

## Service accessibility critical to improving child safety: Dr Aden Ridgeway

Making child and family services more accessible to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and a preventative approach are essential to improving child safety and reducing the number of Indigenous children in out-of-home care, a conference will be told today.

Healing Foundation Board member Dr Aden Ridgeway will deliver the 6th Families Australia Oration at the 2015 Child Aware Approaches Conference in Melbourne this afternoon.

“Creating space for our cultural characteristics to be recognised and to thrive is critical in opening up mainstream services to Indigenous peoples,” Dr Ridgeway will tell the conference.

Dr Ridgeway will challenge the child and family sector to examine the accessibility of their services to Indigenous Australians.

“Do local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people use them? Making services more inclusive is a simple way to change the dynamic,” Dr Ridgeway said.

“We must also move from a reactive, demand-driven system towards an approach that is proactive, strength-based and focused on prevention.”

Dr Ridgeway will describe how Healing Foundation projects are designed to overcome the effects of trauma by providing experiences of success, mastery and empowerment and avoiding further experiences of helplessness and frustration.

“By enhancing inherent strengths and celebrating the small achievements of young people, project workers have been able to build self-worth and personal leadership,” Dr Ridgeway said.

“These projects are building the capacity of young people to create a vision for themselves, their families and communities.”

The Families Australia Child Aware Approaches Conference brings together more than 300 policymakers, service delivery workers and researchers from around Australia to discuss how to improve the safety and wellbeing of Australia’s children and families. It is being held at the Melbourne Exhibition Centre today and tomorrow.

*The Healing Foundation is a national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation with a focus on building culturally strong, community led healing solutions. More information is available at [www.healingfoundation.org.au](http://www.healingfoundation.org.au)*

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