



NATSILS
National Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander Legal Services
TRUE JUSTICE FOR OUR PEOPLE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

29 September 2020

NATSILS MEDIA RELEASE: Statistics suggest racial discrimination in COVID-19 policing, with First Nations people over-policed across Australia

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service (NATSILS) strongly opposes the over-policing and criminalisation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Alongside young people and people of colour, recent statistics suggest that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people continue to be over-policed across Victoria and New South Wales during the COVID-19 pandemic. A report published by [Crime Statistics Victoria](#) brings to light that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people made up 4.7% of the fines, despite making up just 0.8% of the population in Victoria.

[In New South Wales](#), disadvantaged towns and suburbs with high Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations received disproportionately more fines and charges, with no correlation to the number of COVID-19 cases.

“There is no place for racial discrimination, especially during a pandemic. The ongoing over-policing of our people during the pandemic is further manifestation of systemic racism, and it needs to stop now. Governments should be actively diverting and reducing the number of Aboriginal people entering the justice system, and ensure everyone has social and economic support to get through this pandemic,” said Nerita Waight, co-chair of NATSILS.

NATSILS urges Governments to consider a public health approach opposed to policing the pandemic. The [ALRC Pathways to Justice report](#) found fines can and do lead to the further entrenchment of First Nations people in the justice system. NATSILS has concerns about the ongoing impacts of COVID-19 policing on the over-incarceration of our people.

These statistics are in addition to evidence of over-policing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Tennant Creek receiving [COVID-19 fines for known overcrowded houses](#), as well as case studies from across the country in Change the Record’s [‘Critical Condition’ Report](#) and the [COVID Policing website](#).

“This data is further proof that Australian governments are criminalising social inequalities during the pandemic. Over-policing, racism and discrimination continues to push our people into the quicksand of the justice system. The pandemic is an opportunity to reimagine the justice system and end these injustices, so we are all healthy and safe, rather than further criminalising our people,” said Cheryl Axleby, co-chair of NATSILS.

As recommended by the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, all governments and police services need to end racist and discriminatory policing as well as ending systemic and institutionalised racism. This includes the implementation of receipting practises for police conducting stops and searches nationwide to prevent racial profiling by police services.

In April, NATSILS released its [COVID-19 policy statement](#) calling for Australian governments to take a range of justice-related measures to stop the spread of the virus including releasing at-risk First Nations people from prison, diversion, policing, bail, testing, medical care, housing and social supports. To date, few, if any, of these proactive measures have been taken by Australian Governments.

END OF RELEASE

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