

Indigenous incarceration in Australia at a glance

April 15, 2016

Indigenous deaths in custody - 25 years on

The Royal Commission

The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody was appointed by prime minister Bob Hawke on August 10 1987 to investigate the high rate of Indigenous deaths in custody.

At the time there was **1** Indigenous death in custody every **11** days.

The commission reviewed 99 deaths between 1980 and 1989, factoring in the cause, likely reason and any underlying social factors.

When the commission handed down its report on **April 15 1991**, it made **339** recommendations.

The commissioners identified the principal and immediate explanation for the deaths in custody as being the disproportionate rate at which Indigenous people were detained, arrested and imprisoned in Australia.

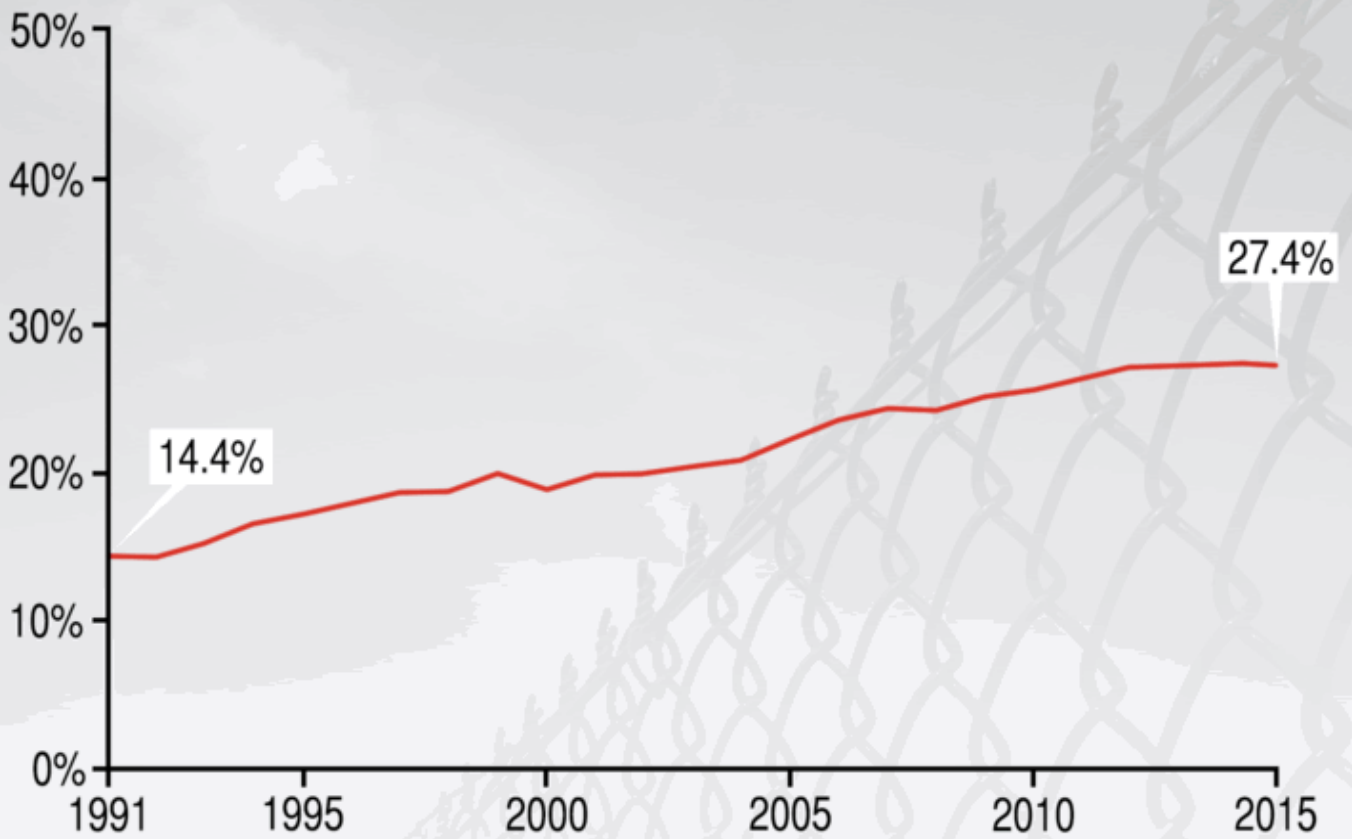
Recommendation 87: Arrest people only when no other way exists for dealing with a problem.

