



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

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**17 June 2020**

**MEDIA RELEASE: NATSILS launches crowd-funder to hire a First Nations campaigner to end Black Deaths in Custody**

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS) has launched a crowdfunding campaign on [GoFundMe](https://www.gofundme.com) to end Black deaths in custody. Since the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody in 1991, there have been 437 Aboriginal deaths in custody - that's about one every three weeks for 29 years. No one has ever been held criminally liable for these deaths.

The crowdfunding campaign has so far received contributions from over 700 donors within the first week of its launch. Donations will fund a dedicated Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander campaigner to work closely with the families whose loved ones have died in custody. Together they will create a campaign to end Black deaths in custody. Money raised will also support the families to be involved.

In the last three weeks alone we have seen continued black deaths in custody and violence at the hands of police and correctional officers towards Aboriginal people. An Aboriginal man died in custody at Acacia Prison in Western Australia on the same day that thousands of people were out on the streets protesting to stop Black deaths in custody. An Aboriginal woman is in a critical condition after being allegedly 'body-slammed' by a prison guard at Bandyup Women's Prison, and a 16 year old boy had his knees kicked out from under him and was pinned to the ground by a police officer in NSW. Recent footage has also emerged of police holding down and striking an Aboriginal man in South Australia during an arrest with questions of racial profiling and unnecessary use of force - and these are just the incidents that made it into the media.

"We have been repeatedly told by politicians to wait, and that justice and progress takes time, but we can't wait anymore. Our people are being locked up at the highest rates in the world and police violence continues to harm and kill our people. That's why NATSILS is calling on the public to show their support for an end to Black deaths in custody and the over incarceration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by donating to our crowd funder," said Cheryl Axleby, Co-Chair of NATSILS.

"The 437 deaths in custody and incidents of the last few weeks show that nearly 30 years on from the Royal Commission, excessive use of force, over-policing and racism in the justice system are significant issues that need to be addressed by governments. We have simple solutions like the Custody Notification Service that saves lives, yet the political handballing of properly funding these programs across the country continues to cost Aboriginal people's lives," said Nerita Waight, Co-Chair of NATSILS.

"We've seen hundreds of thousands of people in Australia take to the streets to stand in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement and to stop Aboriginal deaths in custody. Despite the mass outpour of support and solutions available the Federal Government has failed to announce any further measures to

stop deaths in custody or further implement any of the 339 recommendations of the Royal Commission. Australians are recognising the injustices that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people face, and want to see national leadership to prevent any more Black deaths in custody. Now is the time for leadership not silence.”

Link to GoFundMe - <https://www.gofundme.com/f/black-deaths-in-custody>

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