



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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

03 July 2020

NATSILS MEDIA RELEASE: Once in a generation opportunity to embed strong national justice targets in the Closing the Gap Agreement

Earlier this week, draft national justice targets of 15% for adults were published by the media indicating that Indigenous adult over-incarceration would not end, until 2093. Today, Joint Council met to discuss the new Closing the Gap Agreement, which has now been recommended to National Cabinet for finalisation. This is the first Agreement of its kind that will be signed by Australian governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, represented by the Coalition of Peaks.

“National justice targets are critically important to the Closing the Gap Agreement. The overwhelming response from our communities to these draft targets has been that they want to see stronger, more ambitious justice targets that would end our over-incarceration urgently, rather than the unacceptable proposal of 2093. We agree with Minister Wyatt’s public comments that this parity date creates an unhelpful mindset,” said Cheryl Axleby, Co-Chair of NATSILS.

“Our position throughout the Closing the Gap refresh has been that governments can end the over-incarceration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults and children within 10 years. The solutions from countless inquiries and Royal Commissions are clear - now we need strong political commitments with sufficient public funding to match.”

NATSILS has been clear that at least a 23% (adults) and 28% (youth) *year on year* reduction is required in order to reach parity on incarceration rates within 10 years. NATSILS has for many years called for strong, ambitious national targets on justice, family violence, child protection, disability and housing to be added to the Closing the Gap framework.

“We need to reimagine the justice system. There are actions governments could take right now including raising the age of criminal responsibility to at least 14, justice reinvestment, appropriate diversionary programs, ending mandatory sentencing, and reforming bail laws to see an immediate reduction in our over-incarceration rates,” said Nerita Waight, co-chair of NATSILS.

“Aiming to end our over-incarceration by 2093 is unacceptable when there have been 437 black deaths in custody in the past 30 years alone. If the COVID-19 pandemic response has taught us anything, it’s that the systems put in place to govern our lives can be quickly changed for our collective good if the political will exists.”

The Joint Council has agreed to four key Priority Reform areas for the Closing the Gap Agreement.



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“We remain hopeful that the systemic and structural changes in the Priority Reform Areas in the new Closing the Gap Agreement will lead to real and long lasting change for our people. Targets are important but are not enough on their own, they must be accompanied by government actions to immediately end the over-incarceration of our people with the necessary new funding to make this a reality,” said Ms Axleby.

END OF RELEASE

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