

**1st May 2012**

**Jesuit Social Services' Response to 2012-13 State Budget**

Jesuit Social Services is concerned that major capital spending projects announced in today's budget come at the expense of support services for disadvantaged Victorians.

Responding to the release of the 2012-13 budget, Jesuit Social Services Acting CEO, Sally Parnell said, "Today's budget contains some welcome measures, most notably \$366 million in funding for the protection and support of vulnerable children.

"However we are concerned about the state government's focus on major capital projects such as \$670 million towards new prisons. This commitment ignores the fact that prisons are an expensive way to deal with the consequences of crime as opposed to less costly investment in tackling its causes.

"Research has shown that prison is not a deterrent to crime. Indeed it increases the chances of individuals reoffending. Of course there are circumstances where the interests of justice and the community mean that imprisonment is necessary, yet in light of established evidence on the ineffectiveness of imprisonment, it should be used as an option of last resort, especially in relation to young offenders.

"We do not oppose measures to improve the standards of custodial accommodation, however there are demonstrably more effective and efficient means for decreasing the stress on capacity that is currently faced - sentencing policy and practice, appropriate services for individuals with complex mental health and drug and alcohol problems, and improving the efficacy of programs aimed at rehabilitation and diversion from the justice system are proven to assist in reducing crime and recidivism.

"We understand the difficult situation facing the government with diminishing revenues and a range of competing priorities for spending. However, services that intervene to address social problems at an early stage offer value for money - they reduce burdens on what are often more expensive later stage services. An example is the Opening Doors initiative, which has sought to reduce the number of individuals who become homeless by providing better access to housing services. The state government has chosen not to extend funding for this service in the budget.

"This will serve to compound the disadvantage experienced by some of the most vulnerable Victorians.

"This is just one of several of the government's decisions that are ultimately lost opportunities to invest in cost effective support services that provide a better future for disadvantaged and vulnerable members of our community."

**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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