

Family Matters Report, 2019 – SNAICC

17 October 2019

Family Matters – Strong communities. Strong culture. Stronger children. is a national campaign to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people grow up safe and cared for in family, community and culture. Family Matters aims to eliminate the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care (OOHC) within a generation, by 2040. The Family Matters reports set out what governments are doing to turn the tide on over-representation and the outcomes for children and their families.

The fourth annual report is structured in three parts:

- current data and trends in over-representation in out-of-home care;
- data on economic, social and community level factors and;
- participation in decision-making and respect for culture.

The report's primary recommendation is that through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), all governments commit to a national strategy and generational targets to eliminate over-representation in OOHC and address the causes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child removal. The Family Matters Roadmap provides clear direction to support this recommendation.

Key Findings

The report finds that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families remain grossly over-represented in child protection and OOHC systems, with 20,421 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in OOHC representing 37.3% of all children in care. The rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in OOHC is 10.2 times that of other children, and disproportionate representation continues to grow (the rate in WA is a staggering 18 times). The report finds the projected trajectory is worse than predicated in previous reports, with the population of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in OOHC more than doubling in the next 10 years and tripling by 2037.

Efforts across jurisdictions to reduce the timeframes for long term, permanency-focused orders are disproportionately being used for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. The report finds they are seven times more likely to be on a third-party parental responsibility order than non-Indigenous children. NSW is well above the national average of eight per 1000 children with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children on third-party parental responsibility orders at a rate of 14 per 1000 children.

The number of adoptions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in 2017-18 was twice that in 2016-17. In 2017-18, nine Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were adopted in comparison with four in the previous year. In 2017-18, NSW was responsible for 142 of the 147 adoptions by carers in Australia. According to data provided by NSW, six Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were adopted from OOHC in 2017-18 – all six children were adopted by non-Indigenous carers.

Despite recognition and evidence supporting kinship care as a priority for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, the rate of placement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children with family and kin or other Indigenous carers has continued to drop from 74.8% in 2006 to 64.5% in 2018. The rate of placement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers (excluding non-Indigenous family and kin) has dropped even more steeply. In one year alone, this rate dropped from 49.4% in June 2017 to 45% in June 2018.



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children remain under-represented in universal and targeted services that could prevent their contact with child protection services, with just under 3% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families supported by an intensive family support service in 2017-18 across five states and territories, well below their rate of contact with child protection services. This is unchanged from last year's report.

The Family Matters Data Snapshot can be found here:

http://benshare/Ops/cs/CF/_layouts/15/WopiFrame.aspx?sourcedoc={70D3F7EA-247F-4E86-A4F0-2B7DE74B0B84}&file=Family%20Matters%20Report%202019%20-%20Snapshot%20data.pdf&action=default

A detailed report card is provided on each state and territory's reform progress and compatibility with the Family Matters Building blocks. It can be found here:

http://benshare/Ops/cs/CF/_layouts/15/WopiFrame.aspx?sourcedoc={2BEAAAC1-DFC5-4884-AD26-7A763A593B99}&file=Family%20Matters%20Report%202019%20-%20Report%20Card.pdf&action=default

Key Recommendations

- A national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Strategy, which includes generational targets.
- A target and strategy to increase investment in accessible evidence-informed and culturally supportive prevention and early intervention services.
- Priority investment in service delivery by ACCO's, including through investment targets.
- National standards to ensure family support and child protection legislation, policy and practices in adherence to all five elements of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle.
- An end to legal orders for permanent care and adoption for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.
- Better data to measure the nature of, and causes and responses to over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in OOHC.
- Establishment and funding of state-based and national commissioners, peak bodies and other representative bodies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

The Family Matters Report 2019 can be found here: https://www.familymatters.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/1097_F.M-2019_LR.f.pdf

