

MEDIA RELEASE

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**Budget 2016**

In the lead up to the 2016 Federal Budget, NATSILS look forward to the Government showing leadership by providing funding certainty to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (ATSILS).

NATSILS expects the Commonwealth to make good on its pre-budget asks, including:

- The reversal of cuts of \$4.5 million to the ATSILS due to come into effect in 2017; and
- Urgently address unmet civil and family law needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by injecting \$18.58 million into the Indigenous Legal Assistance Program, as well as appropriate amounts for Family Violence Prevention Legal Services, Community Legal Centres and Legal Aid Commissions.

The ATSILS have experienced funding uncertainty since the 2014 Abbott-Hockey budget announced cuts of approximately \$14 million to the sector. Following sustained community pressure these cuts were reversed in March 2015 by the Attorney-General George Brandis. Funding agreements between the ATSILS and the Commonwealth implemented since the announcement last year will see a decrease in funding of \$4.5 million due to come into effect in 2017. A reduction of \$4.5 million results in an overall decrease of almost 6 per cent in the funding to frontline services.

‘We need funding certainty so that we can focus on developing solutions to the crippling rates of over-imprisonment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ said Wayne Muir, NATSILS Chairman.

‘The ATSILS provide an essential public service ensuring that some of the most vulnerable people in our society, including victims of family violence, clients in remote areas and accused with cognitive and psychiatric impairments, have access to quality culturally competent legal services. Cuts to our funding necessarily limits access to justice for these people and adds unintended cost to government through the court and prison systems’.

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**NATSILS will be part of joint post-budget press-conference with the National Congress of Australia’s First Peoples in the Senate Courtyard, Parliament House on Wednesday, 4 May at 11:00am.**