

MEDIA RELEASE

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Urgent Action Needed on Mothballed WA Out-of-Home Care Plan

A Human Rights Watch (HRW) report released today has found Western Australia’s child protection system disproportionately removes children from Aboriginal families and places them in out-of-home care, while ignoring a report that could turn around this disgraceful trend.

Aboriginal children in WA are 20 times more likely to be in out-of-home care than their non-Indigenous peers, the highest over-representation rate in Australia. The HRW report also found that the system focused on policing families, rather than providing them with the supports they need.

Catherine Liddle, CEO of SNAICC – National Voice for our Children said the Cook Government had a comprehensive plan to address the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children - but they had yet to implement it.

“We commend the WA Government for collaborating with Aboriginal communities and organisations to develop the *WA Roadmap: 10-Year Roadmap Project to Reduce the Number of Aboriginal Children in Care* (the Roadmap) but it’s past time they implemented it.

“The Roadmap is a comprehensive way forward, ensuring a whole-of-government and community approach to addressing key drivers that contribute to children coming into contact with the child protection system - issues such as poverty, housing insecurity and homelessness, family and domestic violence, a lack of culturally appropriate family support services, and institutional racism.

“This government has left a landmark strategy to address this issue sitting on a shelf while the rate of over-representation in the state has continued to worsen.”

Ms Liddle said the Roadmap addresses many of the challenges outlined by the HRW Report, including calling for investment in early intervention and prevention services.

“Last year, WA only invested 4.4% of child protection funding into family support services that can play a strong role in preventing the removal of children, while keeping them safe.

“Despite the government’s commitment to finalise the Roadmap in 2024, we have seen no progress and it’s our children who are paying the price.

"It is also deeply concerning the HRW report shows authorities are failing to keep mothers who are experiencing domestic violence safe and are instead worsening their trauma by removing children.

"The HRW Report makes it clear that to turn the tide of child protection in the state, the Cook Government must finalise the promised Roadmap to reduce the number of Aboriginal children in care.

"We call on the Cook Government to take heed of this report and follow through with their commitments to Closing the Gap, and most importantly, to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families."

END

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