Key Policy Recommendations

1. The Australian Government should develop a national health and wellbeing action plan for children in out-of-home care to accompany Safe and Supported: The National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children 2021-2031. This plan should act as a roadmap on how to implement the National Clinical Assessment Framework (2011) (NCAF) for children and young people in out-of-home care. The plan should be co-designed with the Aboriginal Community-Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs).

   - mandate health assessments for every child in out-of-home care in line with the NCAF
   - clarify the statutory responsibility, funding, and resourcing for health care
   - include a robust statutory and regulatory framework that includes national health indicators to measure and report on the health and wellbeing of children in the child protection system, including those in out-of-home care, and specifically address the health of Aboriginal children in care, aligning with the socio-economic targets in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (2020).

2. The Australian Government should invest in and develop specialised multidisciplinary integrated care hubs for vulnerable children (including those in out-of-home care) within ACCHOs and community hubs, to deliver integrated, culturally safe and trauma-informed primary health, specialist, mental health and supportive care.

For further details, please contact:
Dr Niroshini Kennedy
Victorian Aboriginal Health Service
T: +61 (0)402 089 386
E: niroshini.kennedy@vahs.org.au

Closing the Gap

Recommendations support the following targets for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people:

**Target 4**
Children thrive in their early years
By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children assessed as developmentally on track in all five domains of the Australian Early Development Census to 55%.

**Target 5**
Students achieve their full learning potential
By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (age 20-24) attaining year 12 or equivalent qualification to 96%.

**Target 11**
Young people are not overrepresented in the criminal justice system
By 2031, reduce the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people (10-17 yr) in detention by 30%.

**Target 12**
Children are not overrepresented in the child protection system
By 2031, reduce the rate of over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care by 45%.

**Target 14**
People enjoy high levels of social and emotional wellbeing
Significant and sustained reduction in suicide of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people towards zero.

Indigenous kids in OoHC have high & unmet health needs

An audit of a VAHS paediatric clinic of 103 Aboriginal children in OoHC found:

- **66%** mental health problems
- **46%** developmental delay
- **37%** hearing problems
- **40%** dental caries
- **<1%** received all health services recommended within 12 months of entry to OoHC

However, a study in Victoria of 5,676 children (<13 yrs) in foster or kinship care found:

- **66%** mental health problems
- **46%** developmental delay
- **37%** hearing problems
- **40%** dental caries
- **<1%** received all health services recommended within 12 months of entry to OoHC

Benefits of early intervention

‘Australian governments are spending **$15.2 billion** each year on high-intensity and crisis services for problems that may have been prevented had we invested earlier and more wisely.’

Of this, **$5.9 billion (39%)** is spent on child protection.

*Early intervention in a child’s quality of life – including meeting their health needs – is a smart investment in a stronger Australia.*

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