

MEDIA RELEASE

Urgent Action Needed to Ensure the Care and Protection of Aboriginal Children in the NT

7th April 2016

The Aboriginal community controlled health services across the NT met in Katherine to discuss the Care and Protection of Aboriginal children.

It was agreed at the meeting that:

- The safety and wellbeing of our children is paramount.
- Child safety and wellbeing is a public health issue. The Aboriginal health sector is well placed to play a central role in leading systemic improvements in child safety.
- There is growing alarm that the focus on these issues has again slipped and that too many children are not adequately protected and are being left in unsafe situations. This includes unsafe situations in out of home care and not just in families and communities.
- We do not need an intervention from the Commonwealth government but we do need a high level partnership between Aboriginal leaders and organisations, governments, police and others to address this situation.
- AMSANT has already called for the establishment of a taskforce across Northern Australia to address this problem however this has not occurred up to now.
- The importance of these issues also warrants the establishment of a dedicated NT Aboriginal Children's Commissioner to work with the existing NT Children's Commissioner, Ms Colleen Gwynne. This would complement and strengthen the excellent work that the Commission has done since its inception.
- Too many of our kids are living in unsafe environments and Aboriginal leaders in the health sector accept we have a responsibility and duty of care to do something about this. We cannot do this alone and need to be able to work in partnership with governments and the police. The care and protection of children is the responsibility of all of us.

These problems have been highlighted yet again by reports of inappropriate sexualised behaviours in children and adolescents. There has been no dedicated funding for evidence based programs, including violence prevention education to support families and communities to respond to these complex issues.

We're concerned about reporting of children presenting with sexually transmitted infections (STIs). This is alarming, distressing and unacceptable.

The meeting heard from the NT Children's Commissioner that there are still major concerns with sexual abuse in the Northern Territory. Since the defunding of the special police unit investigating child sexual abuse there has not been the capacity in the police force to properly investigate reported cases.

Any child presenting with evidence of any form of abuse needs to be properly investigated, supported and protected.

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