



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

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**29 March 2022**

**NATSILS MEDIA RELEASE: “Yet again, the Budget lets our people down” - Lack of funding for Aboriginal Legal Services further entrenches our people into the justice system**

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service (NATSILS) is concerned that no additional funding for legal assistance services or peak justice body will further see our people disproportionately overrepresented in the criminal legal system.

We are disappointed that tonight's Budget announcement means that major and urgent funding issues affecting ATSILS will persist - including ongoing subpar budgets and unaddressed 20-24% salary disparity between ATSILS staff and Legal Aid Commissions. This unjust disparity continues to affect ATSILS ability in recruiting and retaining legal practitioners; factoring the comparatively low salaries, high workloads and funding uncertainties.

It is disheartening that our calls for funding for a National Justice Reinvestment Body have gone unaddressed, years after the recommendation was made in the Pathways to Justice Report. We need alternatives to prison, culturally safe ways of healing and recovery and accountability and an investment in Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations to deliver holistic, culturally responsive programs focussed on healing to ensure our people are not continued to be overrepresented in the criminal legal system.

*“I am truly devastated with this announcement. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services are the advocates and the protectors of the rights of First Nations peoples. Our communities suffer due to this severe under-resourcing. It is totally unreasonable to manage service delivery expectations with this appalling level of investment. Adequate funding for ATSILS means that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can access culturally safe legal support when they need it.” - Jamie McConnachie, NATSILS Executive Officer*

This year alone there have been five Black deaths in custody, bringing the total number of lives lost to over 500 since the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody 30 years ago.

The legal assistance sector, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (ATSILS) and Family Violence Prevention Legal Services, and our peak bodies, remain seriously underfunded. 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.

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Media contact: Lucy Brown, [lbrown@vals.org.au](mailto:lbrown@vals.org.au), 0435 866 462