

Submission to the Royal Commission into child protection and youth justice in the Northern Territory

10th August 2016

[Sydney Centre for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics](#)

Prof Richard Madden, Dr Clare Coleman, **Privacy** Ms Kalinda Griffiths, Dr Nicola Man, Mr Laimena Muwadda.

Dear Commissioners Gooda and White,

The Sydney Centre for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics was established in 2015 to promote and measure the development and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We provide nationally recognised expertise in data analysis, linkage and reporting for and with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by critically exploring and examining Indigenous specific data.

We are writing to formally ask you to consider a proposal to help inform you of outcomes for those who have come in contact with the Youth Justice system in the Northern Territory. There are approximately 3000 individuals who have been through the youth detention centres in the Northern Territory since the Youth Justice Act was enacted in 2005. The Northern Territory has collected a large amount of data about the general population in that time, in particular child protection, mortality and hospitalisation data. This data is routinely linked by the SA-NT Data Link organisation and anonymised for research purposes. Linked data can provide a thorough picture of a population and provide insights into pathways that are not visible when in datasets are looked at individually.

We are proposing that the honourable Commissioners request the linked data for those individuals who have been detained in the youth justice system to answer some important questions that are otherwise difficult to determine in the timeframe in which the Royal Commission will be reporting.

The types of questions about those who have been detained that will be able to be answered are:

- What child protection arrangements were in place prior to detention?
- What is the mortality rate?
- What is the presentation rate at hospital for accident and misadventure?
- What are the child protection outcomes for the children of those who have been in youth detention?
- Are these rates different from the general population of the same age?

If some of the non-routinely linked data are also linked further questions could be examined. If linked to:

- the adult corrective services data then the path from youth justice to the adult corrective service can also be examined,
- the Australian Bureau of Statistics mortality database then cause of death, and in particular suicide rates could be examined,
- the notifiable diseases database the path to long term health conditions such as tuberculosis, sexually transmitted infections and blood borne viruses could be examined,
- Centrelink data the path to employment could be examined,
- Medicare data, use of mental health services could be examined,
- PBS data, use of drugs of dependence could be examined.

As researchers we could request these data be linked and examine the questions listed above, but it can take up to two years to get approval from the different data custodians. Given the timeframe for your enquiry we believe that if the Royal Commission made the request then the data could be available in 2 months and that would allow 4 months of analysis to answer some of these very important questions.

If the Royal Commission into The Child Protection and Youth Detention Systems of the Northern Territory is interested in the Sydney Centre for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics' proposal, we would be happy to talk and provide more detailed information.

Yours sincerely

Clare Coleman