

Dear Premier Minns,

We write regarding our concerns about the impact of strip searches on children and young people under 18.

We call on the Government to stop strip searching kids and ensure policing practices are compliant with child protection principles.

Every child deserves to be kept safe and protected from harm. But NSW Police have strip searched over 1,500 children since 2016. That's an average of 220 children strip searched each year. Children as young as 10 have been forced to stand naked in front of adult strangers and, in some cases, told to cough and squat.

This humiliating and harmful experience can lead to lasting trauma. It creates distrust between young people and the police and discourages them from seeking help when needed.

That's why we're calling on you to ensure the upcoming Drug Summit considers a ban on this harmful practice.

Drug law enforcement is the main pretext for strip searches. Yet 62% of searches find nothing at all. And if drugs are found, it's usually only a small amount.

The 2019 Coronial Inquest into the Death of Six Patrons of NSW Music Festivals found that strip searches lead to more dangerous drug use: panic ingestion, pre-loading, bodily concealment, and purchasing from unknown sources inside venues. Deputy State NSW Coroner Harriet Grahame recommended reforming and minimising the use of strip searches and introducing a harm minimisation approach.

Police disproportionately target First Nations people for strip searches. Police are 7.6 times more likely to strip search First Nations people than non-First Nations people.

The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody showed us more than 30 years ago that punitive, discretionary police action is a direct cause of the disproportionate incarceration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. As the Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT) Limited has previously stated, 'NSW Police contribute to widening the gap – they must share responsibility for closing it.'

Samantha Lee, supervising solicitor within the police accountability practice at Redfern Legal Centre notes, "Strip searches are traumatising and cause children to be fearful of police. Strip search laws must be reformed for children."

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At the age of 18, Mysel Le was strip-searched at a music festival in May 2018. Over a year before the strip search, she was a victim of sexual assault. Mysel has been working with the Redfern Legal Centre to advocate for changes to strip search law. She states, "As a person with lived experience of sexual assault who has been strip-searched, I have concerns about the continuation of these coercive practices, which contribute to unequal power imbalances and induce further harm and trauma to other survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence, particularly within our First Nations communities, who are disproportionately represented in these statistics."

The Drug Summit is a significant opportunity for an urgent rethink of our approach. We should be doing everything in our power to help kids stay safe. Drug use should be considered a health issue rather than a criminal justice issue. Strip searching children is harmful, ineffective and must be outlawed.

Premier Minns, it's time to act.

Signed:



AUSTRALIAN FESTIVAL ASSOCIATION



Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT) Limited

