



Media Release

Action on Aboriginal cultural rights in youth justice can't wait: report

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Action to strengthen Aboriginal cultural rights in youth justice centres can't wait for the outcomes of a previously announced inquiry into the over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people in the State's youth justice system, according to a new joint report released today by the Commission for Children and Young People and the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission.

Aboriginal cultural rights in youth justice centres calls on the Department of Justice and Regulation to prioritise 'the promotion of Aboriginal cultural rights and the strengthening of cultural connections in its Koori Youth Justice Strategy', which is now under development.

'We know Aboriginal children and young people are starkly over-represented in youth justice, and the proportion is growing. As we challenge and tackle that discriminatory over-representation, we must also address the reality that Aboriginal cultural rights are too often ignored in youth detention,' said Justin Mohamed, Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People, today.

'A youth justice system that disproportionately imprisons Aboriginal children and young people is also eroding their right to Aboriginal culture that can nurture their well-being, protect their best interests, and significantly help with their rehabilitation,' Mr Mohamed said.

The report calls for training of youth justice staff to place a much greater focus on Aboriginal cultural safety and on best practice human rights to ensure staff meet their obligations under the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities* and the *Children Youth and Families Act 2005*.

The Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission encourages the Victorian government to promptly consider the report's eight recommendations to ensure that young people in Victoria's youth justice centres are supported to maintain and develop their connections to culture and community.

'Under the Charter, the public sector agencies and officials have an obligation to give proper consideration to the cultural rights of Aboriginal people when making decisions,' Ms Kristen Hilton, Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commissioner, said.

'It's critical that human rights informs and guides policy and practice in the youth justice system. Our youth justice system must promote Aboriginal cultural rights and enable Koori youth to connect to culture and cultural supports. Working with families and communities is vital to breaking the cycle of offending,' Ms Hilton said.

The report found that Aboriginal communities want to see significant improvement in the frequency, quality and evaluation of programs to protect and promote Aboriginal cultural rights, and calls on the Department of Justice and Regulation to develop a social and emotional well-being strategy for Koori children in custody.

Further recommendations include a review of policies and procedures, a greater focus on culturally appropriate transitional support for Koori young people leaving youth detention, and more funding to increase dedicated Aboriginal roles in youth justice centres.

The recommendation to implement culturally appropriate design in new and updated youth justice facilities was particularly important for the design of Victoria's new 224-bed youth justice detention centre at Cherry Creek, Mr Mohamed concluded.

The Commission for Children and Young People inquiry into the over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people in youth justice will commence in the second half of this year.

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