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Statement by the Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory regarding calls for a Royal Commission into child sexual abuse in Aboriginal communities

19 October 2023

On behalf of the Board of Directors of the Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory (AMSANT), representing Aboriginal community controlled health services across the Northern Territory, we reject attempts to politicise the issue of child sexual abuse in Aboriginal communities.

Any abuse of any child is abhorrent, and profoundly offensive to Aboriginal culture which has at its heart the care and nurture of children.

We note calls in recent days for the establishment of a Royal Commission into Sexual Abuse in Indigenous communities.

Our Aboriginal organisations and communities do not minimise the issue of the abuse and neglect of children. This is why we support the work of the Northern Territory Children and Families Tripartite Forum, whose membership includes the Northern Territory and Australian governments working with Aboriginal organisations on child protection and youth justice issues.

This is how to make progress: Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, government and community, working together. It is not easy, but it is the focused, long-term work needed to make progress and protect our young people.

Rather than generate more recommendations from yet more inquiries, we need to ensure we implement existing recommendations from previous inquiries, including from the Royal Commission into the Care and Protection of Children.

On the other hand, political grandstanding by those who actively campaigned *against* Aboriginal communities having a voice on matters that concern us can only be divisive and destructive.

We also remind politicians that they are subject to the same laws on mandatory reporting of sexual abuse as all members of the community. If anyone has a reasonable belief of a case of a child being sexually abused, they are required by law under the Northern Territory's *Care and Protection of Children Act 2007* to report the matter to the police or other authorities.

Rather than yet another inquiry, we believe that the substantial resources required for a Royal Commission would be better used in services for our communities on the ground.

In particular, we suggest that those who have genuine concern for our Aboriginal children should demand action on the poverty and inequality in which so many of our children are forced to live; to ensure that they have access to schools and teaching that meet their needs; and to address the accelerating rates of incarceration of our young people.

Rob McPhee, Chairperson, Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory

John Paterson, CEO, Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory

In recognition of the Week of Silence we will not be making media comment on this matter.

AMSANT is the peak body for Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACCHSs) in the Northern Territory. We represent 12 full member organisations (ACCHSs) and 13 associate members across all areas of the Territory. We aim to grow a strong Aboriginal community controlled primary health care sector by supporting our Members to deliver culturally safe, high quality comprehensive primary health care that supports action on the social determinants of health; and representing our Members' views and aspirations through advocacy, policy, planning and research.