



MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release

Productivity Commission data confirms deepening crisis for First Nations children

The latest child protection and youth justice figures from the Productivity Commission's Report on Government Services 2026 confirm that outcomes for First Nations children continue to deteriorate across Australia.

The data exposes a national failure. Governments are imprisoning First Nations children at increasing rates, escalating spending on detention and continuing to remove children from their families instead of preventing harm.

This is a human rights crisis happening in full view of Australian governments.

On an average day, 734 children are imprisoned across Australia. Sixty-two per cent are First Nations. In the Northern Territory, ninety-five per cent of children in detention are First Nations.

In 2024-25, more than five hundred children aged ten to thirteen were held in detention, the majority being Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.

First Nations children account for the overwhelming majority of hospitalisations for self-harm and attempted suicide in youth detention. Detention is also becoming more violent, with serious assaults on children in detention rising sharply in the past year.

Despite this, governments continue to expand spending on youth detention. More than \$1.1 billion dollars is now spent each year imprisoning children, at an average cost exceeding \$1.3 million dollars per child per year. This investment is entrenching harm rather than delivering safety or rehabilitation.

First Nations children also remain vastly overrepresented in out of home care. Nationally, almost half of all children in care are First Nations. In the Northern Territory, nearly nine in ten children in care are First Nations.

In the Northern Territory, findings from the Children's Commissioner warn that youth detention is becoming entrenched in ways that conflict with the rights of children. Imprisonment has weakened rehabilitation, family connection, cultural connection and reintegration. All recommendations for reform from the Commissioners report were rejected by the Northern Territory Corrections Department, disproportionately impacting First Nations children, compounding disadvantage, creating harm and increasing the likelihood of reoffending.

Across jurisdictions, governments continue to prioritise punitive responses driven by political pressure rather than evidence. These approaches are short sighted, costly, ineffective and damaging. There continues to be a lack of investment into community-led solutions and preventions that are proven to strengthen children, families and communities.

Australian governments, across all levels and across political lines, are failing in their duty of care to our children.

Real change requires a fundamental shift in power, decision making and investment toward First Nations communities.

Until governments set aside inaction, listen to evidence and come to the table with genuine commitment, outcomes for First Nations children will continue to worsen.

There are solutions, but they are being ignored.

Quote attributable to William Tilmouth, Founding Chair of Children's Ground and recipient of the 2025 Human Rights Award.

"Our children are being locked up, harmed and separated from their families as governments spend more money every year to keep a failing system alive. Punitive systems are not protecting children and they are not making communities safer."

"Australia is breaching the basic rights of children by criminalising them at age ten and ignoring international standards. Leaders across the political spectrum cannot say they care about First Nations children while continuing policies that cause this level of harm.

"First Nations communities are wanting to lead change. We have the evidence, we have the solutions, but our voices are being ignored. When will our people be heard? Prevention works. Community leadership works. Governments must change how they work and who they listen to.

"Our children deserve systems that protect them, strengthen them and give them hope for a better future."

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