



SUBMISSION TO THE 2017/2018 VICTORIAN STATE BUDGET

October 2016



Jesuit
Social Services
Building a Just Society

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Introduction

Jesuit Social Services welcomes the opportunity to make a submission on the *2017/18 Victoria State Budget*.

The Andrews Government's first two budgets included welcome investments in education, vulnerable children and families, employment, public transport and tackling family violence.

In a tight budget environment, spending must prioritise basic services that enable communities to flourish. These services are the fabric needed to address the very social problems that contribute to crime, educational disengagement, concentrations of long term unemployment, drug and alcohol problems and family dysfunction.

Our Cohort

Jesuit Social Services works with and advocates for people with multiple and complex needs. These people are often some of the most disadvantaged Australians. They can face a range of co-occurring and interrelated issues, such as homelessness, disability, substance misuse, health problems, and involvement in the child protection and criminal justice systems. These overlapping issues often mean that recovery is harder to achieve and sustain.

For this small number of people in Victoria, the complexity of their needs means that they struggle to remain engaged in formal treatment and support services. While our social and welfare systems are able to meet the needs of the majority of Victorians, they are often not adapted to cater for Victoria's most vulnerable people. For this reason, soft-entry points and outreach services play a crucial role in engaging at risk people, who may not have the capacity to actively seek out services.

For people with multiple and complex needs, a whole-of-person approach is critical in addressing the unique mix of intersecting and overlapping issues that each individual faces. For many of our program participants, developing skills such as independent living skills and interpersonal skills, and building their confidence, are the building blocks to recovery.

With this understanding, we recognise that a whole-of-government approach, where the service systems work together and target locations of entrenched disadvantage, is the most effective way to meet the needs of society's most vulnerable.

This is how to make a real difference, and underpins our recommendations in this year's submission.

Jesuit Social Services: Who we are and what we do

Jesuit Social Services works to build a just society by advocating for social change and promoting the health and wellbeing of disadvantaged people, families, and communities.

Jesuit Social Services works where the need is greatest and where it has the capacity, experience and skills to make the most difference. Jesuit Social Services values all persons and seeks to engage with them in a respectful way, that acknowledges their experiences and skills and gives them the opportunity to harness their full potential.

We do this by working directly to address disadvantage and by influencing hearts and minds for social change. We strengthen and build respectful, constructive relationships for:

- **Effective services** – by partnering with people most in need and those who support them to address disadvantage
- **Education** – by providing access to life-long learning and development
- **Capacity building** – by refining and evaluating our practice and sharing and partnering for greater impact
- **Advocacy** – by building awareness of injustice and advocating for social change based on grounded experience and research
- **Leadership development** – by partnering across sectors to build expertise and commitment for justice.

The promotion of **education, lifelong learning and capacity building** is fundamental to all our activity. We believe this is the most effective means of helping people to reach their potential and exercise their full citizenship. This, in turn, strengthens the broader community.

Our service delivery and advocacy focuses on the following key areas:

- **Justice and crime prevention** – people involved with the justice system
- **Mental health and wellbeing** – people with multiple and complex needs and those affected by suicide, trauma and complex bereavement
- **Settlement and community building** – recently arrived immigrants and refugees and disadvantaged communities
- **Education, training and employment** – people with barriers to sustainable employment.

Currently our direct services and volunteer programs are located in Victoria, New South Wales and Northern Territory, and include:

