



MEDIA RELEASE

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Legal assistance services key for access to justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities confirms new Parliamentary Report

The National Association of Community Legal Centres (NACLC) has welcomed the Final Report released yesterday by the Senate Finance and Public Administration Committee into 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experience of law enforcement and justice services'. The Report contains a number of important recommendations aimed at ensuring better access to justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The Report recognises the vital role legal assistance services such as Family Violence Prevention Legal Services, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services, Community Legal Centres and Legal Aid Commission play in providing free legal help to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across Australia.

"We know the crucial role that legal assistance services provide in assisting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people access the legal help they need. We welcome the Report recommendations and in particular recognition of the urgent need for additional funding for these services," said Dan Stubbs, NACLC National Spokesperson.

"Currently, the Report's recommendations are contradicted by funding cuts faced by Community Legal Centres and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services, and underfunding of the other legal assistance services" he added.

The Report also includes important recommendations in relation to the need for funding and support for justice reinvestment approaches, justice targets and review of laws that have a disproportionate impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people such as mandatory sentencing laws.

"As a member of the Change the Record Steering Committee, NACLC is also pleased to see the endorsement of justice reinvestment approaches and a recommendation in relation to justice targets, which are a vital tool in attempting to address the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the criminal justice system" said Mr Stubbs.

"This is yet another important Report that outlines the key steps necessary to seriously address the barriers to accessing justice faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We hope that the Commonwealth Government as well as State and Territory Governments consider the Report and work constructively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations, as well as legal assistance bodies such as NACLC to implement the recommendations" he concluded.

NACLC acknowledges the traditional owners of the lands across Australia and particularly the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, traditional owners of the land on which the NACLC office is situated. We pay deep respect to Elders past and present.

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NACLC, along with other legal assistance peak bodies, made a written submission and provided evidence as part of the Inquiry. The NACLC submission is available here:
<http://www.naclc.org.au/resources/NACLC%20Sub%20to%20Senate%20Access%20to%20Legal%20Assist%20Inquiry%20May%202015.pdf>

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