



Secretariat of National Aboriginal & Islander Child Care Inc.

SNAICC 2008 Federal Budget Priorities

*Supporting child development and family well being
- preventing child abuse and neglect*

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More Information:

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Introduction

Supporting the healthy development of children in the early years is the truest form of child abuse and neglect prevention. The Federal government has an important role in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to raise their children well through providing access to a range of parenting, family support and early childhood programs. Access to financial assistance for families, health care and other essential services are also of critical importance.

SNAICC has prepared this submission and outlined a number of spending priorities that focus on the recognised need to more effectively prevent child abuse and neglect and respond where families and children have already been affected by abuse and neglect.

SNAICC is cognisant of the general parameters, which appear to be framing the development of the 2008 Federal Budget. The commitment to fiscal restraint, implementation of policies released during the election campaign and the nationally recognised need to respond to child abuse and family violence impacting on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. The timing of the election has also shortened the time usually available for preparation of budget initiatives. Being mindful of this SNAICC has developed a relatively brief submission focussed particularly on a long-term response to child abuse, child neglect and family violence guided by a set of principles. We would be pleased to provide additional information on any of the matters raised in the submission.

Guiding Principles

Long term improvements in the health and well being of Indigenous children will be sustained by supporting families in their role of raising children. Strong healthy families raise strong healthy children and provide the best social support system for preventing child abuse and neglect. It is important that any long-term response to child abuse, child neglect and family violence is guided by a set of clear principles. Such principles should include:

- recognising that all children in Australia deserve *a childhood free from violence, abuse and neglect*
- when responding to child abuse and neglect *child safety is paramount* and must be our first consideration
- all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, including those in out-of-home care, must be able to enjoy and practice their cultural traditions and feel that their *cultural identity is a source of pride not shame*
- the whole community has a *shared responsibility for child protection* including all levels of government, all sections of the community and all family members
- *parents and families have the primary role* of caring for, nurturing and raising their children including ensuring children participate in available education programs
- *governments must provide active support for families* to raise children including through universal family support services and specialist intervention programs when children are at risk of abuse or neglect
- a *comprehensive balanced response* encompassing prevention, early intervention and crisis intervention is required to achieve the best outcomes for children
- *evidence and strengths based approaches* that build on what families and communities are already doing well are the most sustainable as they promote family independence

Overview

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are more likely than other Australian children to experience the trauma of child abuse, child neglect and family violence.

The most recent report from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare on child protection, *Child Protection Australia 2006-07*, highlighted (again) that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are up to seven times more likely to be in the child protection systems than non-Indigenous children. It also illustrates that the over-representation is not unique to remote communities. Higher rates of substantiated abuse and neglect are equally prevalent in urban and rural communities due to underlying issues of poverty, social exclusion and the ongoing impact of past policies to separate children from their families.

As SNAICC has previously highlighted whilst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are far more likely to be in the child protection system they are far less likely to access Commonwealth funded childcare, State and Territory funded preschool services or other early years programs.

This is not acceptable and our long-term response must encompass effective prevention, early intervention and intervention where abuse and neglect has occurred. Effective intervention has been the focus of much public debate following the release of the *Little Children Are Sacred Report* and public concern regarding child abuse in Cape York and other remote Aboriginal communities. Effective intervention comprises a number of elements. Policing and child protection services to ensure that where abuse has occurred children are immediately protected. Perpetrators must be identified with people able to speak out about abuse without fear of reprisal. Secondly it must support the children and other victims of abuse or violence to cope with and recover from their traumatic experiences. Thirdly it must provide a pathway for perpetrators to heal, change and cease being a threat to children. Fourthly it must break the cycle of abuse by raising community understanding of child abuse risk and protective factors and maintaining a vigilance against child abuse and neglect. And finally our approach must recognise that we need to work with all those who make up a family, the fathers, mothers, individual children, siblings, uncles, aunties and grandparents.

SNAICC has outlined below a number of budget priorities for the consideration of the Federal Government. Budget estimates have been provided where relevant and a short summary of the priorities for 2008/09 Federal Budget funding is attached.

The social and economic costs (including the direct costs to government of providing alternative care for children removed from family) are escalating at unsustainable rates exacerbated by the combination of the rapid growth in, and age structure of, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population. Whilst the 2008 Federal budget is being framed with a view to restraining Commonwealth expenditure to not make significant additional investments now targeting the well being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children would, in the long term, be both socially and fiscally irresponsible.

