

Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory

An alliance of the CLC, NLC, CAALAS, NAAJA and AMSANT

MEDIA RELEASE

Aboriginal Legal Aid cuts utterly counter-productive

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Cuts to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Aid Services will result in more Aboriginal people in jails and will further marginalise the most disadvantaged and vulnerable members of our communities, Aboriginal Peak Organisations NT (APO NT) said today.

“It is utterly counter-productive to restrict access to the basic legal services and prevention and early intervention programs for Aboriginal people that our Legal Aid Services provide”, APO NT spokesperson, John Paterson, said.

“The Federal Government is failing to see that these cuts will result in significant unintended consequences that will impact broadly on the lives of Aboriginal people and in turn on the cost and effectiveness of services and programs provided by the government.

“These cuts come at a time when demand on our services has never been higher, with figures showing that charge numbers have increased dramatically in recent years, placing unprecedented pressure on courts and the legal services.

“More Aboriginal people needlessly caught up in the justice system and ending up in jail will further fuel the already spiralling costs of the courts and prisons and add to Aboriginal incarceration rates that remain a national shame.

The Northern Territory’s incarceration rate is 5 times the national average and Aboriginal people represent over 85% of the prison population.

“The cuts will also undermine efforts to address disadvantage by placing further pressure on families and increasing barriers to education and employment opportunities.

“This is an unacceptable price to pay for what are paltry savings in terms of the Government’s bottom line”, Mr Paterson said.

“APO NT strongly urges the Federal Government to review its decision and rescind the cuts to Aboriginal Legal Aid Services”.

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