



**NATSILS**

National Aboriginal and  
Torres Strait Islander Legal Services

TRUE JUSTICE FOR OUR PEOPLE

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Issued in partnership with National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services, Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement South Australia, Aboriginal Legal Service of Western Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service (QLD) Ltd, North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency, Tasmanian Aboriginal Legal Service, Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (ATSILS) around Australia have welcomed the federal government's announcement of a small \$21 million funding increase sourced from department underspend in other areas, but say the bandaid measure will do little more than help keep the lights on, with an emergency increase to core funding necessary to stop ongoing service freezes in multiple communities around Australia.

"It's a really good start and will help us keep the lights on over the next 12 months, but it's simply not enough," said Karly Warner, Chair of NATSILS, the national peak body for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services around the country, and CEO of the Aboriginal Legal Service in NSW/ACT.

"We fully expect service freezes to continue and that means bad outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians including unjust incarceration and separated families.

"This increase in funding will mean different things for different services around the country.

"It's a welcome breather but ultimately is nowhere near enough to reverse the increasing freezes that are crippling our capacity to achieve justice for our clients.

"We will continue to work with government and other stakeholders to minimise the impact on communities. We will be continuing our campaign for sustainable funding that guarantees access to high quality advice and services."

ATSILS around Australia have been calling on the federal government to deliver a \$250 million emergency support package to prevent imminent service freezes and unjust incarceration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Demand for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (ATSILS) has increased by up to 100% since 2018 but core funding from the Commonwealth has declined in real terms.

Service freezes will have dire consequences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians who need our services to have any chance of equal access to justice. Service freezes risk disastrous outcomes including increased family violence and child removal, unjust incarceration and deaths in custody.

The current workload crisis facing our frontline services risks the physical and mental health of our staff and therefore our clients. The difficult decision to freeze services will be devastating for our organisations because it means real people who deserve culturally appropriate legal representation are turned away and suffer unnecessarily through the justice system.

ENDS

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