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MEDIA RELEASE

The futures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care are at the centre of a united allyship for change at Parliament House today to change the trajectory of Target 12 and reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in care.

With just five years remaining to meet Australia's Closing the Gap targets, Allies for Children and the First Nations NGO Alliance, in partnership with SNAICC – National Voice for our Children, are demonstrating that reform is not only urgent, it is already underway.

Progress on Closing the Gap Target 12 has stalled nationally, with outcomes worsening in some jurisdictions.

Target 12 of Closing the Gap has the goal of reducing the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care by 45 per cent by 2031.

Today, there are approximately 23,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children currently living in out-of-home care, and First Nations children are 10 times more likely to be in care than non-Indigenous children.

More than half of these children are placed with non-Indigenous mainstream organisations despite evidence showing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children see better outcomes when connected to family, kin and community.

Transition involves the staged transfer of responsibility, resources and decision-making to Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), enabling more children to be safely supported by community.

Together, Allies for Children represent around 15 per cent of child and family services nationally and are collectively responsible for the care of approximately 1,900 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

As a collective, and in partnership with ACCOs, they are working together to return children to family, kin and community and strengthen connection to culture. This includes shifting resources and responsibility from mainstream services to ACCOs, so they can better support their communities.

This is a shared, national effort — one voice made up of many — grounded in First Nations leadership and focused on practical, system-level change.

The event also calls on other mainstream organisations delivering out-of-home care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to join the movement and make commitments that contribute to achieving Target 12.

The Allies for Children partnership works alongside the First Nations NGO Alliance and SNAICC to drive reform by:

- Helping children return safely to their families and kin
- Supporting transitions and enhancing support of ACCOs
- Strengthening children’s connection to family, culture, community and Country
- Committing leadership, resources and operational change within mainstream systems

Today, SNAICC – National Voice for our Children also release their Transformation Principles to support mainstream organisations to shift child protection services to ACCOs, strengthen community-controlled capacity, and align systems with Closing the Gap commitments.

This is an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-informed resource that SNAICC is providing to the sector with encouragement to start the journey.

Quotes attributable to the partnership:

SNAICC – National Voice for our Children:

“The Allies for Children are not waiting for Government to take the lead to address the overrepresentation of our children in OOHC. It’s bold, it’s courageous and it’s necessary to see Target 12 achieved. We need more organisations to do the right thing by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in their care and start the journey to transition, that’s why we have launched our Transformation Principles Framework, to help drive structural change. To be truly transformative and change-making, this transition needs to be effective and sustainable. This means supporting ACCOs with capacity-building and workforce development, aligning with Closing the Gap Priority Reforms,” **Catherine Liddle, CEO SNAICC – National Voice for our Children, said.**

First Nations NGO Alliance:

“Deep and lasting change for Aboriginal children and families is led by Aboriginal leadership, strengthened through principled allyship and partnership. Today, the First Nations NGO Alliance, SNAICC – National Voice for our Children, Allies for Children, Elders and community stand together with one unshakeable purpose: To ensure our children grow up in family and community, safe, loved, and strong in culture – not in crisis. The evidence is clear that a more intensive, family-centred approach that is culturally safe and informed by the wisdom of Elders will have a profound impact in supporting families to stay together and prevent children and young people entering the out-of-home care system,” **Esmail Manahan, First Nations NGO Alliance and National Director, MacKillop Family Services, said.**

Quotes attributable to Allies for Children:

“Being an ally means changing ourselves. Progress towards Target 12 is possible and we can achieve it if we work together. We are examining and dismantling policies, practices and arrangements within our own organisations that contribute to the overrepresentation of First Nations children in the foster care system, and shifting power, resources and decision making to community controlled and First Nations led solutions,” **Claire Robbs, CEO Life Without Barriers, said.**

“As Allies, we're stepping out of the way when ACCOs tender for services. We're partnering on programs and opportunities when community supports a joint approach. We're joining with others in the sector to advocate for the funding and policy settings needed to grow the community-controlled sector, and to understand our collective role in change,” **Lisa J. Griffiths, CEO OzChild, said.**

“Aboriginal children continue to be separated from family and community at unacceptably high rates, and with only five years left to meet Target 12, we cannot afford to wait to take action. Mainstream organisations have a responsibility to change the way our own systems and practice impacts children and families by following the leadership of Aboriginal communities and backing community-led solutions that keep children safe and connected,” **Dr Kate Alexander, CEO Barnardos, said.**

“When support is grounded in culture, children and families, especially those who may have had difficult or traumatic experiences, feel safer, more respected, and truly heard. We've been working closely with ACCO partners to transition Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families involved in the out-of-home care system to culturally grounded services. We're committed to working alongside our Allies for Children partners and the broader sector to keep driving meaningful change,” **Kevin Barrow, CEO The Benevolent Society, said.**

“Australia is at a critical juncture when it comes to giving our First Nations children a better future. Having the courage to challenge systemic barriers and transferring resources and custodianship back to ACCOs is how organisations can create lasting change for children, families and generations to come,” **Act for Kids CEO, Dr Katrina Lines, said.**

“Every First Nations child deserves to grow up connected to country, culture and kin, and we all have a responsibility to make this possible by supporting Aboriginal organisations to care for their children and families. MacKillop will continue to advocate courageously alongside SNAICC and community-based Aboriginal organisations to reverse the trend in over-representation of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care and get us back on track to achieve Target 12,” **Dr Robyn Miller AM, CEO MacKillop Family Services, said.**

“Every child who enters care deserves to remain connected to kin, community, Country, and culture. Our responsibility is to use every relationship, tool, resource available to support a stronger future for First Nation communities,” **Dr Dianne Jackson, CEO Key Assets, said.**

Media: Interviews by request. Please contact the media contacts below for more information.

Media contacts:

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Background:

SNAICC – National Voice for our Children is the national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled peak body organisation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families.

Allies for Children is a formalised partnership of mainstream non-Indigenous organisations commissioned to deliver care to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children across the country. Allies for Children partners include Barnardos Australia, Life Without Barriers, The Benevolent Society, Act for Kids, OzChild, Key Assets and MacKillop Family Services.

First Nations NGO Alliance is a self-determined group of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders working within Allies for Children partner organisations and other non-Indigenous child protection services.

The First Nations NGO Alliance and Allies for Children on a shared reform agenda and focuses on transforming outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children by supporting change in how mainstream organisations operate.