



NATSILS

National Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander Legal Services

TRUE JUSTICE FOR OUR PEOPLE

MEDIA RELEASE

Federal Budget ignores repeated, urgent calls for critical funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services

26 March 2025

The 2025-26 Federal Budget ignores repeated, urgent calls for critical funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services, undermining access to justice and perpetuating inequality.

Karly Warner, Chair of NATSILS says, “Governments across the country are advancing policies that drive the mass incarceration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the removal of children, and are not funding the reciprocal increase in demand for people to access high quality, culturally safe and holistic legal help.

“Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people go to jail for crimes that others don’t. Their children are removed for risk factors that others aren’t. They are pushed into negative contact with justice systems due to things like being misidentified as perpetrators of violence, social need, and systemic racism. They must get the legal assistance they deserve.

“The current funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services is insufficient to cover rising costs, despite investment under the National Access to Justice Partnership and commitments flowing from the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

“As a result services have been forced to turn away clients, to impose service freezes and to forego the wrap around support for individuals that will prevent contact with justice systems in the first place.

“Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have the highest legal needs of any group in Australia, and face structural bias at every stage of the legal process.

“The failure to provide needs-based funding to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services leaves our communities without access to justice.

“The continued underfunding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services, along with the growing national trend of state and territory governments imposing dangerous new laws that drive incarceration, increase legal need, and tare families apart is a disaster that governments can fix but, so far, haven’t.”

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