



NATSILS

National Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander Legal Services

TRUE JUSTICE FOR OUR PEOPLE

States and territories outright rejecting CTG commitments, new data shows

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The latest Closing the Gap update shows that without decisive action from the Albanese Government, there is no hope for reaching Australia's 2031 targets, says the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS).

Acting Chair of NATSILS Nerita Waight said while the figures released last night are appalling, they do not come as a surprise.

"These figures show that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults are being locked up at the highest rate on record, and negligible progress has been made to reduce imprisonment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children."

"State and territory governments across the country are knowingly driving the mass incarceration of Aboriginal people, including children, all in the name of political point-scoring," said Ms Waight.

"This approach is not making communities safer – it is doing the opposite. State and territory leaders know this, but they are more concerned with pursuing populist policies."

"That's why the Federal Government must take decisive action. There are levers to pull in terms of the funding agreements with state and territories that will drive real policy change and improve the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, especially our children."

"Closing the Gap targets are not meant to be suggestions. Governments should be doing everything in their power to improve the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and achieve real equity.

"And yet, national progress on reducing the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in detention is unchanging. In NSW, QLD, ACT and the NT, child incarceration rates are increasing – a direct rejection of their commitments under Closing the Gap and equity for First Nations people."

"Not only are we seeing an increase in detention in half of our jurisdictions, most of the children in custody are unsentenced, meaning they're languishing in prison cells without even having been found guilty of any crime.

"Between 72-93% of children held in detention on an average night across the country are being held on remand – this is absolutely unacceptable.

“We are only five years away from 2031. We have a lot of ground to cover if state and territory governments are serious about honouring their commitments under Closing the Gap.

“When are states and territory governments going to realise that over-policing Aboriginal communities and making it easier to lock children up is making communities more dangerous and making outcomes worse?

“We need the Prime Minister to step up and show leadership, because right now, states and territories are in an appalling race to the bottom, and our communities have the most to lose,” says Ms Waight.

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