



NATSILS

**NATIONAL ABORIGINAL & TORRES
STRAIT ISLANDER LEGAL SERVICES**

MEDIA RELEASE

15 April 2016

25 year anniversary of the Report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody

Today marks 25 years since the final report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. The Royal Commission was a watershed moment for focus on the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia's criminal justice system. The Report detailed 339 recommendations addressing the root causes of overrepresentation, including making imprisonment an option of last resort.

While in 1991 an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person was 7 times more likely to be in prison than a non-Indigenous Australian, the rate today is 13 times more likely. Additionally, the overall number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in prison rose 88% from 2004-2014. The rise in the number of Aboriginal women who are in custody is of particular concern, they are 34% of female prisoners but just 2% of the overall Australian population. The ripple effect of this can be seen in statistics that show Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women are 31.4 times more likely to be hospitalised as a result of family violence and their children 10 times more likely to be in out-of-home care.

This morning NATSILS Deputy Chairperson Cheryl Axleby gathered in Canberra with the Change the Record Coalition members to discuss the lack of progress on this important issue.

"This has been a national crisis for too long and it is only getting worse, it is time for the Federal Government to step-up and address this situation and fully implement the recommendations that are as relevant today as they were in 1991" Ms Axleby said.

A number of the Report's recommendations addressed the issue of adequate funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander legal services. Under current policy, the legal services face cuts of \$4 million per annum starting in 2017.

"It is vitally important that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have access to quality culturally appropriate legal services. This much has been acknowledged by government but we still find ourselves back in this position, fighting for our funding."

"Addressing overrepresentation means investing in community controlled place-based prevention and diversionary programs. The issues are well known, the solutions are well known, and they are in community driven programs. It's an election year and the government has an opportunity now to commit their support to preventing the unnecessary deaths of our children so that we aren't back here in 25 years mourning the loss of another 365 deaths in custody."

Further material available at www.changetherecord.org.au

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