

# More action to prevent Indigenous deaths in custody

May 9 2014, by Kate Bourne

---

Key recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC) are yet to be addressed 23 years after the report was handed down, according to University of Adelaide architectural anthropologist, Dr Elizabeth Grant.

Dr Grant's paper, published this week in the *Australian Indigenous Law Review*, evaluated Australian prisons following the RCIADIC (1987-1991) and found that while there have been some improvements in correctional facilities' infrastructure and services, more can be done to make prisons safer.

"The number of Indigenous deaths in custody continues to be unacceptably high. Growing numbers of Indigenous prisoners have chronic illnesses, substance abuse problems, learning and cognitive disabilities and mental illnesses," says Dr Grant, senior lecturer and researcher at the University of Adelaide.

"The Royal Commission identified hanging as the primary method of suicide in prisons, and as a result, facilities across Australia commenced screening and removing ligature points in cells.

"A number of physical changes were made to Queensland correctional centres, including the removal of bars on cell windows. And cell design guidelines - focused on building safe, practical and liveable cell environments - were developed for Victorian prisons. But in South Australia, the coroner has made repeated requests to have hanging points

removed from prisons, with the most recent request in 2013.

"The Western Australian Department of Corrective Services also made some positive changes with the introduction of a regional prison policy. This policy sees Aboriginal prisoners, wherever possible, serve their sentence near their home region. This policy could be adopted in other states," she says.

Dr Grant says that while some states have implemented effective policies and initiatives to address the predominately male Indigenous prisoners' health, more needs to be done to address minority populations like Indigenous women and young people.

"The rate at which women are being incarcerated in Australia has increased dramatically in the last two decades. Women are a neglected and vulnerable group and the design of prisons should be conducive to their needs.

"Juvenile detention is an area also needing the attention of correctional agencies, researchers and designers. Culturally-sensitive rehabilitation is vital for assisting young people to develop the appropriate life skills.

"Prison accommodation needs to be flexible, culturally appropriate, promote human interaction and enable Indigenous people to remain connected to their family, land and community," she says.

**More information:** The paper, "Approaches to the design and provision of prison accommodation and facilities for Australian Indigenous prisoners after the Royal Commission into Aboriginal deaths in custody," is available [online](#).

Provided by University of Adelaide

Citation: More action to prevent Indigenous deaths in custody (2014, May 9) retrieved 7 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-05-action-indigenous-deaths-custody.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.