Position Statement

First Nations Justice

Anglicare Australia recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Peoples of this country and acknowledges the continued spiritual, physical, social and cultural connections they have with land and sea, sustained over 60,000 years. We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the experts in designing, implementing and evaluating effective and culturally safe systems and agencies, to address the lasting impact of colonisation. We recognise colonisation has left and continues to leave a legacy of violence, family separation, loss of culture, language and country. In working for Reconciliation, Anglicare Australia advocates for self-determination and justice as inherent rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Our Experience

The Anglicare Australia Network works with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to deliver services such as out-of-home care, youth services, housing and homelessness, emergency relief, financial support and family support services.

We support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as they work towards self-determination. We strive to reflect this in our work and our relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities. Many agencies have embedded these aims through their Reconciliation Action Plans or other formal plans. The power of local partnerships is shown in the Network's collaborations with Aboriginal led organisations and communities in areas such as culturally appropriate foster care, youth leadership initiatives and work with perpetrators of family violence.

Key Issues

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are a source of strength, resilience, and identity for all Australians. Anglicare Australia recognises the importance of maintaining connections to culture, country and kinship to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' health and wellbeing. We also recognise the importance of providing services that are culturally safe for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Inequity in Australia is stark. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples can expect to live at least eight years fewer than other Australians,[1] and face an unacceptable gap in health and wellbeing.[2] This gap reflects a deeper failure by governments to partner with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in areas such as health, income, education, employment and housing; and to address the ongoing impact of racism and dispossession.

This deeper failure is most evident in the child protection and justice systems. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children make up over one third of all children in state care – almost ten times that of other children. At the same time services such as early childhood education or intensive family support are less likely to reach Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.[3] The incarceration rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is worsening,[4] and far too many young people are being placed in detention.[5]

Anglicare Australia believes the only way to close this gap is by supporting the self-determination of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and adequately resourcing their needs.[6] This must be backed by supportive institutions, and based on an acknowledgment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and heritage.

Experience shows that when Indigenous nations make their own decisions about what development approaches to take, they are much more likely to succeed in areas as diverse as form of government, natural resource management, economic development, health care and social services.[7] We believe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples must be enabled and provided with opportunities to make decisions about their own futures.

As a Network, Anglicare Australia is committed to working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in genuine partnership, with reciprocal opportunities for sharing and learning from each other. To achieve this, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation at all levels will be vital.

Recommended Actions

Anglicare Australia calls for:

- Development of a national framework that recognises the enduring sovereignty of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and leads to genuine self-determination; to be led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- Commitment from all levels of government to ongoing funding to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' health and addressing its underlying determinants, such as poverty, housing, education, employment opportunities, incarceration and child removal. These services should be contracted to Aboriginal controlled organisations wherever possible, and otherwise – at the very least – designed and managed in consultation with appropriate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities at both a management and service design level.
- Implementation of the Productivity Commission's recommendation for a default contract length of ten years for human services;6 noting long-term funding supports the building of trust between governments, service providers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- A national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Strategy which includes generational targets to address the causes of child removal and end over-representation in the care system and young people in detention.
- Greater efforts to connect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care to family and culture: through cultural support planning, family finding, return to country, and kinship care support programs.
- Investment in service delivery by community-controlled organisations in line with self-determination with investment targets aligned to need and the adoption of co-design principles with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- Increased employment of and collaboration with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across the whole social service sector.

Anglicare Australia
in every Community

1 Australian Bureau of Statistics (2023) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander life expectancy.

2 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2024) Size and sources of the health gap for Australia's First Nations people 2017-2019.

3 Family Matters (2024) The Family Matters Report 2024.

4 Productivity Commission (2024) Closing the Gap Information Repository: Socio-economic outcome area 10.

5 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2024) Youth detention population in Australia 2024.

6 Self-determination as defined by article 1 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights is the right of all peoples to freely determine their political status and make decisions about their social, cultural and economic development. Self-determination is a collective right (belonging to a 'people' as a group) rather than an individual right.

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