SNAICC 2008/09 Federal Budget Priorities

- **Indigenous child abuse and neglect and family support initiative**
 - \$48M over four years (capital for new centres and additions/ renovations to existing services)
 - \$78 M over four years (staff, staff training, community education materials)

A national program of community based Indigenous child and family support centres and workers to staff these centres. The non-capital funding should also be used to extend the capacity of existing services, such as Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Agencies (AICCAs), in response to the high levels of child abuse, child neglect and family violence that communities are seeking to address. Funds should also be sought from states and territories to ensure crisis intervention child protection services are in place to deal effectively with immediate concerns relating to child abuse and neglect.

Types of services to be provided through this funding:

- Parenting education and support programs with a focus on early childhood development, teaching parents, families and children protective behaviours and elevating the important role men must play in nurturing and protecting their children
- Family income and budget management support to assist families to manage their income and meet the basic needs of their children
- Home education and parenting skills programs to provide training and mentoring with critical living skills, child nutrition programs and parenting activities that build children's early literacy and numeracy
- Family relationships skills training, mediation and dispute resolution programs
- Boys mentoring programs for boys, fathers, uncles and grandfathers to highlight and promote positive role models for young boys and combat family violence
- Child abuse awareness and prevention activities to develop whole of community commitments to zero tolerance of abuse and violence
- Safe houses for women and children when crisis issues of abuse and violence have occurred
- Counselling and specialist therapeutic programs for children and young people that have experienced trauma and abuse to assist them to cope and recover
- Therapeutic programs targeting perpetrators to enable them to change and cease being a threat to children
- Emergency accommodation and alternative care programs for children for whom it is not safe to remain at home

Note: In some communities there will be something to build on eg some of the women's centres previously funded by ATSIIC most of which were de-funded through the 1996 Federal budget. In some communities it will be possible to build on other appropriate infrastructure including the Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services (MACS), Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Agencies (AICCAs), the Child Care Hubs announced in the 2007-08 Federal Budget and the Indigenous child and family hubs proposed in ALP New Directions for Indigenous Children paper.

Specialist Indigenous child and family support centres delivering a range of programs in response to local community need are required across the country. The Northern Territory and rural areas of Western Australia, Queensland and NSW should be the first priority areas for the establishment of these centres with services extended across the country during the next term of government.

Note: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child and family welfare services such as the Aboriginal child and family welfare agencies (AICCAs) and child care services such as the Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services (MACS) are seeking to broaden their service delivery into the family support and parenting areas. The recurrent funding to provide workers under this program must also be available to these services many of which are an integral part of their communities but prevented from meeting identified community needs by lack of funding.

Indigenous child and family welfare services require additional funding to provide preventative and early intervention services to meet the needs of people who may otherwise be at risk of neglecting or abusing their child or who may have already had one child removed and need assistance with the other children in the family.

Indigenous child care services such as MACS require additional funding so that they can provide a more holistic response to the families that bring their children to child care. Gaps in current service delivery identified by child care providers include: parenting programs and Indigenous parenting and child rearing information, family support in the home/ home visiting, family respite, mediation and relationship services, promotion of the importance of the early years and prenatal period with emphasis on critical issues such as foetal alcohol syndrome, nutrition and children's developmental milestones.

- **Expanding the capacity of current Indigenous specific child care services and establishment of new multi-functional Indigenous specific child care services in areas of high need**
 - \$40 million over four years

SNAICC called for a National Indigenous Child Care Strategy for many years and was pleased that the previous Government launched the Indigenous Child Care Services Plan in September 2007. SNAICC now seeks for the Plan to be adopted by the new government to further immediate child care priorities including:

- expanding the capacity of current Indigenous specific child care services
- establishing new multi-functional Indigenous specific child care services in areas of high need

In addition, a revised a National Indigenous Child Care Strategy must:

- Recognise that purpose of child care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families is more broadly focussed on supporting children's development and supporting families to care for their children and that the current number of Indigenous specific child care places meets only a small fraction of the need.
- Recognise that multi-functional Indigenous specific child care is the most appropriate and preferred form of child care for many Indigenous families and that this form of child care needs to be supported and expanded across the country.
- Recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander approaches to child rearing and parenting within the Child Care Accreditation process.
- Respond to the workforce development and training needs of the Indigenous child care sector.

Note: SNAICC estimates the capital costs of constructing a new multifunctional Indigenous child care centre as \$1M. Recurrent costs for a 60 place multi-functional Indigenous LDC centre are approximately \$600,000 per annum net of fees collected. Existing centres all faced

additional wage costs of approximately \$60,000 (full effect by September 2008) and cut services to meet this commitment further eroding their multi-functional service model. Existing centres require capital upgrade requirements and these needs must be balanced with the construction of new centres in locations without services.

