

15 May 2018

Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs
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Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

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Submission to the inquiry into local adoption

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry. As a national body, Anglicare Australia acknowledges that the adoption practises and experiences of our Network members vary depending on the jurisdiction of the state and territory they operate in. We refer to the submissions of Anglicare Sydney and Anglicare Victoria on their expertise and experiences around local adoption.

This letter is to provide some specific input on the topic of this inquiry. It stresses the importance that any new policy around adoption needs to take into account our recent history.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in care

This year marked the twentieth anniversary of *Bringing Them Home*, the landmark report into the Stolen Generations. At that time, many Australians were shocked to learn that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children represented 20 percent of children in out of home care (OOHC). Today, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children make up over one third of all children living in OOHC.¹ The rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in OOHC is almost ten times that of other children, and disproportionate representation continues to grow.²

If we continue to do what we are currently doing in child protection, the numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in OOHC will at least treble in the next 20

¹ Family Matters (2017) *The Family Matters Report 2017*. SNAICC. p5. Available at: <http://www.familymatters.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Family-Matters-Report-2017.pdf>

² Ibid.

years, according to the most recent *Family Matters* report.³ The rates of over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children continue to increase across jurisdictions. Not only are we not closing the gap, we are failing to arrest the widening of the gap.

Anglicare Australia is signatory to the *Family Matters* campaign, which aims to eliminate the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care by 2040. We echo the campaign's calls to strengthen and support families to reverse the trend of removals, and to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to ensure children and young people grow up safe and cared for in family, community and culture.

When considering adoption as a part of our out of home care system, the committee needs to consider the legacies of past policies and practices with respect to the separation of children from first families as well as poor practices of forced adoption for many women.

These policies and practises have had and still have lasting damages on the lives, health and well-being of many Australians.

Anglicare Australia recommends that the committee adopt the major actions identified by the *Family Matters* coalition. This would involve a commitment to:

- develop a national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Strategy which includes generational targets to eliminate over-representation and address the causes of child removal to improve safety and wellbeing.
- increase efforts to connect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in OOHC to family and culture, through cultural support planning, family finding, return to country, and kinship care support programs.
- prioritise investment in service delivery by community-controlled organisations in line with self-determination, including through investment targets aligned to need and adopting co-design principles with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

We thank the Committee for taking into account and learning from Australia's recent history.

Should you require further information, please contact the Anglicare Australia office on (02) 6230 1775.

Yours sincerely,



**Kasy Chambers,
Executive Director
Anglicare Australia**

³ Ibid.