

**28 August 2018**

**MEDIA RELEASE**

**No more unjust deaths: NATSILS calls for life-saving Custody Notification Services nation-wide**

The national peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS) today called for a national roll out of mandatory custody notification services in response to alarming findings from The Guardian Australia's 'Deaths Inside' project.

The Guardian reviewed deaths in custody since the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and uncovered that:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are dying in custody from treatable medical conditions, but are much less likely than non-Indigenous people to receive the care they need;
- police watch-houses, prisons and hospitals are failing to follow their own procedures;
- mental health and cognitive impairment is a large factor in deaths; and
- families are waiting up to three years for an inquest.

“A generation on from the Royal Commission, 407 Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people have died in the care of governments,” said Cheryl Axleby, co-chair of NATSILS.

“These are our Elders, our mothers, fathers, children, cousins, uncles and aunties, taken from us too soon. Too many of these deaths were preventable. With the flick of a pen, governments could easily save lives with this simple solution: fund and legislate mandatory custody notification services in every state and territory.”

[Custody Notification Services](#) provide 24-hour, 7-day a week telephone legal advice services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have been detained in police custody. The lawyer will provide the Aboriginal accused with culturally safe legal advice specific to their circumstances and will also inquire as to their health and mental-health, to ensure that appropriate medical assistance is provided.

The Australian Law Reform Commission recently recommended that Commonwealth, state and territory governments should introduce a statutory custody notification service requiring police to contact an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander legal service as soon as possible after an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person is detained in custody for any reason.

“Custody Notification Services run by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services saves lives. We know it works. Governments must develop and fund Custody Notification Services in partnership with us before any more grief, pain and loss is inflicted on our communities.”

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END OF RELEASE

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For more information on Custody Notification Services provided by ATSILS, see [here](#).