



Partnership for  
**JUSTICE IN HEALTH**

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## Partnership for Justice in Health urges action on deaths in custody

The Partnership for Justice in Health (P4JH) stands in solidarity with the grieving families and communities of loved ones who have died in custody due to a failure of governments to effectively implement the clear and comprehensive recommendations outlined in the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody report, handed down 30 years ago today.

The P4JH urges the Australian media to privilege the voices of families grieving the loss of their loved ones due to failures in the justice and health systems, as they mark this confronting anniversary.

All levels of government must reflect on the loss and grief that could have been prevented had they acted on the recommendations as a matter of priority in 1991 and in the years since.

“We are sending our strength to those families and friends whose grief and trauma is compounded by that continued failure of Australian governments to act with resolve and commitment,” said the P4JH co-chairs Dr Janine Mohamed, CEO of the Lowitja Institute and Karl Briscoe, CEO of the National Association of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers and Practitioners (NAATSIHWP).

“Racism and discrimination are deeply ingrained and entrenched at individual, institutional and systemic levels of Australia’s health and justice systems, and must be addressed as a matter of urgency to support strong health and wellbeing outcomes”.

**See the Partnerships full statement marking the 30th anniversary below.**

The P4JH is an alliance of self-determining Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander academics, legal experts, and national peak health and justice organisations committed to working together to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and justice outcomes through addressing racism at individual, institutional and systemic levels, specifically focusing on the health and justice systems.

It was formed to pursue and demand change following the deaths of Wiradjuri woman Naomi Williams and her unborn child at Tumut Hospital in New South Wales in 2016, and of Ms Dhu in custody in South Hedland, Western Australia in 2013.

The P4JH will be formally launched at a webinar on **Tuesday 18 May** to discuss the imperative for eliminating racism within the justice and health systems.

Guest speakers at the webinar will include Associate Professor Chelsea Watego.

Registration details: <https://iaha.eventsair.com/p4jh/conversationp4jh>

**Contact Details: for more about the P4JH please contact the Secretariat on 02 6221 9229 or via email at [secretariat@p4jh.org.au](mailto:secretariat@p4jh.org.au)**

## **Statement on the anniversary of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody**

The Partnership for Justice in Health (P4JH) today stands in solidarity with the families and communities grieving loved ones who have died in custody due to a failure of governments to effectively implement the clear and comprehensive recommendations outlined 30 years ago in the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody report.

The P4JH recognises the subsequent pain caused by the process of coronial inquiries which have historically rarely held the justice and health systems to account for their failure in upholding their duty of care for First Nations peoples.

While governments widely evaluate their own implementation of the Royal Commission's recommendations as partially or fully complete, deaths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in custody continue at an alarming rate.

More than 450 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have died in custody since the Royal Commission's report was tabled in 1991.

They include Ms Dhu and Naomi Williams, whose stories speak to the truth of unsafe health care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, both dying from preventable diseases within racially biased systems. Their tragic deaths in recent years also speak to why more than 60 of the Royal Commission's recommendations in 1991 relate to health care and health systems.

The further deaths and ongoing trauma and harm inflicted since the Royal Commission's report was tabled are an indictment on our Nation and require immediate and vast societal change which must be role modelled by Federal, State and Territory governments and embedded in our institutions.

It is critical that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's lives are not reduced to statistics, because we are yet to find justice from systems that do not uphold the dignity and stories of our loved ones.

The story of each life lost, and the story of colonial violence as ongoing within all of its institutions, across health, education, legal and justice systems, have demonstrated that these systems, time and time again, fail to bring Indigenous humanity into full view even through coronial inquiries.

If responsibility for implementing the Royal Commission's recommendations sat outside of governments, the results would be determined as unacceptable, accountability would be attributed and harm would not have endured for another 30 years.

Whilst self-evaluations may be the normal way of working for governments, this issue has a very real and devastating effect on our families and communities and as such is, we believe, deserving of a more transparent process.

As we reach the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the report, all levels of government must reflect on the loss and grief that could have been prevented had they acted on these entirely reasonable recommendations as a matter of priority in 1991 and in the years since.

Further, they must reconsider their capacity to effectively address these issues whilst they continue to uphold racialised programs, such as the *Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Act 2012*, that

criminalise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at a standard that would be unacceptable for many other communities around the country.

Our people can no longer be expected to wait for Australian governments to find the political will to act appropriately. We have shown through the COVID-19 pandemic that when we are given the power and resources to protect our own communities, we do so at a world leading standard.

We have no reservations in asserting that the same level of success is possible, should Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people be supported to improve health outcomes by leading justice and health reform.

Today, we urge the Australian media to privilege the voices of families grieving the loss of their loved ones due to failures in the justice systems.

Having witnessed the rising of public interest in widespread change, inspired by lived experiences, over the past couple of months brings us hope that the Australian public will also realise the power of the voices of families mourning loved ones who have passed in custody, and honour them with widespread support and understanding.

As widespread conversations of systemic racism continue, it is critical that we reflect not just on the numbers, but more importantly, on the lives and humanity of the children, partners, parents, cousins, brothers and sisters who are no longer with us.

Their spirits remind us today, and every day, of the importance of an explicitly anti-racist health justice agenda, one that holds systems and individuals accountable, so that no other family and community continues to suffer in the way that ours have.

*Signed:*

P4JH Co-Chairs - Dr Janine Mohamed, CEO of Lowitja Institute and Karl Briscoe, CEO of the National Association of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers and Practitioners (NAATSIHWP)

And P4JH members:

- ABSTARR Consulting
- Associate Professor Chelsea Watego
- Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association
- Congress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurses and Midwives
- Indigenous Allied Health Australia
- Institute for Collaborative Race Research
- Lowitja Institute
- National Association of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers and Practitioners
- National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation
- National Justice Project

Further information on the P4JH can be found in our Statement of Intent [here](#)