

MEDIA RELEASE

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Victorian prison expansion undermines community safety

The Victorian Government's announcement of its latest prison expansion plans continues an expensive and flawed strategy that is not going to make our community safer.

Commenting on the Premier and Minister for Corrections' announcement that the capacity of the new Ravenhall prison will be doubled, Jesuit Social Services CEO Julie Edwards said, "Expanding a prison that has not yet been built is not going to fix the crisis in our justice system. The Government says that tougher sentencing laws and more prisons make the community safer, but what we in fact are seeing is more and more Victorians are getting trapped in the revolving door of our prison system. Our prisons population has increased by 40% over the past 10 years even though there has been a 12% drop in the crime rate."

"In order to better promote community safety, law and order policy should seek to stop offending happening in the first place and, where appropriate, to divert offenders from prison. Surely a better use of this money would be to invest in initiatives that have a proven track record of building safer communities through preventing offending and reducing reoffending instead of prisons which have been shown to entrench criminal behaviours."

Noting the issues that offenders face, Ms Edwards said, "55% of Victorian prisoners have drug and alcohol problems, 43% of male and 33% of female prisoners have acquired brain injuries, and only 7.2% have completed secondary education. We should be intervening earlier to address these issues and support people to become productive members of our community."

"This must include a focus on young people. Too many children get trapped in the justice system from a young age," Ms Edwards said, noting that the [2013 National Justice Symposium](#), beginning in Melbourne tomorrow will be focusing on this issue. "Leaders from across the community have recognised the fact that we must intervene earlier. This week we are coming together to discuss how we make this a reality."

Ms Edwards also outlined the need to be smarter in our use of custody for adults. "Clearly there will be some circumstances in which prison is the only option available. In these situations offenders should be able to access drug and alcohol treatment, mental health services and education and training. Instead, we have the unacceptable situation where our prisons are so crowded that vulnerable people, including youngsters, are being held for extended periods of time in police cells."

"Prison expansion is unsustainable. In the last budget the government announced \$78.6 million over two years to add 357 beds to existing prisons. However, the budget was silent on the long term costs of maintaining these prison beds and the growing operating costs of prisons which have increased by \$164 million over the past two years."

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.

MEDIA ENQUIRIES

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