- **Additional *Locational Supported and Intensive Support* playgroups for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in urban areas and regional centres**
- \$5 million per annum

Recent Federal Budget initiatives for the expansion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander playgroups, (such as the Expansion of Playgroups for Indigenous Families (EPIF) measure in the 2007-08 Federal Budget), have focused on additional playgroups in regional and remote areas. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population is highest in urban areas with this population also having birth rates higher than the national average.

SNAICC believes that the reach of existing Indigenous children's services and non-Indigenous children's services with some enrolled Indigenous children could be greatly extended through supporting them to run additional playgroups.

Funding for additional playgroups should be provided and linked to existing Indigenous childcare, maternal and child health or child and family welfare services with a focus on major centres of Indigenous population in urban areas and cities. Where possible funding should be provided as an extension of existing service contracts between

Existing Indigenous children's services in rural and remote town should be supported to run intensive support playgroups and outreach playgroups in remote communities that would otherwise have no children's services at all. Playgroups create opportunities for families not using childcare to access information and support in relation to child health and development. They provide a mechanism to reach out to families for who centre based care is not affordable, acceptable or available and may provide a bridge to child care or preschool. Playgroups that are facilitated by a trained staff member provide children with some of the benefits of centre based child care including the capacity for their health, development and early intervention needs to be met and responded to.

(Note: SNAICC has taken into account the Expansion of Playgroups for Indigenous Families (EPIF) measure in the 2007-08 Federal Budget and estimated that \$5million per annum would fund up to 50 facilitated playgroups costed at approximately \$100,000 each.)

- **Specialist Indigenous Family Relationship Centres**
- \$8M over four years

To support, coordinate and assist in the development and delivery of Indigenous child and family support services, three Indigenous Family Relationship Centres should be created as an extension of the existing Family Relationship Centres program of the Commonwealth Department of Families, Community Services and the Attorney General's Department. The centres should have a dual role in the development and delivery of evidence based counselling, family relationship and parenting programs that recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child rearing practices and kinship systems.

The centres could provide direct assistance to the expanded network of Indigenous child and family support services in tailoring programs and services in response to local community needs. They would also be able to link with and have an educative role in relation to the

existing non-Indigenous family relationship centres enabling mainstream family support and parenting programs to better respond to the needs of Indigenous families in remote, rural and urban communities.

- **Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Community Services Workforce Development**
- \$24M over four years

Responding to child abuse, child neglect and family violence requires a three way partnership between child protection authorities, police and local family support agencies. Whilst efforts to provide additional police services in remote areas of the Northern Territory are commendable too little commitment has been made to reinforcing the other partners in the process – child protection staff and local family support agencies. To support the extension of Indigenous child and family support services the next Federal government should expand the qualified workforce required to deliver quality programs for Indigenous families and children. This will include increasing the number of qualified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff in disciplines including child care, social work, psychology and counselling, community development and welfare work, family mediation and adult and community education. This should be done in partnership with the Community Services Industry Skills Council, the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC), Registered Training Organisations and Universities. A package has been developed with funding of \$24M over four years which includes an Indigenous scholarships program and assistance for Indigenous students to meet travel related costs in order to participate in higher education courses and training programs.

(Note: In August 2006 SNAICC and the Community Services Industry Skills Council provided a detailed briefing paper on workforce and training development needs to FaCSIA, copies available from SNAICC).

- **SNAICC Resource Service (SRS)**
- \$4M over four years

Established under the current FaCSIA Stronger Families and Communities Strategy the SNAICC Resource Service (SRS) has been successful in developing and distributing high quality resources focused on child abuse prevention, early childhood and service governance and support. SRS projects resource and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and mainstream services to deliver programs focussed on child abuse prevention, early intervention, family support and early childhood development.

The SRS has been externally evaluated (evaluation report available from SNAICC) and I the SRS is making a real difference to the quality and relevance of the resources workers have at their disposal in early childhood settings and child and family welfare programs. Resource materials developed through the SRS have focussed parenting, father's and parenting, children's activity kits for childcare and early learning services, online management support for children's services, resources for foster cares caring for Aboriginal children and supporting strengths based family practice.

The external evaluation has recommended that funding for the SRS should be continue for at least a further six years. The current funding is due to expire in June 2008.

