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## VICTORIAN PRISONERS DESERVE PROPER HEALTHCARE

Victorian prisoners must be given immediate access to health services and a framework for communicable diseases must be established, Jesuit Social Services said today following the release of an Ombudsman report which found that prisoners' healthcare needs were not being met.

Jesuit Social Services Chief Executive Officer, Julie Edwards said the Government must provide the resources and funding needed to fix the currently inadequate system and provide proper healthcare services to all Victorian prisoners.

"When it comes to the healthcare of prisoners, what must not be forgotten is that the overwhelming majority of prisoners return to the community at the conclusion of their sentence.

"Whether you're a community member or prisoner, we all deserve the opportunity to access healthcare services and be treated with dignity," Ms Edwards said.

"The lax approach to their healthcare means that unhealthy prisoners will contribute to our hospital and healthcare costs when they are released. So one way or another we all pay for this.

"It is unacceptable that there are not enough psychiatric beds for those with a mental illness, considering that schizophrenia and bipolar disorder are almost 10 times more prevalent amongst prisoners than in the broader community.

"The Ombudsman's finding that 41 per cent of Victorian prisoners have hepatitis C compared with 1 per cent in the general population is an alarming statistic illustrating that the healthcare needs of prisoners are being neglected.

"A Communicable Disease Policy is a step in the right direction to reducing the spread of hepatitis C as is ensuring condoms are made available in all male prisons.

"Providing healthcare services in prisons is not only in the best interests of prisoners, it will also reduce pressure on the public health system and the likelihood of infectious disease spreading into the community when prisoners are released.

"It comes as no surprise that mental illness is more prevalent amongst prisoners, with research showing there is a direct correlation between mental health, inadequate education and training, poverty, homelessness, addiction problems and offending.

"According to Jesuit Social Services' research, conducted by Professor Tony Vinson, the most disadvantaged three per cent of Australian localities have almost double the rate of disability support and psychiatric admissions, double the rate of unemployment, more than 2.5 times the rate of long term unemployment, more than double the rate of criminal convictions and almost three times the rate of imprisonment.

**Jesuit Social Services works with over 500 young people a year, the majority of whom are high risk young people with complex and multiple problems and needs; such complex needs include mental health problems, disability (including intellectual disability), drug and alcohol misuse, homelessness, and health problems.**

**Jesuit Social Services CEO, Julie Edwards is available for comment.**

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