



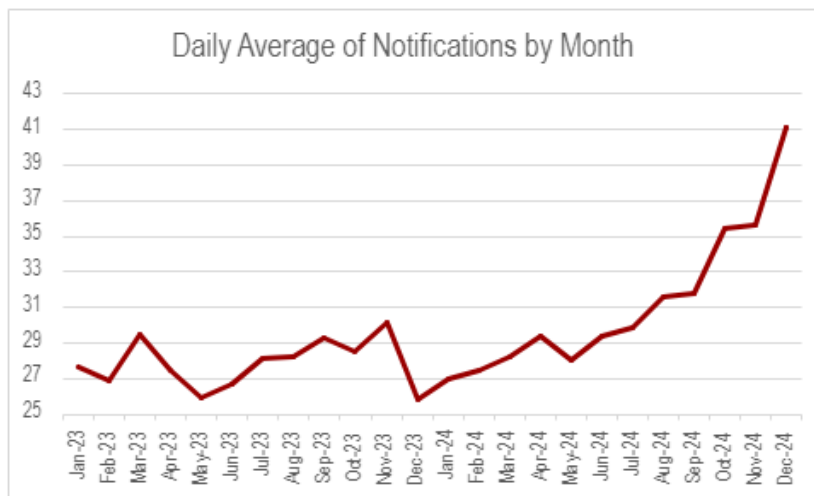
Media release

Record numbers of Aboriginal people facing jail

The North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency (NAAJA) has reported record numbers of calls to its custody notification service (CNS) in December 2024.

The CNS was established to reduce Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander deaths in custody and in response to recommendations from the 1991 *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody*. It provides an independent wellbeing check over the telephone, along with basic legal information and advice, to any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person entering police custody.

A NAAJA spokesperson said, ‘the custody notification service is an early indicator of future pressures on the justice system in the Northern Territory and the news is not good. In December 2024, there was a record 1,276 notifications of Aboriginal people being taken into custody, including the second highest number of notifications on record for young people at 144. This represents an average of 41.2 Aboriginal people being taken into custody every day.’



In August 2019, monthly custody notifications were just 571—December 2024 represents an extra 705 Aboriginal people being taken into custody.

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The impact has been starker in some communities and towns, with Wadeye alone reporting a 277% increase in daily custody notifications from November 2024.

On 6 January 2025, the Minister for Corrections, Gerard Maley announced that there was a record number of 2,628 prisoners were in detention and watch houses were being commandeered to be used as prisons. The new *Bail Legislation Amendment Act 2024* (NT) also commenced this week on 6 January 2025, making it harder to obtain bail. This will see more of the Aboriginal people taken into custody in December 2024 staying in custody and filling already overcrowded jails.

Of concern is that NAAJA was unable to speak to and check in on 131 or 33% of the people detained in the Palmerston watch house in December 2024, one of the watch house that will now be converted to a prison.

NAAJA agrees with yesterday's comments from the Northern Territory Police Association that it is only a matter of time until a death in custody occurs as police station cells swell to capacity with dozens of overflow prisoners (ABC online, 7 January 2025).

'Northern Territory jails and watch houses are already full and more and more Aboriginal people are being pushed into the justice system at record numbers every month', A NAAJA spokesperson said. 'This is going to have a devastating impact on Aboriginal communities and families for generations to come and it is not reducing crime. Jail is not the only solution.'

NAAJA has continued its calls for a package of funding and policy changes to address the underlying causes of crime and greater support for the justice system, as well as better safeguards for Aboriginal people's wellbeing in custody. (*Keep Aboriginal children out of jail*—NAAJA MR2024-01, 16 October 2024 and *NAAJA concerned about deteriorating prison conditions*—NAAJA MR2024-02, 30 October 2024 and *Custody notifications skyrocket*—NAAJA MR2024-03, 4 November 2024).

Media contact

Comments in this media release other than direct quotes can be attributed to a NAAJA spokesperson.

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