



**NATSILS**

National Aboriginal and  
Torres Strait Islander Legal Services

TRUE JUSTICE FOR OUR PEOPLE

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **“Our people are paying with their lives”: Aboriginal deaths in custody reach record high**

**Thursday 11 December 2025**

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS) extends its condolences to families and communities who have lost loved ones to deaths in custody, following news that Australia has recorded the highest number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander deaths in custody in at least four decades.

The national deaths in custody report by the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) released yesterday showed 33 Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people died in custody in 2024-2025 – the highest yearly death toll since the AIC began keeping records.

According to the [AIC's real-time dashboard](#), there have been a total of 617 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander deaths in custody since the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody.

“Every single one of these people has a name, a story, people who loved them,” said Nerita Waight, Acting Chair of NATSILS.

“There are more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in prison now than ever before. We’ve lost the highest number of community members to deaths in custody in a single year since at least 1980. This is not a coincidence,” said Ms Waight.

“State and territory governments are openly pursuing and celebrating policies that throw our people behind bars, all in the name of political point-scoring – and our people are paying the price with their lives.

“These politicians know their policies are not only costing lives – they’re making people less safe. When someone spends even a small time behind bars, it increases their chance of becoming trapped in an ongoing cycle of crime, imprisonment and trauma, which only harms our communities,” said Ms Waight.

Ms Waight said many of the recommendations of the 1991 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody still had not been implemented.

“It is utterly unacceptable that more than 30 years later we are still waiting for governments to implement the recommendations of the Royal Commission.

“Removing hanging points from cells was a recommendation of the Royal Commission – and yet at least 75% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who were unsentenced and died in custody last year, passed away due to hanging and related complications. There is no excuse for this,” Ms Waight said.

Ms Waight said a key solution to reduce deaths in custody is putting an end to the mass incarceration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

“Prisons are life-threatening places. State and territory governments must stop passing laws which contradict their obligations to reduce Aboriginal over-representation in police cells, courts and prisons, and instead work in partnership with Aboriginal communities to implement evidence-based, community-led solutions that prevent our people from entering the criminal legal system in the first place.

“State and territory leaders have proven they don’t care about our lives. That is why we are calling for leadership from the Prime Minister, to end this national crisis on justice,” Ms Waight said.

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