



NATSILS

**NATIONAL ABORIGINAL & TORRES
STRAIT ISLANDER LEGAL SERVICES**

MEDIA RELEASE

3 May 2016

Budget 2016-17 denies many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people access to justice

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service (NATSILS) is deeply concerned that the Federal Government is decreasing the funding to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (ATSILS) in the 2016-17 Budget.

NATSILS had previously called on the Government to commit to the reversal of \$4.5 million in cuts to the ATSILS due to come into effect in 2017. Instead the Federal Government is continuing to cut these essential funds under the Indigenous Legal Assistance Program (ILAP).

NATSILS notes that the overall funding for ILAP will decrease by over \$6 million (compared with 2014-15 as provided in the Portfolio Budget Statements 2015-16) in 2017. The cuts increase further in 2018-19.

The cuts to funding will impact the most vulnerable of the ATSILS' clients, including victims of family violence, children, clients in remote and rural areas, clients with mental ill-health and cognitive impairments. Cuts will force the ATSILS to reduce staffing numbers and will result in unavoidable withdrawals of frontline services.

'The Prime Minister has said publicly that he wants to see justice outcomes for our people improve, that he wants to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. We are here, we are waiting, and his government is cutting the funding that is aimed at delivering the very outcomes that he has called for' said Wayne Muir, NATSILS Chairman, who was in Canberra for the budget.

'We need funding certainty so that we can focus on developing solutions to the crippling rates of over-imprisonment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples'

'Our budgets have already been cut to the bone, there is nothing left to rationalise. These cuts are going to impact frontline services and our ability to get quality culturally competent legal and diversionary services to our communities.'

Mr Muir said that cuts to the ATSILS funding provides an illusory cost saving to government with the cuts to the ATSILS having unintended costs and thus putting more pressure on the Courts, the Health Sector, Corrections, ultimately increasing costs to the Government

'We want to focus on developing innovative solutions to combat the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the criminal justice system. Fighting for our funding every year places unnecessary stress on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across the country and directly on our hard working staff who continue to take on more work to help our clients.'

NATSILS is also particularly concerned about the continued under funding of the Family Violence Prevention Legal Services, cuts to Community Legal Centres of 30 per cent nationally which will take

effect from 1 July 2017 and will amount to \$34.83 million between 2017 -20 and cuts to the Legal Aid Commissions.

Further, the Budget 2016-17 fails to reinstate funding for the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples and to redirect funding to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled and run organisations.

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NATSILS will be part of joint post-budget press-conference with the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples in the Senate Courtyard, Parliament House on Wednesday, 4 May at 11:00am.