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**NT prison lockdown an urgent reminder youth justice reform is needed:
Jesuit Social Services**

Reports that the Alice Springs youth detention facility is in lockdown after four residents tested positive for COVID-19 reveal a deeper youth justice crisis requiring urgent legislative and operational reform, says Jesuit Social Services.

“We are deeply concerned about the young people in Alice Springs after media reports that the facility is locked-down due to COVID-19 cases,” says Jesuit Social Services Acting CEO Sally Parnell.

“This facility is home to some of Northern Territory’s most troubled young people. Incarceration must always be an option of last resort. Evidence-based approaches to prevention and diversion as recommended by the Royal Commission must be used to minimise incarcerating children altogether. If children are incarcerated, they must be given holistic, therapeutic and culturally safe care so as to optimise their successful transition back to family and community.”

The Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory made 227 recommendations outlining humane and effective approaches to supporting young people in contact with the justice system.

While all recommendations were supported by the Northern Territory Government, key recommendations have still not been implemented, including raising the age of criminal responsibility to at least 12 to keep primary school-aged children out of the justice system.

“We are deeply concerned by the failure of the Northern Territory Government to implement the Royal Commission’s recommendations and give young people the support they need,” says Ms Parnell.

“Today, we see record numbers of children incarcerated in the Northern Territory due to the Government’s regressive 2021 Bail laws, facilities responsible for traumatised children without therapeutic models of care, and some children locked up in their cells for nearly 24 hours per day, even before this COVID-19 lockdown. This is inadequate and there is a better way.

“A strong and effective youth justice system must emphasise keeping young people out of the system, through connection with family, school, and community. It must prioritise restorative justice approaches, to keep young people accountable for their actions without unnecessary detention. And it must recognise and address the long-term harm caused to children, their families, and communities by detention.”

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