



# North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency

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**Media release 15 November 2022**

## **'Youth detention in Australia is an abuse of human rights'**

As one of the leading legal services representing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (Aboriginal) community in the Northern Territory, the North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency (NAAJA) has been witnessing the steady decline of the youth justice system failing our kids and families. NAAJA supports Acting Children's Commissioner Nicole Hucks concerns raised on last night's 4 Corner's reports and calls on the NT Government to do more to protect the safety of our vulnerable young people.

NAAJA CEO, Priscilla Atkins "welcomes the steps Attorney-General and Minister of Justice Chansey Paech has taken towards tackling some of our concerns by introducing raising the age of criminal responsibility to 12 and other important legislative reform but there is still more we can be doing." Five years since the *Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory* (Royal Commission) we still have children as young as 10 detained in a condemned facility. We have record numbers of Aboriginal children incarcerated due to punitive bail laws introduced in 2021.

Media coverage has highlighted some of the challenges our community has been facing, especially in Central Australia, with the housing crisis having dire consequences on some of our most vulnerable people. As adults we have let kids down and they are in urgent need of safe housing, however NAAJA does not support another 'intervention' that led to these gaping disadvantages in the first place. "It's vital that we do not disempower Aboriginal communities further by taking decision-making away from families and community. What we need is to engage and work with the families to pave better outcomes for our kids." says Ms Atkins.

There is an opportunity here to work with Aboriginal communities and partnership agreements established under the Closing the Gap and NT Aboriginal Justice Agreement to address the needs of vulnerable children and their families in a culturally responsive way. The 2020 Productivity Commission report on Expenditure on Children in The Northern Territory identified the need for longer term, more collaborative contracting with service providers. NAAJA calls on state and federal governments to utilise Justice Reinvestment to provide the stable and efficient funding to do the work Aboriginal-led services and programs have the expertise to achieve.

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