

## STATEMENT FROM CONNECTING HOME

### Aboriginal people in the justice system – CoHo Ltd

The Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service (VALS) have issued [a statement](#) regarding Aboriginal deaths in custody and the weekend's protests. Connecting Home Ltd supports the VALS statement.

As has been identified in numerous studies and investigations, Stolen Generations and their descendants are over-represented within the disproportionate Aboriginal population in the justice system. These unacceptable situations must be addressed.

Connecting Home Ltd supports Change the Record's [five point plan](#) to end Aboriginal deaths in custody including:

- repealing punitive bail laws, mandatory sentencing laws and decriminalising public drunkenness
- raising the age of legal responsibility from 10 to at least 14 years
- legislating for independent investigations of deaths in custody and resourcing independent police oversight bodies
- implementing all the recommendations from the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and the independent investigations, coronial inquests and reports that have been published in the three decades since
- implementing legislative safeguards and establishing independent bodies to oversee the conditions of detention and treatment of people; in accordance with our obligations under the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT).

We continue to support VALS asserting the importance of having a national conversation about the fair and just treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, particularly in relation to the justice system.

# VALS asserts that the Change the Record recommendations are the way forward

Media Release | Monday 8th June 2020

VALS was formed in 1973 to advocate for the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. VALS works with highly vulnerable clients to ensure that their voices are heard and that they have access to essential legal services. However, VALS continues to observe the significant challenges faced by members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities largely disproportionately.

After the tragic loss of life observed in the United States, that echoed a similar tragedy within Australia, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities organised a series of protests to highlight the many tragic circumstances surrounding the loss of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander lives in custody that has occurred since the Royal Commission into Aboriginal deaths in custody was initiated over 30 years ago.

The protests evidenced the solidarity of all Australians, for Black communities globally, and for the many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders that have lost their lives while in custody and their loved ones and communities. The protests represented actions marked the response of the local communities to stand together, against injustice.

We ask state and federal governments to heed the call. Change the Record, a coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples led organisations and non-Aboriginal allies offers us a way forward.

- End the mass imprisonment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by repealing punitive bail laws; mandatory sentencing laws; and decriminalising public drunkenness.
- Stop imprisoning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and raise the age of legal responsibility from 10 to at least 14 years.
- End racist policing and require police accountability by ending the practice of police investigating police, and legislating for independent investigations of deaths in custody and resourcing independent police oversight bodies.
- Implement all recommendations from the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and the countless independent investigations, coronial inquests and reports that have been published in the three decades since.
- End the abuse, torture and solitary confinement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in police and prison cells through legislative safeguards and by urgently establishing independent bodies to oversee the conditions of detention and treatment of people; in accordance with our obligations under the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT)

The protests involved assemblies in the thousands, marking some of the largest protest actions in recent memory. The protestor organisers have been universally praised for their efforts to ensure the safety of the community, with protestors organising the distribution of face masks and hand sanitisers in the days preceding the event and often during the events themselves.

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Police services have also applauded the peaceful and harmonious nature of the protests, with police representatives recorded as asserting that they were some of the largest and most well-organised protests they had observed in recent memory. VALS applauds the protestors for their considered and measured preparations. VALS asserts that the protestors incredible efforts in handling such a large gathering, in a peaceful and harmonious manner must also be acknowledged.

The events represent the start of a national conversation regarding the fair and just treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. VALS asserts the importance of further media, public, societal and importantly governmental engagement with the issues that have been raised through this movement.

VALS encourages media representatives to reach out to the organisers of these peaceful protest activities to further the national dialogue. VALS is also committed to continuing to advocate for much needed reform in the justice system to address the systematic injustices faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We strongly encourage media, members of the community, and all relevant stakeholders to pursue further dialogue with us to ensure that much needed reform occurs.

## Quotes Attributable to Nerita Waight

"It was inspiring to see so many people, from all backgrounds, of diverse ages and communities, come together to affirm that Black Lives Matter and to call for greater accountability and responsibility regarding the 432 Aboriginal deaths in custody. It is clear that people want change."

"The protestors should be applauded for their efforts in organising peaceful protests through the country and those in attendance for making clear that they want to see Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples treated justly. This is the beginning of an important national dialogue."

"The outpouring of support, through messages and on social platforms to us and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led organisations has been so meaningful, we know that Australians want positive change, and we are genuinely grateful."

"Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples continue to be disproportionately impacted by antediluvian laws. These laws have no place in modern civil societies; we encourage all Australians to learn more about the laws that continue to have such damaging consequences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples."

"We encourage all Australians to visit the change the record website at [www.changetherecord.org.au](http://www.changetherecord.org.au) to learn about what can be done to end black deaths in custody. Too many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been lost. We have a way forward."