



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

**6 December 2021**

**NATSILS Media Release: 500 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have died in custody since the Royal Commission 30 years ago**

NATSILS is saddened and angered to ascertain that since the Royal Commission into Aboriginal deaths in custody in 1991, 500 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have lost their lives in custody.

As reported through the AIC's [Deaths in Custody in Australia 2020-21](#) last week, there have been 489 Indigenous deaths in custody since the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. The AIC encompasses deaths in custody up until June 30, 2021, and since then there have been a further 11 Aboriginal deaths in custody.

That's 500 of our people - our Elders, brothers, sisters, cousins, parents. Every single one of those people have loved ones and communities who are grieving their passing.

All the while, governments continue to stall on urgent action to end these injustices. Governments have not implemented the RCIADIC recommendations in a meaningful way. They have also not implemented the recommendations from the Australian Law Reform Commission's Pathways to Justice Inquiry, the Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory and the many deaths in custody coronial investigations.

*"To have lost 500 of our people in custody since the Royal Commission handed down their recommendations over 30 years ago is beyond heartbreaking. Our thoughts are with every family member and loved one left behind mourning their loss. Our people continue, and will continue, to die from failures to implement these crucial recommendations. All the while, the burden shifts to grieving family members to push for the change needed to prevent more deaths in custody. The onus and burden of pushing for implementation should be on governments, not families."* - **Jamie McConnachie, NATSILS Executive Officer**

Currently, the government does not formally conduct their own tracking of the number of Indigenous deaths in custody and relies on figures provided by the AIC (Australian Institute of Criminology). Accurate and credible data on deaths in custody has been a recurring request from Aboriginal Legal Services and our communities following the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody in 1991. State based Aboriginal Legal Services and Governments need to be advised of Indigenous deaths in custody in real time, and Federal Government needs to be notified within 24 hours so there is real time data.

Our organisations have called for practical and necessary [policy and law reform solutions](#) for 50 years. We need to see every recommendation of the Royal Commission implemented.

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.

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END OF RELEASE

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