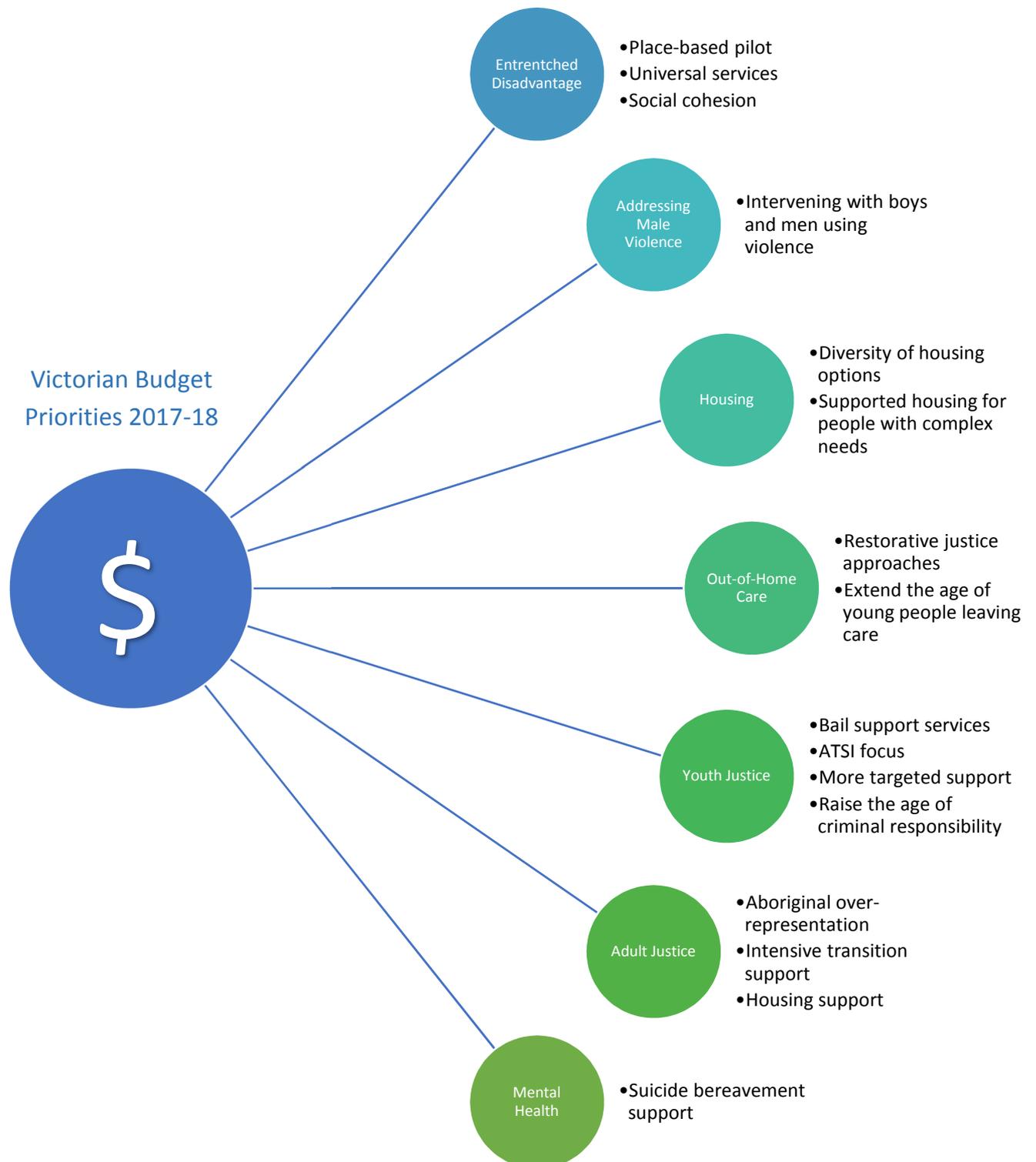
- **Brosnan Services:** supporting young people and adults in the justice system, and assisting them to make a successful transition from custody back into the community. Within the suite of services are Perry House, Dillon House and Youth Justice Community Support Services.
- **Jesuit Community College:** increasing opportunities for people constrained by social and economic disadvantage to participate in education, work and community life and reach their full potential.

- **Settlement Programs:** working with newly arrived migrants and refugees across metropolitan Melbourne, including the African-Australian and Vietnamese communities.
- **Connexions:** delivering intensive support and counselling for young people with co-occurring mental health, substance and alcohol misuse problems.
- **Artful Dodgers Studios:** providing pathways to education, training and employment for young people with multiple and complex needs associated with mental health, substance abuse and homelessness.
- **The Outdoor Experience:** offering an alternative treatment service through a range of outdoor intervention programs for young people aged 15 – 25 years, who have or have had issues with alcohol and/or other drugs.
- **Support After Suicide:** supporting people bereaved by suicide, including children and young people.
- **Just Leadership:** Working in partnership with community and corporate enterprises to foster leadership for a just society. This includes the African Australian Inclusion Program, a professional bridging program developed in partnership with the National Australia Bank providing paid work experience and a pathway to ongoing employment.
- **Capacity building** activities in NSW (Just Reinvest project in Bourke) and the Northern Territory with Aboriginal communities to improve their situation and to have more control over their lives.

