



NATSILS

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

MEDIA RELEASE

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NATSILS calls for Federal Government commitment to Justice Targets on Close the Gap Day

Today, on Close the Gap day, the peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services, NATSILS called upon the federal government to put justice targets into the Closing of the Gap Strategy as a matter of priority.

NATSILS Chairperson Shane Duffy said it was essential that the Federal Government took a leadership role in addressing the crisis of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander imprisonment.

“The rates of imprisonment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are currently at epidemic levels. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander imprisonment has risen by 57 per cent over the past 15 years” Mr Duffy said.

“The truth is when it comes to justice the picture just isn’t getting better. This is an unprecedented crisis requiring an urgent national response.”

“This response will necessitate a new, more holistic approach to justice that incorporates Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities as part of the solution” Mr Duffy said.

It was noted that the safer communities ‘building block’ of the COAG Closing the Gap Strategy was the only area that did not incorporate specific targets.

Mr Duffy said, “This is where clear targets on lowering imprisonment and violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be incorporated.”

“The lack of specific targets for justice in the Close the Gap Strategy is a glaring omission. And the reality is that without a focus on justice the government’s attempts to tackle key priorities such as education and health is undermined. The fact is that all these issues are interrelated” Mr Duffy said.

NATSILS also calls upon the Federal government to reverse the proposed \$13.34 million in funding cuts to member organisations across the country.

“As Professor Larissa Behrendt argued recently we simply will not close the justice gap by defunding frontline legal services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.” Mr Duffy said.

“Time and time again the Abbott government has denied that these cuts will impact on front line legal services. Just this week in Senate on Tuesday it was claimed that the cuts do not “impact on the delivery of services.” We want to make very clear that a cut of 13.34 million will significantly reduce the front line family, civil and criminal legal services that the ATSILS deliver.” Mr Duffy said.

Mr Duffy said, “This will have a major impact on the most vulnerable members of our society, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children. We

call on Minister Brandis to listen to the advice of the Attorney-General of each state and territory that these funding cuts should be reversed as further cuts could "set us back decades."

Mr Duffy said, "On Close the Gap day, it is sad to reflect on the enormous and widening gap in the rates of imprisonment between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the rest of the population. But most of all I am concerned that the situation is going to become so much worse due to government inaction and short-sighted funding cuts. We are in dire need of government leadership to improve this crisis."

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