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Every National Indicator Worsens Again. It's Time to Break the Cycle of Child Abuse.

The latest shocking figures on child abuse are a timely reminder to the new federal government of the opportunity it now has to make a real impact on the future of Australia's children.

The figures, released by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) show the eighth consecutive increase in every national indicator of child abuse. There has been a 16% increase in notifications since 05/06, the number of children on care and protection orders has increased by 43% since 2002, and the number of children in out of home care has risen significantly.

Teresa Scott, President of Australia's peak child abuse prevention organization, NAPCAN, is calling on the government to implement radical prevention strategies to break the cycle of our country's greatest social problem.

Clearly the current approach to protecting children isn't producing the results we need – while some children are protected from further harm, the current system is not designed to encourage families who are struggling to care for their children to seek help before they go into crisis. There must be a greater emphasis on preventing abuse and neglect by assisting families to better care for their children before they reach crisis point. By the time a family is identified as abusing a child it is much harder to make a positive change for the child and family.

"We are therefore calling on the government to build on the commitment to preventing child abuse already shown by so many hard-working Australian communities," she said. "Our hope is the government will also fund strategies that will build the capacity of these communities and to support and build the capacity of families to raise children in a safe environment."

NAPCAN's work has shown that prevention strategies can work. NAPCAN is collaborating with a number of individual communities across Australia who are working to ensure all children grow up free from every form of harm. These *community action networks* bring together professionals, services and the community to improve educational, work, health and other opportunities for children – all consistent with known protective factors for the wellbeing and safety of children and youth.

Short term, stop gap measures are not the answer, and removing children from their family home should be the very last resort. Prevention is a long term, generational, multi-dimensional social & health project that requires political will & financial investment, plus the commitment & understanding of everyone in the community, said Ms Scott.

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