Research, advocacy and policy are coordinated across all program and major interest areas of Jesuit Social Services. Our advocacy is grounded in the knowledge, expertise and experiences of program staff and participants, as well as academic research and evidence. We seek to influence policies, practices, legislation and budget investment to positively influence participants' lives and improve approaches to address long term social challenges. We do this by working collaboratively with the community sector to build coalitions and alliances around key issues, and building strong relationships with key decision-makers and the community.

Our Learning and Practice Development Unit builds the capacity of our services through staff development, training and evaluation, as well as articulating and disseminating information on best practice approaches to intervening with participants across our programs.

Overview of our recommendations



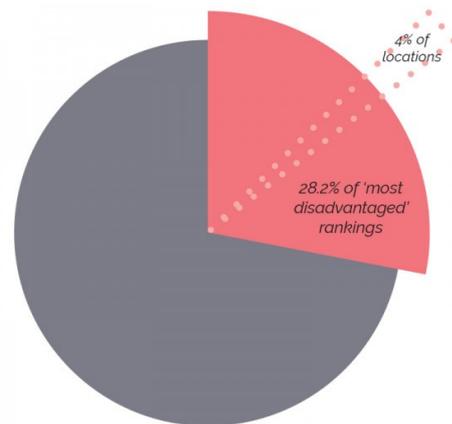
Our wider context – The challenge of overcoming disadvantage

Every Australian should have access to the opportunities in life that will enable them to flourish – to complete their education, to get a job, to access safe and affordable housing, to raise their children in safe communities and to see the next generation thrive.

In 2015, Jesuit Social Services along with Catholic Social Services Australia released the findings of its fourth *Dropping off the Edge 2015 Report (DOTE)*¹, which found that complex and entrenched disadvantage continues to be experienced by a small but persistent number of locations in each state and territory across Australia, including in Victoria. Just 27 postcodes (4% of total) account for 28.2% of the highest rank positions across 22 indicators of disadvantage (see diagram below).

Of particular concern for Jesuit Social Services is the concentration and web-like structure of disadvantage within a small number of communities across the state. Our research found that those living in the 3 per cent most disadvantaged postcodes in Victoria are:

- twice as likely to have criminal convictions
- 3 times more likely to be experiencing long term unemployment
- 2.6 times more likely to have experienced domestic violence
- 2.4 times more likely to be on disability support.



The persistent nature of locational disadvantage becomes obvious when we compare the findings of our 2015 study with previous studies undertaken in 2007, 2004 and 1999. For example, 25 of the state's 40 most disadvantaged postcodes in DOTE 2015 were also found to be 'most disadvantaged' in the 2007 study² (the other 15 postcodes did not show significant increases or decreases) and the postcodes in the most extreme categories have been quite consistent over the past 15 years (in 1999, 8 of the 12 names in the top two bands were the same for 2015).

Jesuit Social Services has consistently argued that public policy must pay greater attention to the role of structural factors and social inequality as key determinants of health and wellbeing. These are drivers of demand for community services.

In addition to addressing structural determinants, the Government can also tackle disadvantage through the provision of services. Here investment must be forward looking and preventative. From our experience, we know the best way to reduce crime and the burden on our criminal justice system is to tackle its root causes. In order to do this we need effective universal services in education, health and family services, as well as access to safe and affordable housing. We need to be able to respond to people in our community who fall through the cracks, and provide holistic interventions during times of crisis. And, fundamentally, we need to commit to long-term, local, community-led solutions in areas of deepest disadvantage.

The community sector, businesses and private philanthropy all have a vital role to play as key partners with the Government. Jesuit Social Services is proud to be an active member of Victoria's vibrant community sector and to partner with the Government in delivering services.

Priority areas for the 2017-18 Victorian State Budget

Entrenched disadvantage

Initiative 1: Invest in long-term, place-based responses to entrenched disadvantage

Without a sustained, collaborative, long-term commitment across the government, community and business sectors, there is a significant risk that some of the state's most severely disadvantaged communities will continue to 'drop off the edge'.

