



SUMMARY

Jesuit Social Services 2017/18 budget submission

Jesuit Social Services works with and advocates for people with multiple and complex needs.

The people we work with are some of the most marginalised members of the community who are experiencing multiple and complex needs such as involvement in the criminal justice and child protection systems, homelessness and substance abuse problems.

While Victoria's social and welfare systems meet the needs of the majority of residents, they are often not adapted to cater for society's most vulnerable members.

Our submission to the 2017-18 Victorian State Budget recognises that a whole-of-government approach – where service systems work together and target locations of entrenched disadvantage – is the most effective way to meet the needs of this small group of people.

About Jesuit Social Services

We work to build a just society by advocating for social change and promoting the health and wellbeing of disadvantaged people, families and communities.

We do this by working directly to address disadvantage and by influencing hearts and minds for social change through service delivery, education, capacity building, advocacy and leadership development.

Our work is focused on four key areas:

- Justice and crime prevention
- Mental health and wellbeing
- Settlement and community building
- Education, training and employment.

PRIORITY AREAS

Entrenched disadvantage

Dropping off the Edge 2015, published by Jesuit Social Services and Catholic Social Services Australia, showed that a small number of communities across Australia are overburdened by multiple and complex forms of disadvantage including unemployment, family violence, criminal convictions and child maltreatment.

We call on the Victorian Government, in partnership with the community, to act immediately to put in place structures, plans and resources to help our most vulnerable communities break the web of disadvantage.

Recommendation: Develop a whole-of-government, long-term strategic approach to entrenched and localised disadvantage.

Reducing crime

Victoria's recidivism rate is at a 10-year high of 44.1 per cent (2014-15). This represents a significant cost to the Victorian community and also a significant opportunity for savings.

Modelling undertaken by Jesuit Social Services in 2014 shows that a modest 15 per cent reduction in the rate of male reoffending could save the corrections system up to \$23.4 million per year over the long term.

Reducing the state's recidivism rate can be achieved by piloting a community capacity building approach to community crime prevention in disadvantaged communities, and continuing investment in place-based targeted grants as part of the Community Crime Prevention Program.

This would also result in significant savings beyond prisons, including for mental health units, hospitals, police and other community support services.

Recommendations

- **Reduce reoffending by 15 per cent by piloting a community capacity building approach to community crime prevention in disadvantaged communities.**
- **Continue to invest in place-based targeted grants as part of the Community Crime Prevention Program.**

Investing in programs that enhance social cohesion

We believe that the most effective way to help people address the underlying drivers of criminal behaviour, particularly for newly arrived communities, is to take preventative approaches.

For almost 40 years Jesuit Social Services has engaged with successive waves of migrant groups in the areas of community development, criminal justice, and training and employment.

We call on the Victorian Government to partner with local communities and respected leaders, including youth leaders, to assist them to identify at risk youth and to help facilitate pathways to purposeful activity.

Recommendation: Strengthen social cohesion by adopting a community development and capacity building approach, and expanding restorative practices.

Male Violence

While there are many established organisations that support victims of men's violence, there remains a significant gap in understanding and responding to boys and men who use violence or are at risk of doing so.

There is an identified need for a broader range of interventions for men who use violence than currently available, and for innovation and an expanded evidence base about strategies that are effective in stopping male violence.

Jesuit Social Services proposes the establishment of an action-oriented body focused on finding solutions to the problem of male violence.

This institute would develop early intervention responses and work with police and courts to inform these strategies.

Recommendation: Invest in the establishment of a dedicated body to address male violence, including establishment funding of \$4.5m over four years and specific funding of \$5.5m over four years for the design, piloting and evaluation of early intervention responses to boys and young men using violence.

Housing

The lack of availability of safe, secure and stable housing is a major issue for many but particularly those with multiple and complex needs, evidenced by the fact that 30 per cent of people exiting prison do so into homelessness.

Our research and experience has shown that secure and stable accommodation, coupled with assistance to sustain housing and build capabilities, can enable people with complex needs to maintain their housing and more productively participate in the community.

A diversity of housing options – such as transitional supported living arrangements and lead tenant housing – is critical to meet the varying needs of society’s most vulnerable members.

