



MIWATJ HEALTH

ABORIGINAL CORPORATION

MEDIA STATEMENT

ABUSE OF ABORIGINAL CHILDREN IN DETENTION WON'T STOP WITHOUT INDIGENOUS GOVERNANCE IN INSTITUTIONS

26/07/16, Nhulunbuy, East Arnhem Land, NT - Today Australia and the world woke up shocked to the evidence of abuse and torture of Aboriginal children in correctional facilities in the Northern Territory. We welcome the Prime Minister's announcement of a Royal Commission and the NT Chief Minister's expression of disgust at these findings, now it's time to find solutions.

In the NT, 85.6% of the adult prison population¹ and 96% of the children in detention² are Indigenous. We are talking about systematic mistreatment of Aboriginal children under the care of the state. Health institutions have shared with prisons the often deserved mistrust of many Indigenous people who viewed them as another instance of institutionalised racism. To address this, in the 1970s Aboriginal leadership developed the Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Sector. The relevant lessons learned from the past four decades of Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services are:

- **Robust and sustainable Indigenous governance:** This can be structured in different ways but needs to be underpinned by accountability to Aboriginal leadership and oversight within culturally appropriate frameworks.
- **High levels of Aboriginal employment:** The vast majority of the prison population are Indigenous. A significant Indigenous workforce at all levels of the system, from policymakers to frontline staff, is required to reflect the needs of the population it serves.

Aboriginal cultural frameworks embedded in governance and operational structures ensure that Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff share the same values and objectives. This not only will help keep children safe in prison but also will engage in social transformation providing real jobs, with real wages and therefore a reason for kids to stay in school, working upstream to prevent incarceration in the first place. Yolŋu leadership has demonstrated the effectiveness of this model in East Arnhem Land with improved access to services and better health outcomes within a decade under Miwatj community control.

Therefore, we call upon the Australian and Northern Territory Governments to make a real commitment to hold correctional services accountable to Aboriginal communities. Only through ongoing and real commitment to Aboriginal community controlled services more broadly -health, education, legal services- will we advance towards reducing the scourge of Aboriginal incarceration rates.

For media enquiries please contact CEO, Mr Eddie Mulholland on 0407 002 357

¹ ABS (2014a). 4517.0 - Prisoners in Australia 2014

² Rudd, P (2015). State of imprisonment: if locking 'em up is the goal, NT's a success. The Conversation.