

**MEDIA RELEASE**

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**State Budget prison build a flawed approach to community safety**

Jesuit Social Services is disappointed that the 2013-14 Victorian State Budget has favoured prison expansion over initiatives to tackle underlying causes of offending.

Commenting on yesterday's state Budget, Jesuit Social Services' CEO, Julie Edwards said, "This is the third budget in a row which has poured millions of dollars into Victoria's prisons. This money should have been used to fund much needed support services that address the underlying causes of offending. Instead, we are adding more beds to prisons to meet demand resulting from reforms to sentencing, bail and parole laws.

"In order to better promote community safety, law and order policy should seek to divert offenders away from prison. 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."

The 2013-14 Budget has not addressed an existing shortfall in funding for prison services that was identified by the Victorian Auditor-General in 2012. Noting the effect of this, Ms Edwards said, "55% of Victorian prisoners have drug and alcohol issues, 43% of male and 33% of female prisoners have acquired brain injuries, and only 7.2% have completed secondary education. We are locking greater numbers of people up without providing them with support to overcome serious problems that contribute to their offending."

Ms Edwards also identified the unsustainable nature of the current prison expansion, "The Government will spend \$78.6 million over two years adding 357 beds to existing prisons. The Budget is silent on the long term costs of maintaining these prison beds yet, in reality, these will add to the growing operating costs of prisons. These costs have already increased by \$164 million over the past two years.

"Surely a better use of this money would be to align ourselves with International trends and invest in diversionary initiatives that have a proven track record of building safer communities through reducing reoffending instead of prisons which have been shown to entrench criminal behaviours."

**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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