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### **Dramatic rise in police strip searches on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people during COVID-19**

NSW Police figures obtained during COVID-19 highlight a dramatic rise in strip searches of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, at a time when large scale-police drug operations at music festivals have ceased.

The new data obtained by Redfern Legal Centre (RLC) under access to information laws reveals that NSW Police conducted over 9,100 strip searches in a two-year financial period from 2018-19 to 2019-2020, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and children being disproportionately targeted.

“These figures paint a disturbing new picture of police strip searches during COVID-19,” RLC police accountability solicitor, Samantha Lee said.

“We already know that police are conducting strip searches on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at disproportionately high rates. But we now also know that this disparity is increasing.

“Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should not have to live in fear of being strip searched by police. This harmful practice is eroding good community relations and feeds into distrust and fear of the police,” Ms Lee said.

The figures from 2018-2019 to 2019-2020 reveal:

- For the two-year period, NSW Police conducted a total of 9,116 strip searches.
- Males accounted for three-quarters of all strip searches (73.98%), compared with females (26.02%).
- Over 40 per cent of searches were conducted on young people, aged 18 to 25 years old.
- Nothing illegal was found in 61 per cent of strip searches.

#### **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people**

- The proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people being strip searched has increased from 9% to 13%, while only making up 3.4% of the NSW population.
- In Dubbo, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people made up two thirds of the number of people searched in 2019-20.

#### **Children**

- There were 271 children strip searched (aged 10-17 years), with children representing 3% of all strip searches in both 2018-19 and 2019-20.

- 13% of children strip searched in 2018-19 were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. This figure rose to 20% in 2019-20.

#### **Police Area Commands**

- Ten of the Police Area Commands (PACs) accounted for 52% of strip searches, with Sydney City (984), Auburn (819), Surry Hills (630), Eastern Suburbs (503) and Nepean (391) accounting for 36% of strip searches.

#### **Location**

- The top five suburbs where the highest number of strip searches occurred include: Sydney (735), Sydney Olympic Park (676), Surry Hills (315), Moore Park (288) and Parramatta (273).
- From 2018-19 to 2019-20, there has been over 50 per cent drop in the number of strip searches at key music festival locations including, Sydney Olympic Park and Moore Park.
- Wooyung (140), Dubbo (100) and Taree (100) accounted for the highest number of strip searches in a regional suburb.

“NSW Police have long been targeting music festivals with large-scale strip search operations. But during COVID-19, the growing number of police strip searches on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people has become starkly apparent. It’s time to end this invasive practice,” Ms Lee said.

This year, Redfern Legal Centre joined forces with class action experts Slater and Gordon Lawyers to investigate class actions into unlawful strip searches. Further information is available at:

[www.slatergordon.com.au/stripsearch](http://www.slatergordon.com.au/stripsearch)

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