

TACKLE THE INCARCERATION CRISIS FACING ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLES

In the past 10 years, the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people ending up in prison has increased by 88%. We need a new approach, which is smarter, evidence-based and more cost-effective, which increases safety, addresses the root causes of violence against women and children, cuts reoffending and imprisonment rates, and builds stronger communities.

Solutions are available and governments must support and fund them, as well as ensure that communities are involved in developing culturally appropriate and strong services.

WHAT THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT SHOULD DO

ESTABLISH A NATIONAL, HOLISTIC AND WHOLE-OF-GOVERNMENT STRATEGY.

Address imprisonment and violence rates and act on the policy reforms outlined in the Change the Record Coalition's Blueprint for Change, which calls for an implementation plan and to build on the National Indigenous Law and Justice Framework 2009–2015. Link the strategy to related areas of Council of Australian Governments (COAG) reform and develop it in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities.

SET JUSTICE TARGETS.

Set justice targets to promote community safety and reduce the rates at which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples come into contact with the criminal justice system. Close the gap in imprisonment rates between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Indigenous Australians and cut the disproportionate rates of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by 2040, with priority strategies for women and children.

ESTABLISH AN EFFECTIVE MONITORING AND REPORTING MECHANISM.

Accompany these justice targets with a national agreement, which includes a reporting mechanism, measurable sub-targets and a commitment to halve these gaps by no later than 2030.

ESTABLISH AN INDEPENDENT CENTRAL AGENCY.

With Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak bodies, jointly establish or task an independent central agency with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander oversight to coordinate a

comprehensive, current and consistent national approach to collecting data and developing policy.

SUPPORT COMMUNITY-BASED PROGRAMS; STRENGTHEN AND RESOURCE COMMUNITIES.

Fund community-based, holistic early intervention, prevention and diversion programs that tackle incarceration and violence issues. Strengthen the knowledge and skills of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, their organisations and representative bodies. Provide ongoing resources to ensure policies are underpinned by the principle of self-determination, respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' culture and identity, and recognition of the history of dispossession and trauma experienced by many communities.

WHY

It is nearly 25 years since the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. Despite this, in the past 10 years the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people ending up in prison has increased by 88%, and they are now 13 times more likely to be imprisoned than non-Indigenous people. At the same time, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders — especially women and children — are experiencing increasing amounts of violence with women 34 times more likely than non-Indigenous women to be hospitalised as a result of family violence.

Current approaches by governments to address "community safety" largely focus on harsher laws and building more prisons. They fail to address the underlying reasons why individuals come into contact with the justice system in the first place. A new approach needs to be based on addressing the key drivers that lead to these disproportionate statistics.

All levels of government need to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities to design and invest in holistic early intervention, prevention and

diversion strategies. These are smarter, evidence-based and more cost-effective solutions that increase safety, address the root causes of violence against women and children, cut reoffending and imprisonment rates, and build stronger communities.

For example, the North Australia Aboriginal Justice Agency's Indigenous Throughcare Project provides intensive pre- and post-release rehabilitation and reintegration services for Aboriginal prisoners. These include culturally-relevant case management services covering accommodation, employment, education, training, health, life skills and reconnection to family and community. Between February 2010 and February 2012, only 13% of the clients who accessed these services returned to prison, significantly less than overall recidivism rates in the Northern Territory, which are well above 40%.

We also encourage the government to engage with the Change the Record campaign — backed by a coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and human rights organisations, including Oxfam — to enable a more

productive approach to addressing incarceration rates.

ABOUT OXFAM

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