



The RACP @TheRACP · 3h

Childhood and adolescence experiences influence our life 'trajectory'; our approach to juvenile justice and protection systems can lead to inequity that is passed from one generation to the next. ❤️

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## Health and medical organisations back national push for youth #NTRC

Editor: Melissa Sweet Author: Melissa Sweet on: November 20, 2017 In: #NTRC, child health, Indigenous health

Health and medical groups are backing a push for federal, state and territory governments to prioritise youth justice the Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory.

The Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP) today issued a statement calling for jurisdictions to work together in a sustained commitment to working with Indigenous communities to implement the Royal Commission's recommendations.

RACP President Dr Catherine Yelland said:

**“** Throughout the Royal Commission's investigations, we have heard many heartbreaking stories of cruel and abusive treatment. We know that these acts did not occur in isolation in the Territory's juvenile justice facilities but happened more generally.

We strongly believe other State and Territory governments through the Council of Australian Governments should work together and ensure the Royal Commission's recommendations are acted on to improve the country's justice system.

We also believe that working in close partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities will be crucial to successfully implementing the Commission's recommendations.”

Dr Robert Tait, an RACP Fellow and specialist paediatrician at Royal Darwin Hospital, said there was still plenty of work to be done of historical abuse and improving health outcomes for young people in the current system. He said:

**“** The evidence shows childhood and adolescence experiences influence our life 'trajectory' and can result in poor educational and vocational outcomes into adult life, with increased subsequent mortality and morbidity.

This path can lead to inequity that is passed from one generation to the next.”

Tait urged the NT Government to consider a greater investment in paediatric services with a stronger focus on prevention.

Meanwhile at NITV online, Summer May Finlay, a Yorta Yorta woman, contributing editor at Croakey, academic, writer and activist, writes:

**“** The current juvenile justice system in the Northern Territory and most likely those in other states and territories teach children that as an adult you can do what you like. That the rules don't apply. It teaches these children that power is everything.

And what is that price these kids and society pay? The price is recidivism, poor education, low self-efficacy, and mental health issues.

We are creating adults who are not prepared for anything but incarceration. By not investing in their future before they have had a chance to succeed.”

## Open letter

The Royal Australasian College of Physicians and other health and medical groups are among 100 organisations to have signed an open letter published by the Change the Record coalition calling for national action.

Signatories include the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO), Australian Indigenous Health Alliance Network (AIHAN), the Australian Health Promotion Association (AHPA), the Social Determinants of Health Association, and the Australian Physiotherapy Association.

The letter has been forwarded to the Prime Minister's office, so the call for signatories is closed, but Change the Record can sign this petition by some of their member organisations calling for a national youth justice action plan:

(The open letter below is re-published with permission from Change the Record.)

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## **Open Letter to the Prime Minister, Premiers and Chief Ministers: Ensure national action on the Report of the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory**

We are horrified by the abuses and torture of children in detention in the Northern Territory, highlighted throughout Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory (the Royal Commission).

We note the report of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Ms Victoria Tauli-Corcia in March 2017 who found “the routine detention of young indigenous children the most distressing aspect of the situation in the Northern Territory”.

We are deeply concerned at the worsening rate at which Australia is locking up Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children at the rate of non-Indigenous children. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children make up more than half the total in custody Australia-wide.

We note that this abuse is not isolated to the Northern Territory. Throughout the past 18 months there have been incidents of detention in every jurisdiction except South Australia.

In addition to removing children from their families and communities, children are being subjected to prolonged abuse, beatings, spit hoods and tear gas in youth prisons.

### **This is unacceptable.**

All Australian governments must take immediate measures to reform our youth justice systems and address the recommendations of the Royal Commission. These must be developed collaboratively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities so that all Australia’s children thrive.

The undersigned organisations call on the Australian Government, working with the Northern Territory Government and state governments through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), to seize the landmark opportunity presented by the Royal Commission.

- Work in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their representative bodies to deliver a timely response to the recommendations of the Royal Commission
- Lead national reform through COAG of youth justice systems, laws, policies and practices. This must build on the recommendations of the Royal Commission, with a view to developing national minimum benchmarks for laws and policies
- Prioritise this issue as a standing item at future COAG meetings to ensure an ongoing comprehensive Commonwealth response to this pressing national issue
- Ensure there is independent oversight and monitoring of the implementation of the recommendations of the Royal Commission

### **Signed by the following organisations:**

Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention Legal Service Victoria

ACOSS

ACTCOSS

Amnesty International Australia

Australian Association of Social Workers

Australian Capital Territory Law Society

Australian Child Rights Taskforce

Australian Council of Trade Unions

Australian Health Promotion Association

Australian Indigenous Alpine Sport Foundation

Australian Indigenous Doctors Association

Australian Lawyers for Human Rights

Australian Physiotherapy Association

Australian Youth Affairs Coalition

Bar Association of Queensland

Canberra Police Community Youth Club

Centrecare Inc.

Child Rights Australia

Children and Young People with Disability Australia

Common Grace

Community Legal Centres NSW

Community Legal Centres Queensland

Community Legal Centres Association WA

CREATE Foundation

Democracy in Colour

Elizabeth Evatt Community Legal Centre

Federation of Community Legal Centres (Victoria)

First Peoples Disability Network

Flemington & Kensington Community Legal Centre

GetUp

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Human Rights Law Centre

Indigenous Allied Health Australia

Indigenous Eye Health

Infinite Hope

International Social Service Australia

Jesuit Social Services

Just Reinvest NSW

Justice Reinvestment SA

Koorie Youth Council

Law Council of Australia

Law Society of NSW

Law Society of South Australia

Making Justice Work

Melbourne City Mission

Muticultural Youth Advocacy Network (MYAN)

NACCHO

National Association of Community Legal Centres

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services

National Children's and Youth Law Centre

National Congress of Australia's First Peoples

National Council of Single Mothers and their Children

National FVPLS Forum

NCOSS

NTCOSS

Oxfam Australia

People with Disability Australia

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PIAC

Plan International Australia

Protect All Children Today Inc.

Public Health Association of Australia

QCOSS

Reconciliation Australia

Reconciliation Victoria

Relationships Australia

SACOSS

Save the Children Australia

Sisters Inside

Smart Justice for Young People

SNAICC – National Voice for Our Children

Social Determinants of Health Alliance

Southern Aboriginal Corporation

St Vincent de Paul Society of Australia

TEAR Australia

The Bridge of Hope Foundation Inc.

The Kimberley Foundation

The Royal Australasian College of Physicians

UNICEF Australia

VCOSS

WACOSS

Weave Youth & Community Services

Woden Community Service

Youth Action

Youth Advocacy Centre Inc.

Youth Affairs Council of Victoria

Youth Coalition of the ACT

Youthlaw

YSAS

• See Croakey’s previous coverage of the #NTRC

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