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New Commissioner Appointed as Indigenous Child Outcomes Worsen

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Adjunct Professor Sue-Anne Hunter takes on the role of National Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People as data shows rising child removals and youth detentions.

The Australian government has appointed Adjunct Professor Sue-Anne Hunter, a Wurundjeri and Ngurai Illum Wurrung woman, as the inaugural National Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People, amid worsening outcomes for Indigenous youth. A 2025 Productivity Commission report reveals that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are 10.2 times more likely to be in out-of-home care (OOHC) and 27 times more likely to be in youth detention than non-

Indigenous children, with only four of 19 Closing the Gap targets on track for 2031, per ABC News.

Hunter, with over 20 years in child and family services, including roles at the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency and Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC), aims to address these disparities. She emphasized to ABC News that the role will focus on amplifying Indigenous children's voices, stating, "The statistics are grim, but our children are not statistics, they are our future." The National Commission, operational since January 13, 2025, under the Public Service Act 1999, seeks to advocate for evidence-based policy changes to reduce over-representation in OOHC and detention, per the Department of Social Services.

The 2023 Family Matters report by SNAICC notes 22,328 Indigenous children in OOHC, a rate of 57.2 per 1,000, compared to 4.7 for non-Indigenous children. The commission's establishment follows advocacy from SNAICC and the Australian Children's Commissioners Guardians and Advocates (ACCGA), with Catherine Liddle, SNAICC CEO, calling it a "game-changer" for accountability, per the National Indigenous Times.

Critics, including Independent Senator Lidia Thorpe, warn of a potential "second Stolen Generation" without urgent action, per ABC News. The Australian Labor Party (ALP) government's delay in addressing systemic issues, such as the Northern Territory's recent child protection law changes, has drawn scrutiny from Acting Commissioner Lil Gordon and National Children's Commissioner Anne Hollonds, who argue these undermine cultural connections, per the National Commission's joint statement. With Hunter's appointment, there's hope for reform, but the challenge of reversing entrenched trends remains daunting.