- **National Children's Commissioner**
\$16M over four years

The National Children's Commissioner should play a role in the monitoring of child abuse and neglect, establishing national standards for the care and protection of Indigenous children and reporting on the performance of child protection systems. They should monitor compliance with the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle, (which sets out the placement priorities for Indigenous children entering out-of-home care), and outcomes for children in care.

The commissioner should have broad powers to inquire into measures implemented for the care and protection of Indigenous children and establish a nation wide '*working with children*' check. The commissioner should report directly to the Federal Parliament allowing for an ongoing vigilance in protecting Indigenous children from child abuse and neglect.

Note: SNAICC has provided an estimate of the cost of the annual cost of a national children's commissioner recognising that this would depend largely on the finalised role and functions. The NSW Children's Commission has an annual budget of approximately \$8m, the QLD Commission (which incorporates the children's guardian) an annual budget of \$30m, the Victorian Child Safety Commissioner a budget of \$2m whilst the Tasmania Children's Commissioner has a budget of approximately \$0.5m. (Figures taken from the most recent annual reports).

SNAICC, Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care

Summary of SNAICC priorities for the 2008/09 Federal Budget

- **Indigenous child abuse and neglect and family support initiative**

\$48M over four years (capital for new centres and additions/ renovations to existing centres) \$78 M over four years (staff, staff training, community education materials)

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- **Expanding the capacity of current Indigenous specific child care services and establishment of new multi-functional Indigenous specific child care services in areas of high need (\$40 million over four years)**

SNAICC called for a National Indigenous Child Care Strategy for many years and was pleased that the previous Government launched the Indigenous Child Care Services Plan in September 2007. SNAICC now seeks for the Plan to be adopted by the new government to further immediate child care priorities including:

- expanding the capacity of current Indigenous specific child care services
- establishing new multi-functional Indigenous specific child care services in areas of high need and population growth

- **Additional *Locational Supported* and *Intensive Support* playgroups for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in urban areas and regional centres**

- \$5 million per annum

SNAICC believes that the reach of existing Indigenous children's services and non-Indigenous children's services with some enrolled Indigenous children could be greatly extended through supporting them to run additional playgroups. Playgroups that are facilitated by a trained staff member provide children with some of the benefits of centre based childcare and preschool programs by supporting parents to respond to children's health, development and social early needs.

Recent Federal Budget initiatives for the expansion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander playgroups, (such as the Expansion of Playgroups for Indigenous Families (EPIF) measure in the 2007-08 Federal Budget), have focused on additional playgroups in regional and remote areas. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population is highest in urban areas with this population also having birth rates higher than the national average. (Note: \$5 million per annum would fund up to 50 new playgroups)

- **Specialist Indigenous Family Relationship Centres**
- \$8M over four years

Three Indigenous Family Relationship Centres should be created as an extension of the existing Family Relationship Centres program of the Commonwealth Department of Families, Community Services and the Attorney General's Department to support, coordinate and assist in the development and delivery of Indigenous child and family support services. The centres should develop and deliver evidence based counselling, family relationship and parenting programs that recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child rearing practices and kinship systems.

- **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Services Workforce Development Package**
- \$24M over four years

This is a partnership proposal between the Community Services Industry Skills Council, and the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) to increase the number of qualified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff in disciplines including child care, social work, psychology and counselling, community development and welfare work, family mediation and adult and community education. The package requires funding of \$24M over four years and will include an Indigenous scholarships program and assistance for Indigenous students to meet travel related costs in order to participate in higher education courses and training programs.

- **SNAICC Resource Service (SRS)**
- \$4M over four years

Funding for the SNAICC Resource Service should be continue for a further four years as it would otherwise expire in June 2008. The SRS has been externally evaluated and is making a real difference to the quality and relevance of the resources workers have at their disposal in early childhood settings and child and family welfare programs.

- **National Children's Commissioner**
- \$16M over four years

The National Children's Commissioner should play a role in the monitoring of child abuse and neglect, establishing national standards for the care and protection of Indigenous children and reporting on the performance of child protection systems. They should monitor compliance with the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle, (which sets out the placement priorities for Indigenous children entering out-of-home care), and outcomes for children in care.

Note: SNAICC has provided an estimate of the cost of the annual cost of a national children's commissioner recognising that this would depend largely on the finalised role and functions. The NSW Children's Commission has an annual budget of approximately \$8m, the QLD Commission (which incorporates the children's guardian) an annual budget of \$30m, the Victorian Child Safety Commissioner a budget of \$2m whilst the Tasmania Children's Commissioner has a budget of approximately \$0.5m. (figures taken from the most recent annual reports).

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