



Coalition of Peaks

25 November 2022

Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Via email: FirstNationswomenchildren.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee,

I write to you today as the Lead Convener of the Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations (Coalition of Peaks), the representative body of some 80 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled peak organisations, which represent approximately 800 member organisations that provide service to more than 500,000 of our people nationally, and in every state and territory. The Coalition of Peaks came together to change the way Australian governments work with our people.

The objective of the landmark National Agreement on Closing the Gap, that the Coalition of Peaks developed and negotiated with all Australian Governments in 2020, is to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and governments to work together to overcome the inequality experienced by our people and achieve life outcomes equal to all Australians.

We draw your attention to the four overarching Priority Reforms within the National Agreement, which pertain to this inquiry:

- Priority Reform One: formal partnerships and shared decision making.
- Priority Reform Two: building the community-controlled sector.
- Priority Reform Three: transforming Government agencies
- Priority Reform Four: shared access to data and information at a regional level.

The first target in the National Agreement is that *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people live long and healthy lives*. This target was created to address the alarming large disparity in life expectancy between First Nations and non-First Nations Australians. The thirteenth target is that *Families and Households are safe*, with a goal to reduce violence against women and children by 50% by 2031.

In this country First Nations women and children are some of the most vulnerable and forgotten about people. This inquiry highlights not only that First Nations women and children experience extremely high levels of abuse – abuse that leads to murder – but also how unreported this abuse is by mainstream media.

Unfortunately, while we are sickened and hurt, we are not surprised. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sector remains at the forefront of this under-resourced work and our Peaks Members daily have to confront the way the system lets our people down. Of our Peaks Members, ten exist to service and protect women and/or children. More broadly, all of our members have a stake in the protection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island women and children.



We understand that more needs to be done to protect our women and children, and we welcome the overdue conversation about how to do so effectively, in a culture informed and healing aware way, and with a government that takes our protection seriously.

Many of our Peaks Members in the community-controlled sector have considerable experience engaging with the government to deliver key areas of policy. One of these, SNAICC – National Voice for our Children, worked alongside the Commonwealth Government to develop a framework that aims to ensure that children and young people in Australia have the right to grow up safe and supported, in a nurturing and culturally appropriate environment. Through staged action plans, they intend to deliver a program that spans from 2021 to 2031. Any policy reform that is created out of this inquiry should consider the wealth of knowledge held in the community-controlled sector.

Peaks Members with special interests

As mentioned, ten of our Peaks Members have special interest in this inquiry, as their service delivery includes the protection and promotion of women and children:

- Queensland Indigenous Family Violence Legal Service
- National Family Violence Prevention Legal Services
- SNAICC – National Voice for our Children
- National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services
- AbSec – NSW Child, Family and Community Peak Aboriginal Corporation
- Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak
- KWY Aboriginal Corporation (SA)
- Nunga NiMinar (SA)
- Kura Yerlo (SA)
- Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women’s Council (SA)
- Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency
- Djirra (VIC)
- The Healing Foundation

We endorse the voice of our Peaks Members and encourage your committee and the Commonwealth Government to engage with them and the communities they represent.

Recommendations

With the above Priority Reforms in mind, and noting that the Commonwealth Government has committed to achieving them, we make the following recommendations to this inquiry:

1. That any changes to legislation, policies, and practices implemented in response to all forms of violence experienced by First Nations women and children are done so in partnership with First Nations people.
2. That ways to address the systemic causes of all forms of violence against First Nations women and children are developed in partnership with First Nations people.
3. That discussion about the ways in which missing and murdered First Nations women and children and their families can be honoured and commemorated takes place with First Nations people.
4. That targeted action to build the capacity and capability of the community-controlled sector be recognised as vital, as our people feel more comfortable accessing community-controlled services.
5. That collection and sharing processes for data about missing and murdered women and children include Indigenous Data Sovereignty Principles and access for relevant community-controlled services.

This inquiry only confirms what we already know – First Nations women and children are vulnerable, overlooked, and forgotten about. I write to implore you to use the inquiry as a means to finally and systematically address the current gaps that let our women and children down.

Sincerely,

Casey Millward
Head of Secretariat

Coalition of Peaks