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## **SNAICC's Response to the Federal Government's Emergency Measures in Northern Territory**

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**The Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) is the national non government peak body in Australia representing the interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.**

SNAICC was formally established in 1981 after the creation of such a body was proposed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at the 'First Aboriginal Child Survival Seminar' held in Melbourne in 1979. The organisation elected its first national executive in 1982 and has received Federal Government funding support from 1983.

SNAICC operates from a 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.

In addition to these members SNAICC has a network and subscriber list of over 800 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's immediate concerns about the Northern Territory (NT) emergency measures developed by the Federal Government, announced in July 2007, were that the lack of expert guidance means that the measures are too short term in focus, and fail to provide a way for stakeholders to contribute their expertise so the measures can have a lasting effect on the safety and welfare of children.

Since 1995, SNAICC has advocated for a national

action plan to prevent child abuse and neglect. As recently as May 2006 SNAICC wrote to every Premier and Chief Minister from each state and territory government and to the Prime Minister calling for a national action plan to prevent child abuse. All responded that they had the current issues of abuse and neglect 'in-hand'. Clearly they haven't and a national action plan is overdue.

### **SNAICC supports:**

1. Provision of additional policing, child protection services and resources for Aboriginal non-government agencies across the NT to prevent abuse, respond to abuse where it has occurred, support victims and families, prosecute perpetrators and refer perpetrators to appropriate healing and rehabilitation programs
2. Voluntary health checks for children facilitated by existing health services, where necessary with additional short term staff, with parental consent and involvement
3. Appropriate follow up and comprehensive response to the identified health needs of children
4. Developing child protection systems at the local community level so that children at risk of abuse can receive immediate support and protection when abuse is reported
5. Establishing a statutory Aboriginal Child and Family Services authority within the Northern Territory to monitor and enforce standards for the care and protection of children
6. The development of full and comprehensive responses by the Federal and Northern Territory Governments to the Little Children are Sacred Report
7. Federal Government leadership in responding to child abuse and neglect within all states and territories – not just the Northern Territory.

## **SNAICC does not support:**

1. Issues of land tenure and the NT permit system (currently used to authorise entry onto Aboriginal land) being changed or removed as part of an emergency child protection response
2. Short term interventions developed with inadequate planning and little or no local input
3. Unilateral federal government intervention with no clear commitment to funding long term programs and services

## **SNAICC's Ten Point National Action Plan**

- 1. Safety is paramount - responsive child protection.** Allegations of child abuse and neglect must be investigated in a child centred way. Ensure child protection systems are well resourced to respond when called upon to properly investigate and intervene where children are at risk of abuse or neglect.
- 2. Support for children – remove perpetrators not the children.** Focus interventions on removing the risk and perpetrators from children rather than children from their families and communities. This requires extra funding and support for local community family support and counseling services and working in partnership with a child's extended family, family friends and local community services.
- 3. Effective policing - speak up against violence and abuse.** Ensure the appropriate levels and forms of policing within communities are in place to enable people to speak out against violence and abuse without placing their own safety at risk.
- 4. Early intervention.** Improve access to Indigenous community based early childhood, childcare, family support and child welfare programs to support families to access help early and promote children's well being.
- 5. Connections to culture.** Maintain

children's rights to be connected with their extended family and community and their cultural and spiritual heritage – child removal is a last resort.

**6. Build on strengths.** All Aboriginal families and communities have strengths and capacity to support and nurture their children. Governments must do things with local communities not to local communities. Recognise and build on the strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, communities and kinship systems and develop workforce and community capacity.

**7. Healing and restoration.** Victims and perpetrators need access to a range of healing and therapeutic programs including alcohol and substance abuse rehabilitation, counselling and healing programs and family restoration programs to rebuild family relationships across generations.

**8. Safe and Healthy communities.** Disempowered communities with woeful housing, extreme poverty, chronic alcohol and substance abuse, few early childhood programs or health services, no economic base and inadequate schools are likely to have high rates of abuse and neglect. Well planned large scale investment over generations is required to create safe and healthy communities for all Australian children.

**9. Listen to and do what works.** Evidence on effective child protection systems from Australia and overseas demonstrates that community based and managed child protection systems achieve the best results. Governments should act on the best evidence and advice available – children deserve nothing less than a thorough response.

**10. A national response for a national emergency.** The Prime Minister has called child abuse in Aboriginal communities a national emergency – but the government has only developed a short term response for the NT. The problem requires sustained national commitment from all states, territories the commonwealth and non-government agencies planned and monitored through a National Indigenous Children's Well Being and Development Taskforce.