Jesuit Social Services welcomes the Victorian Government's investment in strategies and programs that address the needs of vulnerable Victorians, such as the Roadmap for Reform, Children and Youth Area Partnerships, Regional Partnerships, the Education State (Lookout Education Support Centres, Navigator and Reconnect), Jobs Victoria and Community Crime Prevention (Communities that Care and place based targeted grants).

It is critical that these strategies and programs are part of a longer term commitment to ensure lasting and significant change in areas of localised disadvantage. While pilot programs and initial funding for programs is an important first-step to responding to the needs of vulnerable groups, they must not become limited in scope or short-term in nature if they are to have real impact. We call on the Government to commit to a longer-term vision, with greater investment in local communities to lift participation rates in education and employment in particular. Strong leadership and collaborative effort across government is urgently required to address entrenched disadvantage.

Jesuit Social Services calls on the Victorian Government, in partnership with the community, to act immediately to put in place appropriate structures, plans and resources targeted to our most vulnerable communities to effectively break the web of disadvantage. We need a multi-layered, cooperative and coordinated strategy that is owned and driven by the community. It must involve all layers of government and the business and community sectors, reflecting shared responsibility and joint commitment to resolve this entrenched problem. This strategy must take account of the unique characteristics and circumstances of local communities and be sustained over the long term. It should be:

- **Targeted** – concentrated to specific areas of the most severe disadvantage.
- **Tailored** – Meet the community's needs and responding to the unique mix of issues facing the community.
- **Integrated**– Recognising the web of multiple and interconnected causes of disadvantage.
- **Cooperative** – Responses are founded on a strong relationship between government and departmental portfolios, integrated community initiatives and coordination between different levels of government.
- **A long term horizon** – A long-term commitment of 20 years to address complex, entrenched disadvantage.
- **Community owned and driven** – Community leaders drive the agenda, recognizing the strength within communities and work with them to build capacity, generate action, attract external resources and maintain direction and energy.

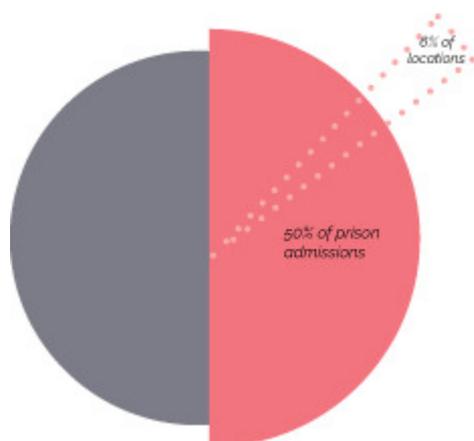
- **Engaged at the individual, community and national levels** – Recognising the complex interplay of the individual, their family circumstances, their community, and the broader social and economic environment in causing and addressing disadvantage.

Access to lifelong learning, development and employment is a critical enabler. We welcome the Government’s focus on vulnerable learners through initiatives such as the Jobs Victoria Employment Network, Reconnect and Navigator. These initiatives create an opportunity for long-term, sustainable change for disadvantaged Victorians by laying strong foundations for a place-based, whole-of-government response to localised and entrenched disadvantage. We call on the Government to maximise these opportunities by committing to a long-term investment to ensure lasting and tangible outcomes.

We recommend the Victorian Government develop a whole-of-government, long-term strategic approach to entrenched and localised disadvantage.

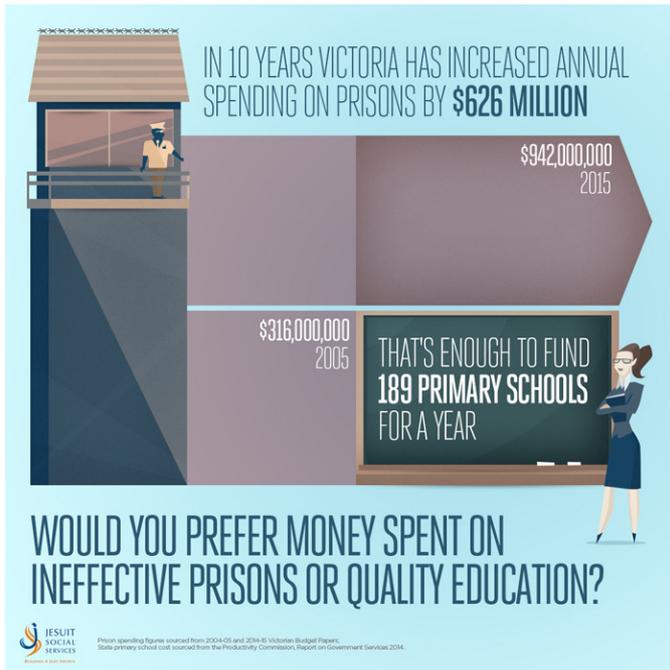
Initiative 2: Reduce crime by responding to underlying drivers in vulnerable communities

