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VICTORIA'S LEAD ROLE IN ACTIVE DIVERSION OF YOUNG OFFENDERS AT RISK

Julie Edwards, CEO of Jesuit Social Services, pointed to key data released by the Australian institute of Health and Welfare today that confirms Victoria continues to lead the nation in diverting young people from detention. Ms Edwards said Victoria's rate of youth detention is less than half the national rate at 0.16 per 1,000 of the youth population compared with the national rate of .35. "We're particularly pleased to see this translating to less young people experiencing unsentenced detention. Victoria's record here is leading the nation with 22% of young people detained without sentence compared with the range across other Australian states and territories of between 43% and 68%.

"These outcomes are not a coincidence but the result of years of cooperation between the courts, police, non government agencies, such as ours, and the government of the day" Ms Edwards said. "In the past Victoria's approach has been driven by a commitment based on evidence that active diversion leads to reduced rates of detention and is a major step towards keeping young offenders out of the prison system," she said. "Research shows that the younger a child is placed in custody, the higher the likelihood of them serving another prison sentence in adulthood.

"This proud record is under threat, however", Ms Edwards warned. "Hidden below this success story are real warning signs that the lock 'em up approach to law and order is beginning to bite". The same AIHW data shows that from the June quarter 2007 to the June quarter 2011, the juvenile detention population in Victoria increased by 35% against a national increase of only 12%. In the most recent year alone, Victoria's youth detention population increased by 12% while our most comparable State, NSW fell by 11%. "While we are starting from very different baselines, the trend is very concerning" said Ms Edwards.

"Only this week NSW has announced further reforms to their bail laws in a push by the state government to reduce the number of young people in jail. This contrasts starkly with what's happening here in Victoria where hype about young thugs and hoons distracts public attention from policies such as prevention and diversionary programs shown to deliver to Victoria low rates of detention, low rates of recidivism and low rates of crime. Those things are connected", said Ms Edwards, "and combine to make our communities safe" .

Jesuit Social Services engages with young people in the youth justice and adult corrections systems – most of whom have had, or currently have, involvement with the child protection system. Jesuit Social Services works closely with these youths through the Jesuit Community College.

MEDIA ENQUIRIES

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