Australian governments continue to fail kids by refusing to raise the age at which children can be locked in prison

Aboriginal-led, medical, legal and human rights organisations condemned State and Territory lawmakers who failed at today's Council of Attorneys-General meeting to commit to raise the age at which children can be locked away in a prison.

In just one year across Australia close to 600 children aged 10 to 13 years were locked away in prisons and many more were pushed through the criminal legal system. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are disproportionately affected, accounting for 65% of the younger children sent to prison.

New polling released today from the Australia Institute and Change the Record shows most of those surveyed agree that children as young as 10 years old do not belong in prison, and that Australia's age of criminal responsibility should be increased from 10 years of age to the global median of 14 years of age, or higher.

The Commonwealth Government is shortly also expected to release Closing the Gap justice targets to address the crisis of Aboriginal incarceration. Reports this morning suggest the national agreement would outline that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples will have to wait until 2093 to reach parity with non-Indigenous Australians on incarceration rates.

An urgent step towards ending the mass imprisonment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples would be law and policy changes to stop the imprisonment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, including raising the age of legal responsibility from 10 to at least 14 years.

Cheryl Axleby, Co-Chair of Change the Record & National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS):

"If governments were serious about ending the mass imprisonment of our people, then they should have taken this straight-forward step today to raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility from 10 years old to 14.

"We are deeply disappointed in the lack of leadership shown by Attorneys-General today, but this campaign is not over. First Nations people have been fighting for justice for a long time, and we know we have the support of the majority of Australians who understand that prison is no place for a child."

Tony Bartone, President of the Australian Medical Association:

"The AMA is extremely disappointed that state, territory and Commonwealth governments have failed to listen to medical advice and raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility from 10 years old to at least 14. By leaving the age of criminal responsibility at the unacceptably low age of 10 years old, we run the risk of further traumatising already disadvantaged and vulnerable children instead of giving them the help and healthcare that they deserve."

Rodney Dillon, Amnesty International Australia Indigenous Rights Advisor:

"Every day children are trapped in the quicksand of the justice system, is a day longer that they are harmed. Attorney-General Porter is purposefully dragging his feet on this issue and everyone knows it; it's time for the states and territories to take up the job of raising the age of criminal responsibility as soon as possible."

Shahleena Musk, Senior Lawyer, Human Rights Law Centre:

"Today political leaders showed complete disregard for Aboriginal lives and the futures of Aboriginal kids in this country. We again call for all state and territory governments to bring Australia in line with international standards and raise the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to at least 14 years so we can shut the gates of police and prisons cells to Aboriginal children once and for all. Nothing is stopping state, territory and Commonwealth governments taking action."

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