



Overview

The Australian Children's Commissioners and Guardians comprise part of the broader Australian and New Zealand Children's Commissioners and Guardians (ANZCCG) group of national, state and territory children and young people commissioners, guardians, and advocates.

The ANZCCG promotes the safety, wellbeing and rights of children and young people in Australia and New Zealand. Collectively we are committed to:

- promoting the rights of children and young people
- advocating for the right of children and young people to participate in decisions that impact them
- giving voice to the views of, and encouraging direct consultation with, children and young people on matters that affect them
- sharing the observations and perspectives obtained through members' varied functions and roles to ensure these drive improvements for children and young people across Australia and New Zealand
- ensuring the best interests of children and young people are considered in the development of policies and programs, and
- encouraging systemic improvement, informed by evidence-based research, in areas that impact on the rights, interests and wellbeing of children and young people, including but not limited to issues such as child poverty, housing and homelessness, mental health, child protection, and youth justice.

Key priorities for Australian Children's Commissioners and Guardians

All Australian Children's Commissioners and Guardians are committed to the self-determination and empowerment of Australia's First Nations peoples. At their January 2023 meeting, the Australian First Nations Children's Commissioners, Guardians and Advocates outlined 11 priorities for their collective effort and action.

At the April 2023 meeting, Australian Children's Commissioners and Guardians acknowledged that policies and programs that benefit First Nations children will benefit all children. As a collective entity, we agreed to adopt the 11 priorities developed by our First Nations colleagues and, in furthering these priorities, seek to ensure a better future and improved outcomes for all Australian children and young people.

These 11 priorities are to:

1. Advocate for, and support the introduction of, a National Commissioner to advance the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people across Australia, in collaboration with jurisdictional first nations Commissioners, Guardians and Advocates. Alongside this, we will also promote the need for consistency of independence, powers and commensurate resourcing for dedicated Commissioners and Guardians for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in each jurisdiction.

2. Lend our authority in the implementation of the Uluru Statement from the Heart including discussions about a Voice to Parliament and make Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people's voices heard.
3. Influence the Closing the Gap agenda at a national and jurisdictional level on relevant targets concerning children, young people, and families; ensuring that we lend our legislative powers to leverage systemic change for better outcomes.
4. Support a strengthening of the national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sector that is equitably resourced to design and lead child protection and youth justice responses for our children and families, and develop culturally appropriate models to improve family-led decision making at the community level.
5. Implement a nationally consistent approach to monitoring over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in child protection and youth justice systems, applying Indigenous Data Sovereignty Principles.
6. Commit to ongoing advocacy to raise the age of criminal responsibility to 14 years nationally highlighting that detention in youth and adult facilities or watchhouses is harmful and re-traumatising to children and young people, can increase criminogenic behaviours, is inhumane, and deprives children and young people of their basic rights.
7. Advocate to end harmful and inhumane practices that violate the human rights of children and young people detained, including solitary confinement, the use of spit hoods and detention in adult facilities.
8. Monitor the interpretation and application of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle, with a particular focus on consistency of approach on a national basis. Primacy must be placed on the preservation and reunification of families to prevent children being removed, including babies taken from hospital and birthing units, and being placed with non-Indigenous carers and in residential care facilities.
9. Raise the visibility of missing children and young people, including those who are self-selecting or self-placing from child protection systems and advocate for a nationally consistent approach in how we identify and publicly report on these children and young people.
10. Promote the difference between poverty and wilful neglect, highlighting that poor families love their children too. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families experiencing poverty are reluctant to seek help when the consequence is often removal of their children.
11. Advocate for greater investment in support services for vulnerable and impoverished families, highlighting that structural disadvantage, prejudice, systemic discrimination and diminished support services exacerbate the marginalisation of impoverished families and lead to increased levels of child removal.

We are committed to progressing these 11 priorities in alignment with Australia's commitment to uphold and embed into law the United Nations (UN) *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, and the United Nations Development Program *Sustainable Development Goals*.

*Endorsed by the undersigned Commissioners, Guardians and Advocates
for Australian children and young people*



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