

MEDIA RELEASE: Caritas Australia and Kinchela Boys Home Aboriginal Corporation call on government to close the gap for First Australians

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This Reconciliation Week, Caritas Australia calls on the government to continue to work towards closing the gap for First Australians.

"We work with First Australian partners all over the country, from Western Sydney to Beswick in remote Northern Territory, and our key priority across all these partnerships is to really listen, understand and collaborate," says Christine Rhazi, Caritas Australia's First Australians Associate Director, and a proud Yamatji Widi woman from Geraldton, Western Australia.

"Our country has a history of making decisions on behalf of rather than with First Australians. This means we've ended up with a lot of policies that don't work or cause further trauma to culture and communities."

Caritas Australia works in close partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and First Australian-led organisations to support programs that focus on intergenerational healing, strengthening cultural identity and spirituality, livelihood opportunities, and advocacy.

Kinchela Boys Home Aboriginal Corporation (KBHAC) was formed by the survivors of Kinchela Boys Home in Kempsey, New South Wales, who were forcibly removed from their families during the Stolen Generations. It seeks to address the trauma of being forcibly removed from their families, as well as the multigenerational trauma that adversely impacts on the lives of their families and descendants.

"The truth-telling about the invasion of this land needs to be told. It needs to be told for everybody. Not just the children who were forcibly removed, but for the bigger pain that's not talked about," said Uncle Michael "Widdy" Welsh, KBHAC's Chairperson.

"We were rejected by the non-Indigenous people when they took us away, and then by Indigenous people when we went back home, so we're still waiting to be identified by our true heritage of our grandfather and grandmother's land. And that's something that needs to be finished. The Bringing Them Back Home report, that's what it's all about."

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are worse off compared to other Australians across almost every measurement of wellbeing, including financial, social, physical and mental health. First Australians are incarcerated at significantly higher rates, with dire consequences for some children incarcerated as young as ten years old.

"This is simply not good enough. We must invest in our First Australian communities, and close the gap in wellbeing and outcomes," said Ms Rhazi.

"Truth-telling is vital to reconciliation because as we've seen with KBHAC it promotes healing, but this also needs to be supported with strong and sound policies and an understanding that First Australian-led is best – not the top-down decision making like we've seen in the past. The time has come for First Australians to be empowered to make the decisions that affect their lives, because they do have the answers."

Media contact: Jessica Stone 0490 684 867 / jessica.stone@caritas.org.au