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MEDIA RELEASE: “Our communities have a right to know.” This NAIDOC week, the Government is planning to disband the Indigenous Legal Assistance Program. NATSILS is calling for #JusticeByUs.

During NAIDOC week, the National Peak Body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS) is calling on the Federal Government to retain the Indigenous Legal Assistance Program (ILAP).

“Our communities have a right to know about issues that affect the future of our community-controlled services, so we are launching #JusticeByUs, calling on the Federal Government to keep Aboriginal justice in Aboriginal hands this NAIDOC week,” says Cheryl Axleby, Co-Chair of NATSILS.

In the Federal Budget 2019-20, the Government announced that from 2020, funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services would be mainstreamed into a national mechanism, abolishing the ILAP.

“This NAIDOC is about voice and truth-telling, yet the Federal Government’s plans to abolish the Indigenous Legal Assistance Program threaten community control over the essential services that ATSILS provide. If this Government is serious about respectfully working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and peak bodies, it will retain the ILAP program,” stated Ms Axleby.

Over 100 legal, health, disability, social justice and human rights organisations are behind the call to retain the ILAP, signing an [open letter](#) to the Federal Government on the issue.

“We are the most incarcerated people in the world, we need to keep our ATSILS strong. There is clear, demonstrated support for the Government to maintain its commitment to self-determined ATSILS by retaining the Indigenous Legal Assistance Program,” said Ms Axleby.

These calls are supported by a [recent independent review of ILAP](#) that found that ATSILS are cost effective, efficient, culturally safe and the preferred legal services providers of Indigenous communities alongside Family Violence Prevention Legal Services. The review recommended the Commonwealth funding to be delivered through a standalone and specific program that directly funds ATSILS and NATSILS.

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