



MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release

Full reset of child protection must begin with prevention and First Nations-led solutions

The Independent Review into the Conduct of the Department of Children and Families has highlighted the longstanding systemic failures of the child protection system in the Northern Territory.

Children's Ground agrees unequivocally that the Northern Territory child protection system requires a full reset and supports the direction and intent of the review's recommendations. Reform must strengthen statutory responses at the point of crisis while addressing the social, cultural and economic drivers of harm, including racism, through prevention and early intervention.

First Nations children are disproportionately represented in the Territory's child protection system because of intersecting systemic failures, not because First Nations families, culture or kinship are the problem. Despite this, the review gives limited attention to the structural conditions driving that overrepresentation, the cultural safety of statutory practice or the authority of First Nations families and communities in decisions affecting their children.

A genuine reset must recognise the historical and ongoing harm caused by government intervention and child removal. It must be implemented through a strong First Nations cultural and rights-based framework, with First Nations families, leaders and community-controlled organisations directly involved in decisions affecting their children. Reform must also draw on the expertise of specialist domestic and family violence, legal, health, housing and child development services. Prevention must be a core part of the redesigned system.

The Northern Territory Government must be held accountable for the failures of the child protection system and the broader policy and service failures that leave families without adequate support. Future success must be measured by fewer families reaching crisis, fewer repeat referrals and removals, more timely support, stronger family preservation, improved cultural safety, better access to housing and essential services, and independent evidence that children are safer and connected to family, culture and Country. This success must be measured in partnership with First Nations communities.

The Government must establish a First Nations-led implementation and oversight mechanism with formal authority to shape and review proposed reforms, access to information and data, and the ability to monitor investment across statutory child protection and prevention. It should publicly report on implementation and have the ability to progress remedial action where reforms increase removals, weaken cultural connections or fail to improve children's safety.

Children's Ground and other organisations have continually advocated for First Nations led reform with the Northern Territory and Australian Governments. There are solutions. Children's Ground was established by

First Nations people in the Northern Territory as a new system in response to the failures of existing systems and the devastating realities facing children and families. By centring culture, strengthening child and family wellbeing, improving access to essential services and supporting families before they reach crisis, this approach seeks to prevent harm, create safety and reduce the need for statutory intervention. Investment in these long term, community led solutions is urgently needed to protect the safety and future of our children.

Quote attributable to Jane Vadeloo, CEO of Children's Ground:

"A full reset of the Northern Territory's child protection system is long overdue. Governments have repeatedly failed to address the conditions that place children and families at risk, leaving families without adequate support until their circumstances reach crisis. Reform must address these failures and invest seriously in prevention, early intervention and community-controlled solutions.

"First Nations communities have lived with the consequences of government intervention and child removal for generations. They must have genuine decision-making authority, backed by long-term resources and transparent data, to shape a system that protects children, prevents unnecessary removals and supports families to remain connected to culture and Country."

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