Place-based, long-term initiatives must be maximised to reduce crime. *Dropping off the Edge 2015* found that 6 per cent (42) of postcodes in Victoria accounted for half of all prison admissions. This highlights the often localised nature of crime, as well as the role of disadvantage as an underlying cause of offending.



A community capacity building approach to crime prevention recognises the role that disadvantage in communities plays in the prevalence of crime. This cost-effective measure directs funding to communities with high levels of crime to fund community-led initiatives as a means of preventing crime. Over time, these initiatives lead to savings in justice spending due to a reduction in levels of crime. These community-driven responses target underlying issues that the community has identified as important to them. The Just Reinvest NSW project in Bourke is already seeing good results. There has been an

improvement in school attendance, a sharp drop in domestic violence assaults and it currently has the lowest number of people jailed for driving offences that it has seen in 10 years.³



The Victorian Ombudsman identified the need for more innovative approaches to crime reduction and the efficacy of a community capacity building approach in Texas which led to a 1,125 drop in prisoner numbers.⁴

By comparison, Victoria's recidivism rate is at a 10-year high of 44.1 per cent (for 2014-15), up from a low of 34 per cent four years ago⁵. Recidivism represents a significant cost to the Victorian community and presents a significant opportunity for savings. Modelling undertaken for Jesuit Social Services in

2014⁶ shows that a 15 per cent reduction in the rate of male reoffending could save the corrections system between \$15.2 million and \$23.4 million per year over the long term. Achieving this reduction would also result in significant savings beyond prisons, including for mental health units, hospitals, police and other community support services.

We recommend the Victorian Government reduce reoffending by 15 per cent by:

- **piloting a sustained community capacity building approach to community crime prevention in disadvantaged communities for a minimum of 10 years**
- **continuing to invest in place-based targeted grants as part of the Community Crime Prevention Program**

Initiative 3: Invest in programs that enhance social cohesion

The unique challenge of maintaining social cohesion and public safety was given vivid expression in the CBD during Moomba earlier this year, as well as through a series of well publicised motor vehicle theft incidents. The actions of a minority group are serious and require a strong response. It is critical that the underlying drivers of this criminal behaviour are addressed in a holistic manner. We believe that preventative approaches that adopt a community development, capacity building and restorative justice lens offer the most effective way to do this, accompanied by intensive interventions that target the young people engaged in offending behaviour, their families and communities.

For almost 40 years Jesuit Social Services has been engaging effectively with successive waves of new migrant groups in the areas of community development, criminal justice and training and employment to improve personal resilience, and to build a strong sense of belonging and social

cohesiveness. We aim to strengthen Victoria's social cohesion by addressing issues of belonging, leadership, social justice and equality, participation, acceptance and worth.

Our programs in this space include our community building work in western Melbourne with newly arrived communities (particularly Somali, Eritrean, Ethiopian, Afghan, Iranian, Karen and Sudanese groups), our leadership programs for young people from African countries, our African Visitation And Mentoring Program (to help prisoners with an African background to transition successfully back to the community), our African Australian Inclusion Program (to help skilled migrants gain local work experience and a sense of belonging) and our work with Pacific Island young people and their families living in and around Dandenong to improve cultural connection, reduce crime and build employment pathways. Through these programs we have developed respectful and effective relationships with members of the African, Maori and Pacific Islander communities.

To strengthen social cohesion and reduce crime in the community the Victorian Government must adopt the following approaches:

- *Adopt a community development and capacity building approach* – by partnering with local communities and respected leaders, including youth leaders, to assist them to identify at-risk youth, as well as implement effective community development and education, training and employment programs to: build community resilience; address underlying drivers of young people's challenging behaviour; and facilitate pathways to purposeful activity (i.e. education, training and employment).
- *Expand restorative practices* – by working with frontline staff (e.g. Victoria Police Youth Resource Officers) to identify young people early on (such as at the police cautioning stage) and then engage with young people to help them understand the potential harm of their actions on individuals, families and the broader community through a restorative justice approach.
- *Develop intensive interventions* – that target young people, their families and community, engaged in offending behaviour.

