



Australian Governments must commit to raise the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to at least 14

Next week Australian lawmakers will have a historic opportunity at the Council of Attorneys-General Meeting on Monday 27 July to change laws that currently allow children as young as 10 to be arrested by police, charged with an offence, hauled before a court and locked away in a prison.

In just one year across Australia close to 600 children aged 10 to 13 years were locked away in prisons and many more were pushed through the criminal legal system. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are disproportionately impacted, accounting for 65% of the younger children sent to prison as a result of differential treatment and the criminalisation of disadvantage.

The criminal legal system does not hold the answers to strengthening and supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, the solutions lie within families, communities, Country and culture.

Dr Tony Bartone, AMA President:

“Raising the age of criminal responsibility will prevent the unnecessary criminalisation of vulnerable children. The AMA wants the Commonwealth and state and territory governments to support developmentally and culturally appropriate health, education, and rehabilitative-based alternatives to the criminal justice system.”

Shahleena Musk, Senior Lawyer with the Human Rights Law Centre:

“If Australian governments were committed to reducing the crisis that is the mass over-imprisonment of Aboriginal people, then they would act to shut the gates to the cruel, broken system in the first place. All governments must raise the age of criminal responsibility so that Aboriginal children are kept with families and in community - not put behind bars.”

Cheryl Axleby, Co-Chair Change the Record:

“Our children are being stopped by police, put in handcuffs and thrown into police and prison cells at up to 43 times the rate of non-Indigenous children in some jurisdictions. Our children deserve the same support, care and opportunities as every other child - and they don't get that from inside a prison cell. We are calling for every state and territory government to follow the unanimous medical recommendations of organisations like the Australian Medical Association and raise the age of criminal responsibility from just 10 years old to at least 14 years old.”

Terry Slevin, CEO, Public Health Association of Australia:

“We need to support these children and their families, to get them back to school and protect them from the trauma of being locked up. We also need to avoid kick-starting a cycle of more disadvantage. Public health is all about prevention, and the best way to prevent lifelong harms to a child is to recognise and support their needs. Raising the age of criminal responsibility to 14 is a vitally important way to do so.”

Dr Jacki Small, President-elect of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians:

“The RACP wants all governments to raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 14, in line with the significant body of evidence on child brain development and United Nations recommendations. This is an opportunity for our leaders around the country to seriously consider the medical advice and make a decision in the best interests of our children and the communities that they live in.”

Nerita Waight, co-chair of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services, NATSILS:

“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.”

Rodney Dillon, Indigenous Rights Advisor, Amnesty International Australia:

“Prisons don't make good homes, kids need to be nurtured in their families and supported in their cultures, so they can prosper. The overwhelming evidence shows that diversion programs are much more effective in both keeping kids out of the justice system in the first place and preventing a lifetime caught up in the quicksand of the justice system.

ENDS

See here for more information: www.raisetheage.org.au

PRESS CONFERENCE - FILMING AND INTERVIEW OPPORTUNITIES

A media conference will be held outside Parliament House in Sydney on Monday July 27 where Amnesty International activists will join experts in Indigenous rights, health and child welfare to urge State and Territory governments to take meaningful action on Indigenous incarceration.

WHERE: “Tree of Knowledge” Hospital Road, near NSW Parliament House, Sydney

WHEN: 9am AEST, Monday July 27

SPEAKERS:

- **Joel Clark**, Amnesty International Australia campaigner
- **Keenan Mundine**, Co-founder of Deadly Connections
- **Richard Weston**, CEO, SNAICC
- **Karly Warner**, CEO, NSW Aboriginal Legal Services
- **Dr Jacqueline Small**, President Elect, Royal Australasian College of Physicians

Media contacts:

Michelle Bennett, Communications Director, Human Rights Law Centre: 0419 100 519

Sophie Trevitt, Executive Officer, Change the Record: 0431 843 095

Danielle Veldre, Media Lead, Amnesty International Australia: 0408 972 997