

Federal Budget fails to prioritise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

MEDIA RELEASE - Wednesday 4th May 2016

The Change the Record (CTR) Coalition this morning expressed concern at the 2016 Federal Budget's overall lack of focus on the Indigenous sector and investment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

CTR Co-Chair Shane Duffy said "We are extremely disappointed that the Turnbull Government's Budget fails to prioritise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander justice issues, including the high rates of violence being experienced by Aboriginal women and children, and skyrocketing rates of incarceration of our peoples."

A high number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in prison suffer from a mental or cognitive disability, and so we welcome the Budget's inclusion of \$10.5m to provide more services for Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder.

However, on the whole the 2016 Budget retains previous cuts to vital frontline services, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services. There has also been no additional funding provided to critically under-resourced organisations such as the Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention Legal Services and Aboriginal organisations in the early childhood, child and family support sectors. The peak Indigenous representative body, the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples, remains unfunded.

"If we are serious about changing the record of violence and imprisonment rates for our people, it is vitally important that the Government commits to long-term investment in Aboriginal community-controlled services and organisations. This includes law reform and advocacy peaks who are best placed to undertake rigorous policy development informed by evidence on the ground."

"Earlier this year the Prime Minister stated that he wanted to work to enable Aboriginal communities to provide local solutions. Our communities stand ready to work with Government, but they need to be appropriately resourced to support the development of innovative and holistic programmes" said Mr Duffy.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are currently 34 times more likely to be hospitalised for family violence related assault than non-Indigenous women, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men are more likely to go to jail than university. This is a national crisis, and tackling these issues should be front and centre of our nation's budget priorities.

"The Federal Budget provides a roadmap of Government priorities, and we are deeply concerned that in this Budget Aboriginal justice issues appear to have been forgotten by the Turnbull Government" said Mr Duffy.

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The 'Change the Record' (CTR) Coalition is a group of leading Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, community and human rights organisations working collaboratively to address the disproportionate rates of incarceration and violence experienced by Indigenous Australians.

The CTR Coalition has identified two goals:

- *Close the gap in rates of imprisonment by 2040; and*
- *Cut the disproportionate rates of violence to at least close the gap by 2040 with priority strategies for women and children.*

The CTR Coalition is calling for greater investment in early intervention, prevention and diversion strategies. These are smarter solutions that increase safety; address the root causes of violence against women, cut reoffending and imprisonment rates, and build stronger and safer communities.

The CTR Coalition Steering Committee includes:

- *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Mick Gooda*
- *ANTaR*
- *Amnesty International*
- *Australian Council of Social Service*
- *Federation of Community Legal Centres (Vic)*
- *First Peoples Disability Network (Australia)*
- *Human Rights Law Centre*
- *Law Council of Australia*
- *National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations*
- *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services*
- *National Congress of Australia's First Peoples*
- *National Family Violence Prevention Legal Services Forum*
- *Oxfam Australia*
- *Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care*
- *Sisters Inside*
- *Victorian Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People, Andrew Jackomos*