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CALL FOR IMMEDIATE ACTION TO REFORM CHILD PROTECTION FOR ABORIGINAL CHILDREN

A collective of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organisations are calling for the NSW government to make a significant commitment in this year's budget to urgently address the child protection system's disproportionate impact on Aboriginal children and families.

Currently in NSW, 40% of children in out of home, or foster care, are Aboriginal. This is nearly 10 times the rate of non-indigenous children and is despite only 5% of children in NSW being Aboriginal.

Department of Communities and Justice research shows that children in out-of-home care are far more likely to have poor, long-term, health, education and wellbeing outcomes. An Independent Review of Out-of-home Care reported that children who grew up in out-of-home care are 10 times more likely to have their own children removed from their care.

To investigate these alarming statistics, the NSW Government undertook an independent review of the NSW child protection system as it relates to Aboriginal children. Called the *Family is Culture* review, it was chaired by UNSW Professor Megan Davis, and was the largest and most comprehensive independent review of Aboriginal children in the NSW child protection system, in recent history.

The report released its findings in November last year, and highlighted that the NSW Government is failing to protect Aboriginal children in its care. Many of the case studies included in the report make for disturbing reading. In some cases, Aboriginal mothers in hospital are suddenly told by nurses that their children are being taken into State care – without being given the opportunity to take a photograph of their child or to give their child a special gift.

In one example, a first-time Aboriginal mother was deemed to be a “danger” for not giving details about her child's lunch-time routine, despite the child only being one day old at the time. It is shocking to see these stories are still happening today – not in the dark, distant past.

The [Family is Culture](#) review made 125 recommendations relating to self-determination, transparency, public accountability and early intervention. Yet, despite an urgent need for action, the NSW Government has only committed to preparing advice on their suggested response by 30 June 2020 – more than 7 months after the release of the report.

Based on the current rates of the removal of Aboriginal children from their families, more than 400 Aboriginal children will be removed from their family while we await the government's response.

“The *Family is Culture* review demands an urgent response, and we stand with the Aboriginal community in their call for a commitment from government. This must include greater investment in prevention and family support, rather than removals” said Fams CEO, Julie Hourigan-Rouse.

AbSec CEO, Tim Ireland says; “Aboriginal communities are frustrated by seeing report after report gather dust on Department shelves while the outcomes for our kids only get worse. The time for change is now, and that change must come from Aboriginal people. Megan Davis gave us the roadmap for significant reform that empowers Aboriginal people and communities to change this

MEDIA RELEASE

system for the better – it’s now time for the NSW Government to step up and demonstrate their backing of the 125 recommendations”.

Mr Garry Matthews, CEO AbCare, an Aboriginal child and family organisation in Coffs Harbour also supported this view. “Working in community day-in, day-out, we see the impact of government inaction on our children, families and communities. We need this government to commit to making the response to *Family is Culture* a priority, working with Aboriginal communities to achieve the change that is urgently needed”.

Mr Steve Kinmond, CEO Association of Children’s Welfare Agencies, joined the call for action, stating that “as a non-Aboriginal community sector, we cannot continue to sit by and watch a generation of Aboriginal children and young people fall through the cracks. The time for action is now, and in the spirit of reconciliation, the NSW Government must prioritise the *Family is Culture* recommendations in this year’s budget”.

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