

3 June 2019

MEDIA RELEASE: “Self-determination is the path to justice” Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services call for action from incoming Federal Government

The national peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS) is calling on the incoming government to take action on injustices facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. NATSILS welcomes Ken Wyatt MP’s appointment as the first Aboriginal Minister for Indigenous Australians.

“Self-determination is the path to justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. With our first Aboriginal Minister for Indigenous Australians, this is a chance for the incoming government support our solutions for the wellbeing and safety of our communities,” said NATSILS co-chair Cheryl Axleby.

Key priorities for NATSILS include maintaining the Indigenous Legal Assistance Program (ILAP), a 50-year funding commitment that the Attorney General is threatening to walk away from. Retaining ILAP is seen as crucial by the social services sector, with over 100 organisations signing on to an [open letter](#) urging the government to reverse its decision. “We ask the Attorney General to hear our voices. There is extensive community support for self-determined ATSILS and a standalone ILAP,” Ms Axleby noted.

Priorities also include increased funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services and Family Violence Prevention Legal Services, with Ms Axleby noting that “increased funding for community-controlled legal services means that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can access justice when and where they need it.”

Ending the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the justice system is a crucial commitment for NATSILS. “We are the most incarcerated people in the world. If this government is serious about Closing the Gap then we need to measure national justice targets,” Ms Axleby said.

NATSILS asks the government to commit to long-term funding of Custody Notification Services in each state and territory. “Mandated and fully funded Custody Notification Services will save lives. This government must do everything in its power to prevent another death in custody,” added Ms Axleby.

NATSILS repeats its calls for the government to implement the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, the Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory and the Australian Law Reform Commission’s Pathways to Justice Report.

“Children as young as 10 are losing their fingers in police watchhouses in Queensland. We urge the new government to show national leadership on raising the age of criminal responsibility to at least 14 and support children with the Aboriginal-run services, education and care that they need,” said Ms Axleby. “Supporting community solutions through justice reinvestment will keep our children healthy and safe in their communities.”

END OF RELEASE

Media contact: Anna Cerreto, email: acerreto@vals.org.au, phone: 0400 490 884