



**Health Ministers' joint response to
the National Review of First Nations
Health Care in Prisons (Review)
*December 2024***

December 2024

Acknowledgement

Health Ministers acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters on which Australians live and pay respect to Elders past, present and emerging, who maintain their culture, country and spiritual connection to the land, sea and community.

Health Ministers thank all stakeholders who contributed to the Review findings. In particular, the First Nations people who shared their stories and expertise.

Introduction

Access to culturally safe and effective health care is a basic and fundamental human right which extends to people in prison and youth detention facilities.

First Nations people are over-represented in both adult prisons and youth detention facilities and often have complex health needs. Their over-representation reflects Australia's history of trauma and the stressors that have affected their parents, families and communities¹.

At the Health Ministers Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Roundtable in October 2022 it was agreed governments will work to improve continuity of care in hospitals and prisons, including action to review the relationship between the health and justice systems to identify barriers and identify areas for reform.

In response to this commitment, the Commonwealth, through the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Collaboration, commissioned an independent National Review of First Nations Health Care in Prisons (Review).

Nous Consortium was engaged to undertake the Review and deliver a report with findings and recommendations to governments. The Review report highlights the health and wellbeing inequities experienced by First Nations people in prison and detention facilities and provides recommendations for governments to achieve real and sustained action to complement existing state and territory-led work, and to provide a more joined-up, national approach to system reform of health care in places of detention.

Health Ministers' Response

We commit to ensuring health care delivered in custodial settings upholds the dignity and respects fundamental human rights of people in places of detention.

We acknowledge the health and wellbeing inequities experienced by First Nations people in prison and detention facilities and reaffirm the commitments under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, both in relation to:

- its Priority Reforms, which are relevant to how future work to address the findings in the Review would be progressed, and

¹ [Youth detention population in Australia 2023, First Nations young people - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare](#)

- addressing the unacceptable gap in health outcomes and life expectancy between First Nations and non-Indigenous Australians.

We affirm the Nelson Mandela Rules and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime policy on Good Governance for Prison Health.

State and territory governments remain responsible for the delivery of health care in places of detention and the operations of their detention facilities. We acknowledge the complexities of each jurisdiction's prison and youth detention governance arrangements and population requirements. Many jurisdictions are already underway with innovative, First Nations-led programs addressing the inequities outlined in the Review.

We also wish to acknowledge the voices of First Nations people across Australia who have and continue to strongly advocate for changes to address the overrepresentation of First Nations people in custody and improve health outcomes for First Nations Australians. We acknowledge the many dedicated health, corrections and youth justice staff across the country who are working to improve the health, wellbeing and life outcomes of adults and youth in custody.

We endorse the publication of the final report of the National Review of First Nations Health Care in Prisons (Review), supporting literature summary and consultation summary.

We commit to developing an approach to implementation in 2025, in partnership with the Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACCHS) sector, other key First Nations stakeholders, and Ministers responsible for corrections and youth justice.

Genuine collaborative effort and partnership is needed to consider and enact these recommendations with a focus on the social and economic determinants of health.

Implementation must be carefully designed to ensure it centres the wisdom, strength and knowledge of First Nations people within each jurisdiction and tailored to the different approaches to detention across Australia.

Through collective and national action, we can achieve real improvements to the health and wellbeing of First Nations people in places of detention and upon their release.

Ms Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA, Minister for Health

The Hon Mary-Anne Thomas MP, Minister for Health

The Hon Tim Nicholls MP, Minister for Health

The Hon Chris Picton MP, Minister for Health and Wellbeing

The Hon Mark Butler MP, Minister for Health and Aged Care

The Hon Ryan John Park MP, Minister for Health

The Hon Amber-Jade Sanderson MLA, Minister for Health

The Hon MP Jacquie Petrusma MP, Minister for Health

The Hon Steven Edgington MLA, Minister for Health