Recommendation 92: Imprisonment should be utilised only as a sanction of last resort.

Indigenous incarceration rate

But since 1991, the proportion of Indigenous Australians in prison has actually increased:

(% of prison population)



Source: Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC), Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)
Photo: flickr/JoshuaDavisPhotography

And while Indigenous Australians make up **27.4%** of the national prison population, they make up only **2.5%** of the overall population of Australia.

Which means that Indigenous Australians are significantly over-represented in incarceration numbers.



Source: ABS

Indigenous people were **15.4** times more likely to be incarcerated in 2015 than non-Indigenous Australians.

The increasing number of Indigenous women in prisons

And over the last ten years, the rate of incarceration of Indigenous women has also increased significantly.



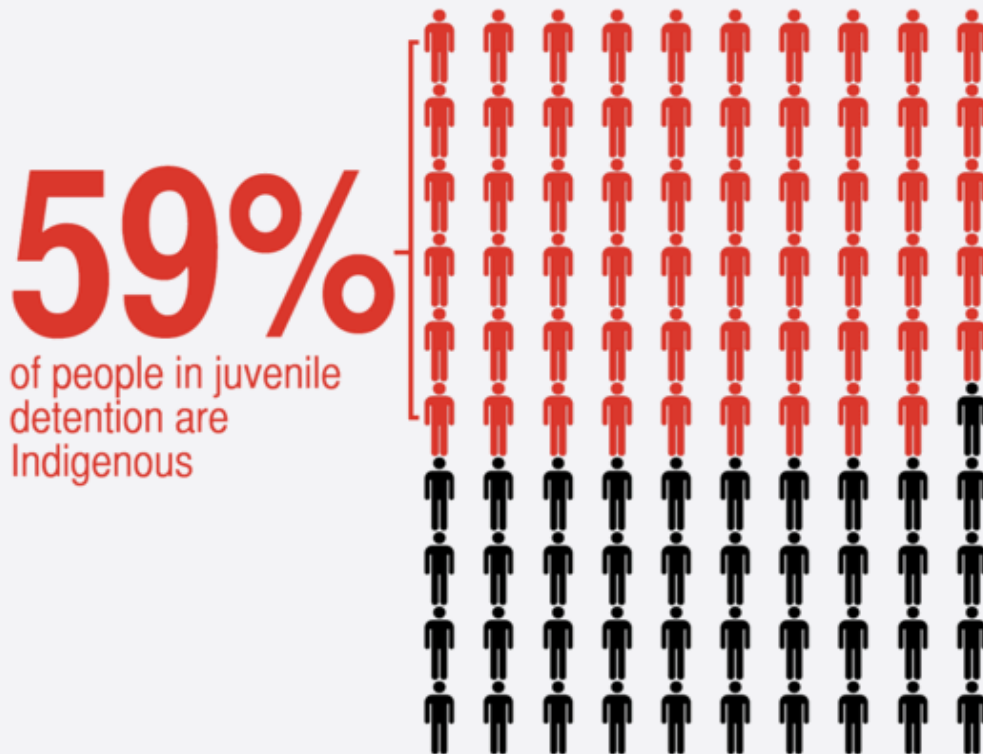
Indigenous women are **21.6** times more likely to be incarcerated than non-Indigenous women.



Source: ABS

Indigenous youths in juvenile detention

One of the factors affecting the higher proportion of Indigenous Australians in prisons is the way juvenile offenders are treated by the justice system.



Source: AIC
Icons: Freepik

Young Indigenous people in juvenile detention are **74%** more likely to end up in adult prisons than those who are diverted into alternative forms of rehabilitation.

And Indigenous children are **26 times** more likely to be in juvenile detention than non-Indigenous children.



Time in remand

Sentenced prisoners are also not the whole picture.

27% of Indigenous people in custody in 2015 were on remand — either **unsentenced**, **unconvicted** or **awaiting trial**.

The median time spent in remand in 2015 was **2.7 months**.

And between 2014 and 2015 the rate of prisoners overall in remand by **21%**, the highest rise in a decade.

The rate of sentenced prisoners rose just 3% for the same period.



Indigenous deaths in custody since the Royal Commission

The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody provided a benchmark and a call to action for governments on Indigenous deaths in custody.

But 25 years on, with an increase in the overall Indigenous population in prisons, the actual rate of deaths remains relatively stagnant.

(Indigenous deaths in custody)