Recommendation: Invest in a diversity of housing options for people with multiple and complex needs, including:

- **Fund a head-leasing and housing first pilot to assist people who face barriers entering the private rental market or accessing social housing.**
- **Invest in and expand supported housing options for people who do not have adequate independent living skills.**
- **Fund supported housing models, such as Next Steps and Perry House, for vulnerable women who require supported living arrangements.**

Out of Home Care

There are clear links between young people’s involvement in the out-of-home care and youth justice systems.

The Youth Parole Board reports that 62 per cent of youth parole clients were current or former Child Protection clients, and 36 per cent of youth justice clients had parents or siblings who had been imprisoned.

We believe there is an opportunity to work in a better way with young people in challenging situations in out-of-home care, including the expansion of restorative justice conferencing to these placements.

Extending the age of young people leaving out-of-home care from the current 18 to 21 would allow young people a graduated transition into adulthood.

Recommendations:

- **Expand restorative justice conferencing to out-of-home care placement.**
- **Extend the age of young people leaving out-of-home care to 21 years, and invest in additional services to support this approach.**

Youth Justice

Victoria has been a leader in youth justice approaches, however we now need to implement a range of reforms to ensure vulnerable children and young people are steered away from the criminal justice system wherever possible.

This includes specific cultural responses appropriate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and raising the age of criminal responsibility from 10 years to 12 years in line with United Nations recommendations.

Recommendations:

- **Expand the Central After Hours Assessment and Bail Placement Service (CAHABPS) and after hours support to divert children and young people from custody, including funding for:**
 - **Operation from 3am to 9am (Monday to Friday) and from 3am to 10am (Saturday, Sunday and Public Holidays)**
 - **Extended coverage to provide outreach services and face-to-face assessments in major regional centres during peak periods where there are high volumes of youth justice involvement**
 - **Brokerage funding for CAHABPS to purchase emergency short term accommodation placements and support from a register of providers on a needs basis**
- **Invest in additional support for young people sentenced to youth justice orders (and their families).**
- **Invest in targeted but time-limited intensive case management support for young people following participation in a youth justice group conference.**
- **Invest in more intensive case management with the small group of young people committing a high number of offences, including family work and supporting education, training and employment pathways, offered after hours and on weekends.**

- **Expand the Barreng Moorop model throughout Victoria to provide a whole-of-family approach in Koori communities.**
- **Raise the age of criminal responsibility to 12 years and fund a pilot program that takes a restorative and welfare approach to anti-social behaviour in children under the age of 12.**

Adult Justice

We welcome a number of Victorian Government initiatives to support the rehabilitation of prisoners.

We recommend the Victorian Government invest in more intensive transition support services for highly vulnerable people exiting prison, such as an expansion of the Judy Lazarus Transition Centre which currently only has 25 beds for male prisoners.

Addressing the housing needs of people leaving prison is also a critical issue. Having stable and affordable housing can make a significant difference in the life of a person leaving prison and whether they reoffend, yet 31 per cent of prisoners exit custody into homelessness.

Safe and affordable housing is fundamental to people's ability to get their lives back on track.

Recommendations:

- **Commit to reducing the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the justice system by:**
 - **Funding a community capacity building pilot in an Aboriginal community**
 - **Fund a pilot therapeutic jurisprudence response that incorporates a whole-of-family approach from an Indigenous perspective**
 - **Fund ongoing cultural awareness training for all staff in prisons and those delivering services to prisoners**
 - **Strengthen the capacity of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to work within the justice system**
 - **Fund a continuum of support for Aboriginal prisoners from pre-release to post-release that is built on trusted relationships with a single Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation to provide consistent, culturally appropriate support exiting prison**
- **Invest in more intensive transition support services for highly vulnerable people leaving prison by expanding the Judy Lazarus Transition Centre to enable a greater proportion of the prisoner population to access intensive transitional support, including an equivalent transitional support facility for women.**
- **Invest in more intensive, therapeutic interventions focused on personal and vocational skill building, housing support, counselling and reintegration support for young adults post-release and on a community corrections order.**
- **Address the housing needs of people leaving prison by establishing a diverse range of housing and support options and expanding and identifying the availability of affordable and appropriate housing options for women exiting prison.**

Mental Health

The Victorian Government has committed to halve the number of suicides over the next decade, which is heartening.

British researchers have found that bereaved people are 65 per cent more likely to attempt suicide if they are grieving for loved ones who took their own lives.

Recommendation: Develop secure, long-term funding for postvention, early intervention services for suicide bereavement, and increase access to suicide bereavement services for regional and rural areas.