

**MEDIA RELEASE**

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**Numbers of Aboriginal children in prison a national shame**

“Over half of the children in prison throughout Australia are Aboriginal and immediate action is needed to prevent them spending lives entrenched in our prison system” says Jesuit Social Services CEO Julie Edwards on the release of the Productivity Commission 2014 Report on Government Services.

Despite some modest improvement over the past 5 years, the Report shows that Aboriginal children more than 25 times likely to be in prison than non Aboriginal children with 442 Aboriginal Children in detention on an average night in 2011-12. In Victoria, Aboriginal children are 17 times more likely to be in prison.

Ms Edwards said, “We can’t just sit by and allow this generation of Aboriginal children to become entrenched in our prison systems. Efforts to intervene early and address the root causes of disadvantage within Aboriginal communities must be sustained. These should be coupled with interventions to divert Aboriginal children from pathways into prison and back into community, culture, and learning opportunities.”

In more welcome news, the Report revealed that Victoria’s approach to youth justice diversion remains strong. “Victorian children have the lowest rate of imprisonment in the country, less than half the next best state. This is the result of a long standing commitment to diversion by successive governments, police, courts, and the community. It is significant that the number of children who offend has also declined (13 per cent between 2001 and 2011), and our youth offending rate is the second lowest in the country. Victoria’s approach contributes to a safer community and is more cost effective.”

Ms Edwards noted the impact of current reforms in Victoria, “It is good to see that a focus on engaging young people who offend in education, particularly through the Parkville College, has led to improved education participation rates (at 100%).”

“However, there are still gaps in the availability of diversion and intensive support opportunities for young people in Victoria. These should be addressed to further strengthen our approach. This is particularly the case for young people in rural and regional areas.”

**Jesuit Social Services is a not-for-profit organisation which works to build a just society by advocating for social change and promoting the health and wellbeing of disadvantaged young people, families and communities.**

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## **Productivity Commission Report on Government Services 2014 – Key Youth Justice Statistics**

- Average daily National Youth Detention population in 2011-12 was 819 down from 862 in 2010-11, of whom 442 are Aboriginal.
- In Victoria, there were 77 young people in detention on an average night in 2011-12, of whom 14 were Aboriginal.
- The national youth imprisonment rate is 36.5 prisoners per 100,000 young people, the Aboriginal youth imprisonment rate is 425.4 prisoners per 100,000 young Aboriginal people.
- In Victorian youth imprisonment rate is 14.3 prisoners per 100,000 young people, the Victorian Aboriginal youth imprisonment rate is 208.6 per 100,000 young Aboriginal people.
- In Victoria, all 59 young people in detention who were of compulsory school age were attending an education course and all 107 not of compulsory school age were also attending education or training.