

Media Release



Community lawyers and advocates voice strong support for royal commission on youth detention



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Community lawyers and advocates have strongly supported calls for a royal commission following revelations of young people held in isolation and severely mistreated in detention in the Northern Territory.

They say the inquiry must focus on solitary confinement, the use of restraints, the practice of remand, and the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in youth detention.

'Last night's *Four Corners* program was shocking, but it's important to recognise that solitary confinement is damaging and abhorrent in itself, before we even consider the further abuse detailed in the program. It breaks the spirit, causes serious psychological and physical harm, and heightens the risk of self-harm and suicide,' said Tiffany Overall, convenor of Smart Justice for Young People, today.

'Solitary confinement should be banned. Children require support to rehabilitate, not punitive barbaric responses. Yet we know that solitary confinement is used for behavioural management in all states and territories,' she said.

In addition to the royal commission, Overall called on the Federal Government to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture (OPCAT), which Australia signed in 2009, to enhance commitment to independent monitoring, oversight and investigation of the treatment of children and young people in detention in Australia.

The Federation of Community Legal Centres has also strongly backed a royal commission and swift action to protect children and young people, but warns the circumstances revealed in last night's report may not be confined to the Northern Territory.

'Complementing the royal commission, all States and Territories need to take action and ensure accountability so that children are protected,' said Serina McDuff, executive officer of the Federation, today.

'Last night's program underlines the risks of recent calls for increased use of incarceration as a simplistic response to youth offending in Victoria. It's why we say it must be a last resort, and why we need the strongest possible scrutiny to ensure that when incarceration is used, it's an opportunity for rehabilitation, not damage and abuse,' McDuff said.

She said the Federation, through its Smart Justice project, would continue to advocate for alternatives to reduce incarceration, including rehabilitation, effective diversion and early intervention.

For comment or to arrange an interview

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