



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

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NATSILS MEDIA RELEASE: 30 years later and over 441 senseless deaths—Families whose loved ones have died in custody unite to demand answers from Prime Minister on anniversary of Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody

Fifteen families whose loved ones have died in custody have united together in solidarity, calling for Prime Minister Scott Morrison to meet with them face to face on the 30 year anniversary of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody.

The families, who have come together for the first time in a show of formidable strength and power, have created a [petition](#) calling on the Prime Minister to meet with them face to face in Canberra this coming April. They are seeking answers as to why the Federal Government will not take action to stop our people dying in custody, and demand a commitment to work with them to implement the Royal Commission recommendations that have so far been ignored, and to make sure no other family ever has to experience their pain.

The families' calls for justice have been published in a historic double page Black Lives Matter spread in the December issue of Rolling Stone Australia. Featuring powerful portraits of their loved ones who tragically lost their lives alongside emotive words from their families, the feature illustrates the grief and determination of these families, and so many more, each day in their journey for justice. It calls for support in the ongoing fight for accountability and justice for ending Black deaths in custody, and was published in print and also on the [NATSILS website](#).

Almost 30 years and over 441 deaths since the Royal Commission, no police officer, corrective services, prison guard or medical authority has been convicted for Black deaths in custody. There have been 5 Black deaths in custody since June this year—Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people continue to die at horrific rates.

The families involved in the petition and Rolling Stone Australia piece include:

Family of Cherdeena Wynne and Warren John Cooper

Family of Christopher Drage and family of Trisjack Simpson

Family of David Dungay Jnr

Family of Gareth Jackson Roe

Family of Joyce Gladis Clarke

Family of Ms Dhu

Family of Nathan Reynolds

Family of Raymond Noel Thomas

Family of Stanley Inman

Family of Tane Chatfield

Family of Aunty Tanya Day
Family of Aunty Sherry Fisher-Tilberoo
Family of Wayne Fella Morrison.

Statements from the families calling for the Prime Minister to meet with them:

- *"It's time the government agree to a public and national commitment to Aboriginal people to stop Aboriginal deaths in custody entirely. Resolving injustices and working toward a future where Aboriginal peoples lives are favoured over a system that renders us unworthy of being mourned needs to be a priority in every policy and legislative strategy. Wayne's life matters this much!"* - Caroline Andersen, Mother of Wayne Fella Morrison. Wayne died in 2016 from causes including spithood and restraint asphyxia, with no CCTV footage of the transport van with 7 officers inside.
- *"The system failed our dear Aunty Sherry's basic human rights. It'd be prudent to think the tyrannical nefarious systems of government in particular (QPS) can continue to dispel systemic racism & over policing as a myth, but Aunty Sherry was a victim of the very system that victimised her basic right to live. Truth & justice will prevail. Say her name "AUNTY SHERRY." - Troy J Brady, Nephew of Aunty Sherry Fisher-Tilberoo, a proud cultural Birigubba woman who died in September 2020 at the grasp of a system that failed her basic human rights, in a cold concrete cell.*
- *"Suzette Roe, Mother of Gareth Jackson Roe who suicided in 1997, a death in custody, stand in solidarity with all First Nations peoples to fight for justice in Australia. With the support of my sister Rosemary Roe, we vowed to make the Western Australian Police and all Government agencies accountable for any cruel and inhumane treatment of my 11 year-old son and nephew."* - Aunty Suzette & Aunty Rosemary Roe on behalf of GJ Roe's family.
- *"We want justice for our son, Raymond Noel Thomas, and those to be held accountable who persuade him for no crime committed."* - Raymond Thomas on behalf of Raymond Noel Thomas' family.
- *"Nathan should still be here today. It is critical that there is urgent systemic change - there must be justice and we must keep fighting so this never happens to another person again."* - Makayla Reynolds on behalf of Nathan Reynolds' family.
- *"Our beautiful Tane, 22 year old Gomeroi man was taken too soon. The system killed our son. We will continue to fight for justice to make change so we can stop Black deaths in custody. The pain never goes away, it's still raw. Corrective services have that much power in Australia without being investigated, why do we need a Prime Minister? These deaths won't stop until there is an independent body to investigate police and prisons."* - Statement from Tane Chatfield's family.

- *“30 years of deaths in custody and nothing much has changed. My son passed away, and then his daughter passed away, both at the hands of police. When they write out the recommendations from the coroner, it looks good on paper, but they need to put recommendations into action. Our kids are still dying in custody. Stop the cover ups and own up - they need to be held accountable for their wrong doings. I’ve lost two of my immediate family and it’s worn me down. They treat us like animals and nobody cares.” - Aunty Jennifer Clayton, mother of Wayne Cooper and grandmother of Cherdeena Wynne, on behalf of their family.*
- *“Police Officers at South Hedland left my granddaughter to die alone, 'shame' on them. The medical staff never listened to my granddaughter, she was moaning in pain and crying out for help, they never helped her, they left her to die. After 30 years plus the system is still killing our people and we need justice, my granddaughter died alone by herself. This breaks my heart everyday and I want it to stop.” - Aunty Carol Roe, grandmother of Ms Dhu, on behalf of their family.*
- *“The New South Wales jail system failed and as a result our Dunghutti Warrior, David Dungay Jnr died in custody aged 26 in December of 2015. After he refused to stop eating a packet of biscuits while safely secured in his cell. We demand that the NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into Aboriginal deaths in custody that commenced this year is to implement an independent body to investigate Aboriginal deaths in custody also for Safe Work NSW to automatically investigate a death in custody for industrial manslaughter. Accountability means justice. We will continue the fight until those involved with David’s deaths are criminally prosecuted and this corrupt system is changed.” - Paul Silva, statement on behalf of David Dungay Jnr’s family.*
- *“Our mum - Tanya Louise Day - was a proud Yorta Yorta woman and much-loved mother, grandmother and advocate. Three years ago, she died in police custody after she was locked up for falling asleep on a train. In the last 30 years, hundreds of Aboriginal people like our mum have died at the hands of the police, yet no police officer has ever been held criminally responsible. This is wrong and speaks volumes about racism and police impunity in this country. Aboriginal people will keep dying in custody until the legal system changes and police are held accountable for their actions.” – Statement from the Day family.*
- *“If Joyce got the care she needed she would be here with us today. She left her son and family behind and we miss her.” - Aunty Anne on behalf of Joyce Clarke’s family.*

Rolling Stone Australia is proud to partner with the families and NATSILS on this historic publication to commemorate Black Lives Matter.

“Australia’s governmental system has failed its people and had a negligible overall effect on reducing Indigenous deaths in custody since the Royal Commission was launched in 1991. Rolling Stone Australia stands with the fifteen families seeking justice today and supports their call for a consultation with Prime Minister Scott Morrison in April.” - Poppy Reid, Managing Editor Rolling Stone Australia.

NATSILS stand in solidarity and deep respect with all families whose loved ones have died in custody in their calls for change, justice and accountability.

“The families have shown incredible strength and power in their advocacy for justice and accountability for these senseless and preventable deaths. No one should have to go through their loved ones dying at the hands of police and authorities. Our communities have had solutions to end these deaths for decades, yet families continue to endure tragedy. We urge the Prime Minister to meet with these families next year —hear their stories and the change they want to see—and work alongside them to implement all of the recommendations of the Royal Commission.” - Priscilla Atkins, NATSILS Co-Chair.

END OF RELEASE

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Journalists to note that suppression orders may relate to this story in respect of Kumanjayi Walker and the associated trial is sub judice.