



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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

19 August 2020

NATSILS MEDIA RELEASE: Nearly a year and a half on and little has been done to protect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from COVID-19

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

In April 2020, NATSILS and our members (ATSILS) 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, 16 months on, few, if any, of these proactive measures have been taken by Australian Governments.

Despite the fact that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have been successful in ensuring their communities have been safe from COVID-19 transmission, the situation has recently worsened, with confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Aboriginal communities and outbreaks in prisons.

This year marked 30 years since the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody recommended that all governments and police services need to end racist and discriminatory policing as well as ending systemic and institutionalised racism, yet statistics released late last year suggest that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people continued to be over-policed across Victoria and New South Wales during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Over-policing and discrimination exercised during the pandemic is further manifestation of the systemic racism that continues to push our people into the quicksand of the justice system. The pandemic has proven to be yet another missed opportunity to reimagine the justice system and end these injustices against our people. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people continue to be left behind without support needed to get through the pandemic.” -

Priscilla Atkins, NATSILS Chair

NATSILS urges Governments to consider a public health approach opposed to policing the pandemic. We know that fines can and do lead to the further entrenchment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the justice system, and we hold grave concerns about the ongoing impacts of COVID-19 policing on the over-incarceration of our people and real risk of transmission and deaths in custody for mob currently in prison.

END OF RELEASE

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