



## VICTORIAN ABORIGINAL LEGAL SERVICE

**MEDIA RELEASE: Thursday 17 October 2019**

### **Inquest to probe police pursuit death**

Raymond Noel Lindsay Thomas, a 29-year-old Gunnai, Gunditjmara, and Wiradjuri man, tragically passed away on 25 June 2017, after sustaining injuries during a police pursuit near his home.

More than two years after his death, the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service ('VALS') is representing Raymond's family at a coronial hearing on 17 October 2019.

On behalf of the family, VALS is requesting that the coronial process examine the impact of the Victoria Police pursuit policy, and the adequacy of the police investigation process following Raymond's death.

VALS will be seeking recommendations from the Coroner regarding the Victoria Police pursuit policy, and will look to work with Victoria Police, the State Government, and other parties to implement those recommendations.

#### **Family Statement**

Our Raymond was a big man with a big heart. A proud Gunnai, Gunditjmara, and Wiradjuri warrior. As big and strong as he was, Raymond had a caring nature and a beautiful soul. He was affectionately called the gentle giant by his family, friends and community.

Big Raymond loved his family. Most precious to him was his niece Lehtia who he adored. Now our family show photos of Uncle Raymond to his nieces and talk to them about him, to keep him alive in their hearts and ours.

Raymond was a staunch West Coast Eagles supporter. Sadly, he missed seeing his Eagles win the premiership last year, but his family celebrated the victory for him at home. A happy moment marked with sadness.

We as a family and a community now carry that same grief and pain that many Indigenous families and communities around the country have had to endure.

*The loss of a Child, a Brother, a Nephew, a Cousin, and a Friend.*

We want justice for our son. Hopefully accountability will result through this process, and changes can be made to prevent any other family having to experience what we have since his passing.



**Quotes attributable to Nerita Waight, CEO at VALS**

“Raymond’s family have waited over two years since their son’s death for the coronial process to commence. The delays and uncertainty prolong and deepen the impact of Raymond’s death on his family.”

“VALS notes that the Coroner has previously made recommendations to limit pursuits in certain circumstances, which were implemented by Victoria Police, then removed prior to Raymond’s death. Raymond’s family will be asking the Coroner to make recommendations to limit pursuits in circumstances similar to those that resulted in Raymond’s death.”

“Police pursuits, and deaths resulting from police pursuits, disproportionately impact upon Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Police officers must be provided with clear guidelines on pursuits, and community safety must be paramount in any decision to commence a pursuit.”

“VALS and the family have serious concerns about the police investigation into the death of Raymond Jnr, including that all relevant evidence was not investigated or preserved for the Coroner’s consideration. This is yet another instance demonstrating that an independent body, such as IBAC, should investigate police contact deaths.”

**Note for media**

*For cultural reasons, the family of Raymond Thomas Jnr does not wish to make any further comment to the media about this case at this time.*

**For all media enquiries call Isabel Robinson on 0491 149 299 or email at [irobinson@vals.org.au](mailto:irobinson@vals.org.au)**