

NAPCAN'S STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT TO ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLES AND COMMUNITIES

“Around the world, indigenous peoples have experienced colonisation, cultural oppression, forced assimilation, and absorption into a global economy with little regard for their autonomy or wellbeing. These profound transformations have been linked to high rates of depression, alcoholism, violence and suicide in many communities, with the most dramatic impact on youth” (Kirmayer, Tait & Simpson, 2009, p.3).

NAPCAN acknowledges the devastating impact of colonisation on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their communities.

This includes recognising that:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have suffered disadvantage as a direct result of the history of colonisation and subsequent policies, including the forced removal of children
- throughout the colonisation process, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have continually resisted the infringement of their economic, social, cultural and political rights, which has led to the destruction of their rights to self-determination
- the reality of marginalisation, disadvantage and extreme trauma associated with colonisation has gone largely unacknowledged in Australian history
- there is limited mainstream awareness of the effects of cultural trauma and how the negative effects are passed from generation to generation (i.e. intergenerational trauma).

The reality of history and the subsequent trauma is critical to NAPCAN's work to prevent child abuse and neglect.

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities experience significant social and economic disadvantage and fare worse on almost all measures of health and wellbeing compared to their non-Indigenous contemporaries.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people are over-represented in the child protection system (e.g. almost seven times more likely to be the subject of substantiated reports than non-Indigenous children, and almost 10 times more likely than non-Indigenous children to be in out-of-home care).
- If this generation of children and young people are to have a different experience from their parents and grandparents, we must acknowledge and address their healing needs.
- We have seen that investment in services and programs that simply address the symptoms of disadvantage – poverty, lack of housing, low levels of education and employment – have limited effect unless supported by trauma-informed healing for whole communities.

NAPCAN's work is informed by evidence that child safety and wellbeing is best supported by a whole-of-community approach, where strong communities are equipped with the knowledge and capacity to care for their members in an autonomous and culturally appropriate way. In practice this means NAPCAN's work with communities will:

- recognise the pivotal role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to drive local solutions to the safety and wellbeing of children and young people
- celebrate and promote the existing strengths and values of Aboriginal people, families, children and communities
- value the cultural wisdom of tens of thousands of years and trust that solutions can be found from within Indigenous culture
- respect and uphold that there is no single 'right' way to raise a child
- recognise that children exist within the context of their family, community and culture
- value the work of existing Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait organisations and avoid duplicating or intruding on their work
- work with communities only as invited, to address needs identified by the community itself
- work alongside communities with the aim of further building their capacity
- support measures to engage all members of the community in protecting children
- encourage children and young people to have a say in all matters impacting on them and advocate for their voices to be valued and acted upon.

In all the work that we do, NAPCAN is guided by the principles of the FAMILY MATTERS campaign (<http://www.familymatters.org.au/whos-with-us/>).

We agree to:

1. apply a child-focused approach (within the context of family and community)
2. ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, their communities and organisations participate in and have control over decisions that affect their children and young people
3. protect the right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people to live in culture
4. pursue evidence-based responses
5. support healing and strengthening of families
6. challenge systemic racism and inequalities
7. value the cultural expertise and knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations.

To all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, NAPCAN pledges a commitment to walk alongside you to create stronger communities that can protect and nurture your families and children. We acknowledge your past and present suffering, we value your cultural wisdom, and we will listen to and learn from your voices.

NAPCAN is committed to building, in partnership with indigenous agencies, a culturally secure, trauma-informed model of care for those children and families needing intervention (Milroy, 2013).

References

Kirmayer, L., Tait, C. & Simpson, C. (2009) The Mental Health of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada: Transformations of Identity and Community. In L. Kirmayer & G. Valaskakis (Eds.), *Healing Traditions: The Mental Health of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada* (pp. 1-35). Vancouver: UBC Press.

Milroy, H. (2013) Beyond cultural security; towards sanctuary. *The Medical Journal of Australia*, 199 (1), 14. Doi: 10.5694/mja13.10796