By adopting a community capacity building lens, using restorative justice practices and continuing these with intensive interventions, we can effectively tackle the criminogenic factors driving the at-risk or offending behaviour of young people. Supporting local communities to develop their own solutions is critical to achieving this.

We recommend the Victorian Government strengthen social cohesion by adopting a community development and capacity building approach and expanding restorative practices.

Addressing Male Violence

Jesuit Social Services commends the commitment the Andrews Government has taken to tackling family violence in Victoria. The immense effort will see long-term improvements for women and children facing family violence.

While there are currently many established and invaluable organisations that support the victims of men's violence, and a small range of behaviour change programs for perpetrators of violence generally linked to the justice system, 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 is currently available, and for innovation and an expanded evidence base about strategies that are effective in stopping male violence.

Despite the cycle of harm played out across generations, not enough is being done to support children and young people's safety, and to respond early to children and young people at risk of becoming perpetrators themselves. In the words of a Jesuit Social Services Youth Justice Community Support Service Coordinator:

We are currently coming across a number of young men who are perpetrating family violence either with family members (mum) or with their partners (females). We recently had a worker trying to find a men's behaviour change program and was calling all services who ran this type of program with the young man to make a referral. All places contacted had waiting lists of over three months and were all targeted at adult males. There were no youth specific male behaviour change programs. The young men we work with who perpetrate this violence have all had histories of witnessing and often experiencing family violence as a child.

The experience related above is not uncommon. Adolescent violence in the home comprises around 10 per cent of all family violence incident reports to police.⁷

The importance of working with men and boys who use violence was noted in the Royal Commission into Family Violence:

Key areas of attention must involve improving risk assessment and management; monitoring perpetrator behaviour; harnessing the authority of the courts; working with perpetrators in ways that help them take responsibility, change their behaviours and address any specific risk factors that contribute to their use of violence; exploring different program models; and delivering programs and other interventions that are proven to work.

To respond to this issue, Jesuit Social Services is working to establish an action-oriented body focused on finding solutions to the problem of male violence.

The body will be a central hub of ideas that will use evidence-based research and action to design, pilot and evaluate interventions to promote behaviour change and prevent male violence.

This initiative will develop early intervention responses, initially targeting boys and young men using violence against family members, and young fathers using violence. The intervention will have a clear focus on:

- initial assessment of need and the development of a care/response plan
- working with Police and Courts to inform the development of early intervention strategies designed to divert boys and young men from entering the criminal justice system
- developing practical options for police and first responders to use in responding to critical incidents of violence
- avoiding the boy/young person being held in police stations or youth justice facilities pending development of an appropriate intervention, and
- ensuring the young person is held in a safe place for an appropriate period of time.

This will be followed by addressing other cohorts of boys and young men who use violence and designing responses that suit differing cohorts.

We recommend the Victorian Government invest in the establishment of a dedicated body to address male violence, to include:

- **establishment funding of \$4.5m over four years**
- **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 availability of safe, secure and stable housing is a major issue for many in our community, but particularly for people with mental illness, addictions and other complex needs. We know that 30 per cent of people exiting prison do so into homelessness⁸, while a University of NSW study on multiple and complex needs found those with complex needs experience greater homelessness and housing disadvantage.⁹ Working with young people in the justice system, we know that a small number of young people remain incarcerated given the lack of access to a home.

Homelessness services provide varying levels of housing advice, accommodation and support. While these services provide critical interventions for people with temporary housing crisis or less complex underlying issues, they also must operate in an environment where resources are limited and there are significant barriers to building a highly skilled workforce. These pressures mean that they often struggle to support the small but significant number of people in the community with a combination of complex needs and challenging behaviours that put them at heightened risk of prolonged homelessness, social exclusion and of contact with the justice system, such as women and families fleeing domestic violence, people leaving prison and young people leaving out-of-home care.

A barrier for people finding stable housing, can be entry into the private rental market. Particularly for women and families fleeing domestic violence, or people leaving prison, the lack of rental history and financial barriers can prevent access to the housing market. Financial barriers can often prevent young people accessing both the private market and social housing. Very few social housing providers accommodate young people as their financial modelling does not cater for people on low incomes.

