the Broadband Response paper**

SNAICC has completed and enclosed a copy of the Broadband response paper. The answers we have made to the response paper are based on the following:

- returned SNAICC surveys about the Broadband from MACS and other services
- recommendations from the National MACS project report prepared by SNAICC in 2000
- SNAICC briefing paper on Indigenous child care issues presented to the Commonwealth Child Care Reference Group in December 2002
- Outcomes from the Child Care Workforce Issues *Think Tank* relating to Indigenous child care
- Discussions with services relating to accreditation, staff training and professional development which took place at the 2002 AGM as part of discussions regarding Indigenous child care and the broadband redevelopment

Copies of all of the above documents are enclosed.

### **16.0 Indigenous consultations and deliberation**

To inform the development of this response and to encourage participation in the consultations about the Broadband Redevelopment SNAICC promoted the Redevelopment in its newsletter, (distributed to over 1200 organisations), distributed copies of the Broadband Resource Document and Response paper directly to all MACS services and developed a brief survey to allow services to input into this SNAICC submission.

SNAICC took the initiative of distributing materials directly to services after Community Link had in our view failed to put in place appropriate arrangements for consultation with Indigenous communities generally and Indigenous child care services specifically. SNAICC informed Community Link that the reliance of their consultation strategy on email communication and the Community Link website excluded the vast majority of Indigenous child care providers. The majority of MACS and other Indigenous child care services do not have email or internet access.

SNAICC requested that Community Link write directly to all Commonwealth funded Indigenous child care services and distribute copies of the materials related to the Broadband Redevelopment. We also offered to provide a covering letter from the SNAICC Chairperson for such a mailout encouraging services to

contribute to the consultation process. After assurances from Community Link that the MACS and other services would be sent hard copies of information, either by Community Link or the Department, SNAICC left the matter in their hands. Unfortunately no such mailout to services occurred and in response SNAICC wrote directly to all MACS services in late March providing copies of the relevant documents and brief survey developed by SNAICC.

SNAICC considers that the consultation strategy, as it pertained to Indigenous communities, suffered from the same lack of planning, collaboration and initiative which impairs the development of Indigenous child care services generally. Consultation took place on the basis that what will work for the general community will work for Indigenous communities – this was wrong. SNAICC pointed out for instance that Indigenous consultations were scheduled in areas where there were no Commonwealth funded child care services and locations were determined with no reference to SNAICC. If asked we could have assisted in identifying locations with services relevant to the broadband or locations with no services but a strong interest in child care.

It is important that deliberative stage of the Broadband Redevelopment try and overcome the inadequacies of the consultation stage. Specifically it should allocate time and resources to consider the needs of Indigenous communities more carefully including through collaboration with SNAICC and other stakeholders.

**Recommendation Nine: Indigenous consultations and deliberation.**

That the deliberative stage of the Broadband Redevelopment include a specific focus on the needs of Indigenous communities and collaboration with relevant stakeholders including SNAICC.

## **Attachment One: 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).

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

<b>ATSI Region</b>	<b>Indigenous Population</b>	<b>Existing MACS Services</b>	<b>Location of Current Services</b>	<b>New Services Required</b>	<b>Priority Locations for new services</b>
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/Echuca/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 Headland	4,298	1	Roebourne	1	Port Headland
<b>ATSIC Region</b>	<b>Indigenous Population</b>	<b>Existing MACS Services</b>	<b>Location of Current Services</b>	<b>New Services Required</b>	<b>Priority Locations for new services</b>
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/Bachelor	0	n/a
<b>Aust.</b>	<b>352,970</b>	<b>37</b>		<b>40</b>	

**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
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>352,970</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>77</b>

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