



MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release

On the Anniversary of the National Apology, First Nations children are still being removed from family at deeply disproportionate rates

As the nation reflects on the National Apology to the Stolen Generations, recent national data confirms that First Nations children continue to be removed from their families at alarming and profoundly disproportionate rates.

Figures released last week in the Productivity Commissions *Report on Government Services 2026* show that First Nations children make up approximately 7 per cent of the national population aged 0 to 17 years. Despite this, they account for almost half of all children placed in out of home care. At 30 June 2025, 15,340 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were living in out of home care across Australia, accounting for approximately 44 per cent of all children in care.

In the Northern Territory, the imbalance is even more acute. At 30 June 2025, 733 children in out of home care were First Nations, representing 89 per cent of all children in care in the Territory.

While the total number of all children in out of home care has declined in recent years, the proportion of First Nations children has remained persistently high, moving from 42 per cent in 2020-21 to 44 per cent in 2024-25.

This pattern shows that the structural drivers of disadvantage and racial injustice continue to place First Nations families under greater scrutiny and intervention.

Speaking yesterday when releasing the *Closing the Gap 2025 Annual Report*, the Prime Minister focussed on progress and optimism for the future, despite the crisis being faced by our children. He stated “New South Wales, the Northern Territory and ACT are improving when it comes to children in out of home care,” but the reality nationally remains dire. Target 12 – ‘By 2031, reduce the rate of overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (0–17 years old) in out-of-home care by 45%’ – is one of four targets actively worsening and not on track to be met. The commitment to end overrepresentation is failing. Optimism must not replace accountability and commitment to transformative change. This is a matter of system performance and political integrity, with real consequences for children and families.

Children’s Ground commends the establishment of the National Commission for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People as a significant reform. As an independent national

entity, the Commission has the authority to advocate and hold governments accountable for the safety, wellbeing and rights of First Nations children. The appointment of National Commissioner Sue Anne Hunter brings principled leadership at a time when strong oversight and sustained reform are essential and ensures that the lived experience of children and families informs national decision making.

The release of *Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Plan to End Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence 2026 to 2036* is also a critical development. By addressing family and domestic violence, a key pathway into child protection involvement, the plan strengthens national efforts to prevent harm and support families so children can remain safe within their own communities.

Children’s Ground recognises the leadership of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Katie Kiss in advancing truth telling and human rights. Truth telling about the history of forced removals and the intergenerational impact of those policies remains central to meaningful reform. The legacy of the Stolen Generations continues to shape the child protection system today, and structural change is required to end that pattern.

Sustained change requires a decisive shift towards prevention, early support and community led solutions. Investment in housing, health, education and culturally grounded family support services strengthens safety and reduces the need for destructive intervention. First Nations designed and governed approaches like Children’s Ground continue to demonstrate that children thrive when they remain connected to family, culture and Country. These models provide a clear pathway to safety that does not depend on separation as the primary response.

Quote attributable to William Tilmouth, Co-Chair of Children’s Ground, recipient of the 2025 Human Rights Medal and a survivor of the Stolen Generations:

“The apology acknowledged the trauma of forced removal, yet our children continue to be separated from their families. Nearly half of all children in out of home care in this country are First Nations, while we are only a small fraction of the population. In the Northern Territory, almost every child in care is one of ours. That is a national failure.

Governments have had years of reports, inquiries and evidence. They know that poverty, overcrowded housing, underfunded services and systemic bias sit at the centre of these removals. Still, the response remains surveillance, intervention and removal, instead of investing in families before crisis takes hold.

If there is genuine commitment to change, then power must shift to our communities. Funding must go towards prevention. First Nations led services must be resourced. Children must be kept safe within family, culture and Country. Until that happens, the promise carried in the apology remains unfinished and our children continue to pay the price.”

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