



COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN  
AND YOUNG PEOPLE

# Media Release

## Aboriginal children need urgent change; Yoorrook response does not deliver

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Over six months after the Yoorrook Justice Commission made 46 recommendations for systemic change to the child protection system and criminal justice system in the *Yoorrook for Justice* report, the Victorian Government's response to the recommendations represents yet another disappointment for Aboriginal communities, with only four of the 46 recommendations 'supported'.

'There is very little to be positive about in this response,' said Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People, Meena Singh, today.

Twenty-four of the 46 recommendations are 'supported in principle'. A further 15 are 'under consideration'. The Victorian Government said they 'did not support' the remaining three recommendations, including raising the age of criminal responsibility to 14 without exception, and much-needed youth bail reform. This comes a week after the Victorian Government announced plans to trial electronic monitoring of children and young people on bail, which will most likely disproportionately impact Aboriginal children and young people.

Commissioner Singh appeared before the Yoorrook Justice Commission in December 2022 and May 2023 to give voice to the experiences of Aboriginal children and young people's experiences of child protection and youth justice systems in Victoria. This evidence was accompanied by the Commission for Children and Young People's previous systemic inquiries and the raft of findings and recommendations within them.

'Despite Yoorrook's focus on Aboriginal children and young people in hearings and in recommendations, that focus is virtually absent in the government's response,' Commissioner Singh said.

'Aboriginal people in Victoria have already given, and continue to give, their time, energy, and passion, at significant personal cost, to this truth-telling process. After the trauma in the lead-up to and the aftermath of the referendum on the Voice to Parliament in October last year, this response is a missed opportunity for the Premier and the Victorian Government to demonstrate their commitment to the Aboriginal community and the futures of Aboriginal children and young people.

'Our children are strong and resilient, even when they bear the brunt of intergenerational trauma, separation from their families and erasure of their culture and identity through colonialism and government policies. They deserve a response to this important truth-telling process that respects their identity and provides them with a vision going forward,' Commissioner Singh said.

Among the recommendations under consideration is to legislate the role of the Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People in the *Commission for Children and Young People Act*.

'Last month we saw that, as a nation, we are not on track to Close the Gap when it comes to reducing the numbers of Aboriginal children and young people being removed from their families.



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Victoria has the highest rates of removal of Aboriginal children and young people in the country. But the Victorian Government has yet to give even ‘in principle’ support for the Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People to be enshrined in legislation, even as the federal government has committed to a National Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children.

‘Without a timeline or funding for implementation, “support in principle” for most recommendations provides little assurance of real change for our most vulnerable Aboriginal children, young people, and their families.’

‘What we need to see now from the Victorian Government is a clear plan for how the recommendations from Yoorrook will be taken forward. We need to see direct engagement with Aboriginal community leading to action to achieve a shared vision for reducing the numbers of Aboriginal children and young people engaged with the child protection and youth legal systems. I am committed to working with the Victorian Government and will continue to advocate for urgent change and the rights of Aboriginal children and young people in this state,’ Commissioner Singh concluded.

**For interview:**

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