



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**NATSILS MEDIA RELEASE: National Cabinet’s COVID-19 legal sector funding announcement is welcome but must prioritise First Nations people**

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS) welcomes the National Cabinet’s funding announcement of \$63.3 million for the legal assistance sector.

“We welcome the additional funding but it’s imperative that Governments prioritise these resources towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services and Family Violence Prevention Legal Services so we can respond to meet the increased legal needs of our people during and after the COVID-19 pandemic,” said Cheryl Axleby, Co-Chair of NATSILS.

“Additional funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services will help with the impact of policing, and the closure and delay of courts during the COVID-19 pandemic. There must also be more focus on alternatives to imprisonment, on diversion, and on providing communities the support that we need to survive this pandemic.”

NATSILS also welcomes the announcement to plan for COVID-19 prison outbreaks, to supply Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) to corrections facilities, as well as the creation of the ‘Safe Travel Plans’ for newly released First Nations people from prison.

“We are glad to see that some of the demands from [families in the open letter](#) have been backed by the National Cabinet. It’s a starting point but to prevent COVID-19 black deaths in custody, governments must release people from prison immediately,” said Nerita Waight, Co-Chair of NATSILS.

“Across the world, governments are recognising that the release of imprisoned people is the responsible thing to do to contain the spread, we need to follow their example and release prisoners before it is too late.”

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