



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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

12 May 2021

NATSILS MEDIA RELEASE: Lack of funding for Aboriginal Legal Services further entrenches our people into the justice system, and minimises the national crisis of deaths in custody

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service (NATSILS) is concerned that no additional funding for legal assistance services will set back Close the Gap efforts and further see our people disproportionately over-represented in the criminal legal system.

There have been 7 Black deaths in custody this year alone, bringing the total number of lives lost to over 475 since the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody 30 years ago. NATSILS are disappointed that there has been a lack of investment into measures to address this national crisis. The lack of resourcing and funding for the ATSILS has severe implications for the many coronial inquests they are involved with, as well the many which, most unfortunately, will arise in the future. This is having a devastating effect for our communities and families left behind.

“Given the alarming rates of over-incarceration and Aboriginal deaths in custody, it is more important than ever for ATSILS to be properly resourced and accessible across Australia. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services are already suffering from a demand we cannot meet due to substantial delays and understaffing. More funding and job-creation for ATSILS means that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can access culturally safe legal support when and where they need it, which supports our communities and reduces the over-incarceration of our people.” - Priscilla Atkins, NATSILS Chair

We welcome any announcement of funding for the sector to provide assistance, casework, counselling and court support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults and children who are victims/survivors of family violence, however, given the existing and ongoing demand we support the calls by the National FVPLS Forum for additional funding, a move to national coverage of services and long-term funding agreements to ensure funding certainty.

NATSILS welcomes the creation of a new National Justice Policy Partnership, however note that funding to enable this Partnership was not announced. Our people must see real action now to reduce the devastatingly high rates of over-incarceration and subsequent deaths in custody.

We also note disappointment at being excluded from the Federal Budget Lock-Up, along with many other Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations and legal sector peaks.

END OF RELEASE

Media contact: Lucy Brown, natsilsmedia@vals.org.au, 0435 866 462