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Royal Commission into Northern Territory youth detention marks major opportunity for change: AASW

“The final report from the Royal Commission into Northern Territory youth detention highlights what is fundamentally a broken system and there must be a commitment from all levels of government to implement the recommendations” says Ms Cindy Smith, the Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW).

“From the report it is beyond debate that youth detention in the Northern Territory is in need of urgent change given the horrific treatment and the ongoing over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.”

“We strongly support the recommendations, in particular the closure of the current Don Dale Youth Detention Centre and High Security Unit, the 10-year Generational Strategy for Families and Children to address child protection and prevention of harm to children, the focus on diversion and therapeutic approaches and the greater involvement of Aboriginal Organisations.”

“Social workers have continually raised concerns over the failings of youth detention and child protection in the Northern Territory, and all of Australia, calling for greater investment and immediate reform” she said.

“We strongly support an approach to child wellbeing and protection that reflects the principles of social justice, human rights and professional integrity.”

“We believe that the detention and protection system must be unified under a common framework, one that recognises the fundamental right that children and families have to respect, participation and culturally appropriate services that build their capacity.”

“This will not be possible unless governments make a long-term term commitment to properly funding early intervention family support services so children don’t end up in youth detention,” she said.

“The report marks an important opportunity for change not just in the NT but all over Australia, from punishment towards prevention and rehabilitation” Ms Smith says.

The AASW represents over 10,000 professional social workers from around Australia.



Cindy Smith is the Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Association of Social Workers. She has over 15 years’ experience as a social worker across a wide range of positions including as a housing worker, counsellor in community health, team leader in out-of-home care, and as general manager of a child, youth and family directorate in community health. Cindy is a graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors, fellow of the Australasian College of Health Services Management, and an AASW Accredited Mental Health Social Worker. She served as National Vice President on the AASW board until late last year.

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