

Developing a national response to prevent child abuse and neglect – what you can do!

SNAICC has today outlined a **Ten Point National Action Plan** responding to child abuse and neglect (see below) and encourages people and organisations to actively express their support for the development of a national response to child abuse and neglect including immediate measures to combat abuse and violence.

SNAICC has long advocated that the child protection system in the Northern Territory has failed to respond adequately and protect children from all forms of child abuse - including sexual abuse. In doing so we have not sought to blame individuals or governments but propose evidence based culturally safe solutions.

What you can do

Specifically SNAICC suggests that people and organizations express their views directly to the relevant Federal, State and Territory Ministers as well as speaking to local federal members of parliament outlining your concerns in relation to child abuse and neglect. You should also write to the Federal ALP requesting that they commit to a full and proper response to child abuse and neglect

You may wish to express support for the position taken by SNAICC and for the recently released detailed response from the Coalition of Aboriginal Organisations of the NT which many organizations from across Australia, including SNAICC, helped develop. (available on SNAICC website)

We suggest you:

Write, fax or email the following and make direct representation to your local members of parliament.

SNAICC has developed a form letter that you may wish to use for writing to the Federal Minister, State and Territory Governments or to your local member of parliament. (attached)

The Hon Mal Brough, MP
Federal Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Email mal.brough.mp@aph.gov.au
Ph: (02) 6277 7560
Fax: (02) 6273 4122

Jenny Macklin, MP
Shadow Minister Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

Parliament House RG111
Canberra ACT 2600
Fax: 02 6277 2307
Email: JMacklin.MP@aph.gov.au

- List of Federal Members of Parliament

<http://www.aph.gov.au/whoswho/index.htm>

- List of State and Territory Government Ministers (available on SNAICC website)

Points to remember

Some points you may wish to include when writing to or speaking with Ministers or members of parliament.

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children should be able to live a life free from violence and abuse
- The Federal Government is to be commended for taking action but would get a better outcome if it sought input into its emergency measures
- The Little Children Are Sacred report on child abuse in the NT included 97 recommendations for action - the Federal and NT Governments should respond to the whole report - not just some of the report
- Child abuse and neglect affects all communities - not only Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory
- The Prime Minister has called child abuse a 'national emergency' - where is the national response for all states and territories
- Short term measures for the Northern Territory will create no lasting impact without input from local Aboriginal communities
- The Federal Government should be doing things with Aboriginal communities to protect children – not doing things to Aboriginal communities
- Issues about land use and permits in the Northern Territory should be put to one side and dealt with separately - not as part of an emergency child protection response
- Poverty, child neglect and malnutrition also cause great harm to children but these problems can't be fixed without long term investment in communities
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities have a right to expect that basic essential services such as police, child protection, preschools, schools, health services, public phones and communication systems, transport and housing are available
- The Federal Government should show leadership, work with all states, territories and other stakeholders and develop a national action plan to prevent child abuse and neglect

- A detailed response developed by the Coalition of Aboriginal Organisations of the NT should be supported by all governments
- SNAICC has been calling for a national action plan since as early as 1995

Overview of SNAICC's response as at July 10th

SNAICC's immediate concerns are that the Northern Territory (NT) emergency measures developed by the Federal Government lack expert guidance in the area of child protection, 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.

In relation to the current emergency measures for the NT:

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

The Way Forward - A National Action Plan to prevent child abuse and neglect.

The way forward from here is for the Federal Government to lead the development of a National Action Plan to prevent and respond to child abuse and neglect within all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities with the support and involvement of states and territories, SNAICC and other representative Indigenous organisations.

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, counseling 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 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*.

SNAICC has written to Minister Brough and requested:

That the Federal government establish under COAG a national taskforce to lead the development of a national action plan as proposed and outlined by SNAICC

- That the NT Emergency Response Taskforce be immediately expanded to include a senior experienced child protection practitioner;
- That the Federal Government and the NT Emergency Response Task Force convene a national forum to hear the views of experts and stakeholders including Indigenous child and family welfare specialists on;
 - Maximising the impact of the emergency response with the NT;
 - Key areas for action in the development of longer term responses for the NT and all other states and territories

More Information:

<http://www.snaicc.asn.au/news/SNAICCresponseNTJune07.html>

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