National Commission for
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
Children and Young People

WEDNESDAY 25 NOVEMBER
MEDIA RELEASE

NATIONAL COMMISSIONER ANNOUNCES NATIONAL AGENDA AT NPC

The National Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People, Sue-Anne Hunter, has today addressed the National Press Club in Canberra to announce her national agenda, which will carry the remainder of her term.

In her address, the National Commissioner called on every government in Australia to enact six things, noting each one is something they have already signed up to and agreed to do by the United Nations.

National Agenda:

1. Raise the age of criminal responsibility to at least 14, everywhere. The ACT has shown it can be done. A ten-year-old in Darwin deserves the same protection as a ten-year-old in Canberra.
2. Remove children from adult police watch houses, and open every institution children are detained in to independent inspection, including by United Nations experts.
3. Put the money where the help is. Fund Aboriginal community-controlled organisations to support families early, before a baby is taken at birth, and publish every year what share of child protection money goes to them.
4. Measure child poverty, so we know how many children are going to bed hungry and set a target to bring it down.
5. Put all five parts of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle into practice, and report on each of them publicly.
6. Share the data. Release the figures on children who die in care, with proper protections for their families, and let communities govern the data about their own children, as every government agreed in Closing the Gap.

At the National Press Club, National Commissioner Hunter said Governments don't need more advice.

“In Safe and Supported and in Closing the Gap, every government in this country has already agreed what has to change. What has been missing is someone checking and saying out loud whether they are doing it. That is my job now, and here is how I'm going to do it,” said National Commissioner Hunter in her address.

“Governments can say yes or no to any of these. I will publish a report card on every government in this country, against these six asks and against Safe and Supported, and I will do it every year. I will publicise who has acted, who has not, and what they told me when I asked why. And if nothing moves, I will go further, using every power this Parliament has given me.”

“We are not waiting for the first report card to start. We are working through the more than 1,600 recommendations governments have already been given, to find out what was done, what wasn't, and what got in the way. I am not ruling out a national inquiry. If the evidence says we need one, I'll hold one.”

“And on wellbeing, we are going to the source. My team and I are going to be spending the time travelling to communities across the country, asking children and young people what it takes for them

to feel well, safe and strong."

"What they've told us so far is that they want somewhere safe to go, someone to talk to, and to feel like they belong. While we listen, I will keep pushing governments for mental health services that children can actually reach: in their own communities, run by people they trust, and open when they need them. And the report card will track the Closing the Gap target on suicide, because it's going backwards, and none of us should be allowed to look away from that."

"None of this will be done about communities without them. A National Youth Advisory Council of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people will help set our direction and tell us whether what governments promise is actually reaching them. We'll work alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership, the Australian and New Zealand Children's Commissioners, Guardians and Advocates. And we will hold this Commission to the same standard."

"I'm not interested in catching anyone out. I'll work with any minister, in any jurisdiction, who wants to change these numbers, and my door is open. But I will report either way, because these children can't afford a commissioner who stays quiet."

On what she hopes to see by the end of her term.

"That fewer babies were taken at birth. That no ten-year-old spent a night in a watch house. That a mum who asked for help got it. That is what accountability looks like for a child. Names, dates and a public record, and childhoods that are different because of it."

For more information on the National Commission, visit https://www.ncatsicyp.gov.au/

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About the National Commission for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People

The National Commission for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People (the National Commission) is an independent body dedicated to promoting the rights, wellbeing and safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. The National Commission works to elevate First Nations voices, advocate for systemic reform and drive evidence-based policy and practice that supports strong, thriving futures for children, families and communities.