

Prime Minister: It's time for national leadership on youth justice

Dear Prime Minister Turnbull,

Today the Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory will hand down its interim report. To date, the public hearings of the Royal Commission have revealed countless stories of systemic cruel, inhumane and degrading mistreatment of children, the vast majority being Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

The issue of over-incarceration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people remains a national crisis. Nationally, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people are 25 times more likely to be sent to youth detention than their non-Indigenous counterparts, yet they make up just 5% of the national youth population.

The abuse and mistreatment of youth detainees is not just isolated to the Northern Territory, but has occurred in other detention centres across Australia. In the past six months we have heard damning reports, highlighting shocking allegations of abuse in Queensland youth detention facilities, the disturbing use of isolation, separation and lock downs of children in Victoria's youth detention centres and similarly awful reports from Cobham Youth Detention Centre in Sydney. A recent report by the Commissioner for Children and Young People in Victoria found that Koori kids were disproportionately subject to isolation whilst in detention.

This is a national crisis, which demands an immediate national response.

Just last year a Vote Compass survey found that two-thirds of Australians want our federal government to commit to reducing the rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people being imprisoned.

Our kids don't belong in prison. Instead we should be supporting young people at risk to maximise their chances of achieving their full potential and making a meaningful contribution to society.

We, the undersigned, call on you and your government to work in partnership with the States and Territories to immediately take action to improve Australia's youth justice system and end the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in detention.

We urge you to play a leadership role and work in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, their organisations and representative bodies to:

- Set meaningful National Justice Targets through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) 'Closing the Gap' framework;
- Develop, through COAG, a fully resourced national plan of action on youth justice, drawing on the recommendations of the Change the Record Coalition's [Blueprint for Change](#);
- Invest in effective community-led early intervention, prevention and diversion programs, to ensure detention of children is a last resort; and
- Design and implement a national preventative mechanism against torture and mistreatment in detention as soon as possible, in line with your Government's commitment to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture (OPCAT).

Yours sincerely,

Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat (AbSec)

ACOSS

ACTCOSS

ACTU

Amnesty International Australia

Anglican Social Responsibilities Commission

ANTaR

APO NT

ARC Justice

Arthur Bolkas Consultancy

Association of Alcohol and other Drug Agencies NT

Australian College of Midwives

Australian Health Promotion Association

Australian Indigenous Alpine Sport Foundation

Australian Lawyers for Human Rights

Australian Physiotherapy Association

AYAC

Berry Street

CatholicCare NT

Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare

Cohealth

Common Grace

Community Legal Centres NSW

Community Legal Centres Queensland

CRANaplus

CREATE Foundation

Criminal Lawyers Association of the Northern Territory (CLANT)

Dawn House

Disabled Peoples Organisations Australia

Drummond Street Services

Elizabeth Evatt Community Legal Centre

Families ACT

Federation of Community Legal Centres (Vic)

First Peoples Disability Network

Fitzroy Legal Service Inc

Flemington & Kensington Community Legal Centre

FVPLS Victoria

Gippsland Community Legal Service

Human Rights Legal Centre

Hunter Community Legal Centre

IARC Immigration Advice & Rights Centre

Illawarra Legal Centre

Indigenous Allied Health Australia

Indigenous Eye Health

Jesuit Social Services

Just Reinvest NSW

Justice Reinvestment SA

Kingsford Legal Centre

Koorie Youth Council

Law Council of Australia

Law Institute of Victoria

Life Without Barriers

Making Justice Work

Melbourne City Mission

NACCHO

NACLC

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services

National Congress of Australia's First Peoples

National Ethnic Disability Alliance

National FVPLS Forum

Northern Territory Legal Aid Commission

NSW Reconciliation Council

NTCOSS

Organisation

Oxfam Australia

People with Disability Australia

PIAC

Plan International Australia

Prison Songs Impact Campaign

Protect All Children Today Inc.

Public Health Association of Australia

QATSICPP

Queensland Advocacy Inc

Reconciliation Australia

Reconciliation South Australia

Reconciliation Victoria

Redfern Legal Centre

SACOSS

Sacred Heart Conference

Save the Children

Shopfront

Show Me The Way Incorporated Association

Sisters Inside

Smart Justice for Young People

SNAICC - National Voice for Our Children

Social Determinants of Health Alliance

South Sudanese Community Association In Victoria.

South West Sydney Legal Centre

Southern Aboriginal Corporation

Tasmanian Aboriginal Corporation

The Bridge of Hope Foundation Inc

The Kimberley Foundation

The Royal Australasian College of Physicians

The Valuing Children Initiative

UNICEF Australia

VCOSS

WACOSS

WEAVE

WEstjustice

White Lion

Winnunga Nimmitjiah Aboriginal Health Service

Women with Disabilities Australia

Youth Action

Youth Advocacy Centre Inc

Youth Affairs Council of Victoria

Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia

Youth Coalition of the ACT

Youth Network of Tasmania

Youthlaw