

NATIONAL FAMILY VIOLENCE PREVENTION LEGAL SERVICES

WORKING TO ACHIEVE IMPROVED JUSTICE OUTCOMES FOR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER
VICTIMS/SURVIVORS OF FAMILY VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT

15 April 2016

25 years on the system is failing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and destroying families

Twenty-five years after the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody the system remains broken. It is failing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and destroying families. And tragically the disproportionate rates of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women continues to be hidden from the public consciousness.

In 1991 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were seven times more likely to be imprisoned. Twenty-five years later the gap has almost doubled. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women make up 2% of the national population, but are over a third of the female prison population and are the fastest growing prisoner population. Over 80% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in prison are mothers and 87% victims of sexual, physical or emotional abuse.

As Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander women face spiralling imprisonment rates, they are also confronted by a national family violence crisis. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are 34 times more likely to be hospitalised as a result of family violence than other women.

In the early 2000's Social Justice Commissioners Dr William Jonas and Dr Tom Calma AO noted that in the years since the Royal Commission Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women have been invisible to policy makers. This marginalisation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's voices continues into the present day.

It is widely recognised that implementation of the Royal Commission's recommendations has been incomplete, ineffective and inadequate to address the scale of the systemic injustices faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Incarceration rates and violence against women are both national crises. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are the epicentre of these crises. A national response led by the Commonwealth Government is required – this includes the development of targets and funding services for safety to ensure they can meet need. A whole-of-government strategy needs to be combined with the knowledge and experience of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations to address these concurrent and closely linked national crises.

Ms. Antoinette Braybrook, National Convenor of the Family Violence Prevention Legal Services Forum, today participated in a panel at Old Parliament House in Canberra hosted by Change the Record to mark the 25 years since the Royal Commission.

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