

MEDIA RELEASE

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**NATSILS welcomes Labor commitment to closing the justice gap**

Today National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS), the national peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (ATSILS) has welcomed Labor's commitment to addressing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander imprisonment rates and experiences of violence.

In a speech delivered at the University of Melbourne Law School, Labor Leader Mr Shorten, vowed to put an end to the "grievous national shame" of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander imprisonment and experiences of violence.

The speech included a number of specific commitments including establishing justice targets through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) under a Labor government.

NATSILS Chairperson Shane Duffy said, "A commitment to targets for addressing the "justice gap" means that governments will be accountable for their performance in this area. We simply must work together in a co-ordinated way to address this critical issue."

"As Chairperson of NATSILS we were particularly pleased to hear Mr Shorten commit to the appropriate resourcing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled legal services, including ATSILS and Family Violence Prevention Legal Services (FVPLS). These legal services are crucial to ensuring that vulnerable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, particularly women and children escaping family violence, are able to receive access to justice, Mr Duffy said.

"We also welcome Mr Shorten's acknowledgement of the role that disability plays in the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the criminal justice system. Recent research shows that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with mental illnesses and cognitive impairments experience a criminal, rather than a therapeutic response to their disabilities."

"NATSILS will continue to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, organisations and all levels of government to address the crisis of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander imprisonment and experiences of violence. We call on the Australian public to join us in demanding vital change and ask that all levels of government work with us to address this critical issue."

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*NATSILS is part of the 'Change the Record' (CTR) Coalition, a group of leading Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, community and human rights organisations working collaboratively to address the disproportionate rates of incarceration and violence experienced by Indigenous Australians.*