Lacking independent living skills can also be a barrier to maintaining stable accommodation. Many young people leaving care, or young people leaving the justice system, have not yet developed the independent living skills necessary for stable accommodation. For this cohort, transitional, supported housing, with after-hours workers, is central to a pathway to stable, independent living. Without intensive support to access and sustain appropriate forms of housing, many of these people will continue to experience homelessness, and will have contact with other acute services in the community.

Investment is needed in housing and support packages that aim to stabilise housing and build social inclusion. Our research and experience have 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.¹⁰

Jesuit Social Services' Next Steps and Perry House models are two such examples of supported living arrangements. Perry House is a living skills residential program for young people with intellectual disabilities who are involved with the criminal or youth justice systems. Perry House workers facilitate the development of independent living skills from a strength based practice approach which promotes resilience and a 'can do' approach to life. Each resident is supported to develop a 12 month program plan which aims to optimise their capacity to live independently in the community. Activities may include reconnection to family, engagement in employment, training or education, financial management, good communication and use of technologies.

To meet the varying needs of society's most vulnerable people, a diversity of housing options is critical. Options include transitional, supported living arrangements such as residential programs, lead tenant housing, step down models, and approaches that support individuals' entry into the private housing market through housing first models and head-leasing.¹ It is also important to consider housing options through a gendered lens to ensure women have access to safe, secure, long-term housing.

We recommend the Victorian Government invest in a diversity of housing options for people with multiple and complex needs including:

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

¹ **Lead tenant** is an out-of-home care placement option providing medium-term accommodation and support to young people aged 16-18 years, who have been placed away from the care of their families by Child Protection (Source: DHHS, Victorian Government). **Head-leasing** occurs when a social housing provider leases a property from a landlord in the private rental market and then subleases it to a person requiring housing assistance. Based on the understanding that housing is a right, the **Housing First model** secures housing as a first step to addressing social issues. It is similar to a head-leasing arrangement, however the individual has no requirement to engage in support services and the housing is permanent.

CASE STUDY: DILLON HOUSE

When Alex* first engaged with Jesuit Social Services' Next Steps program after exiting the youth detention system, his case workers recall a young man who struggled with confidence and self-motivation.

The transformation he has undergone since showcases four key elements of the Next Steps program – case management, family therapy, residential component and outreach.

Next Steps, funded by the Victorian Government as part of its Homelessness Innovation Action Projects, works to prevent homelessness for vulnerable young people aged 16-24 involved with the criminal justice system. It does this by delivering intensive case management support and providing supported accommodation through Dillon House, a three-bedroom property in inner-city Melbourne.

When Alex first came to Dillon House he was struggling with grief and mental health problems linked with his offending.

Moving into Dillon House provided him with safe and secure housing that wasn't available otherwise.

"His prospects in terms of housing and finding a home were limited," says Roger Pugh, Senior Project Officer at Jesuit Social Services.

"He enjoyed the fact that he felt he had independence but that there were also people around to help keep him safe," says Roger.

"He knew it was a safe place – a refuge – here and it was the first time he had a constant in his life."

Living at Dillon House, Alex was able to develop his independent living skills such as cooking and cleaning. He was also linked in with activities including a local gym and study opportunities.

At the same time, by addressing the root causes of his behaviour Alex was reducing the likelihood of re-offending and working towards becoming a productive member of society.

Alex lived at Dillon House for 18 months until exiting in January 2016.

"Eighteen months is a long time to work intensively with someone but it demonstrated that Alex could build trust in us," says Roger.

Alex now lives in a sharehouse with friends, where he uses the independent living skills he had developed during the program. Next Steps has also provided him with material aid and financial assistance, and he continues to meet with case workers in community settings regularly.

Whereas Alex was once too anxious to hand his resume in at a café, he is now actively handing out his resume at local businesses seeking casual employment.

"Next Steps allowed Alex to grow his identity and develop from a boy into a young man."

**not his real name*

Out-of-home care

Initiative 1: Adopt a preventative restorative justice approach to divert children in out-of-home care from the justice system

Through our research and experience, Jesuit Social Services has identified links between young people's involvement in the out-of-home care system and youth justice.

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 have been imprisoned.¹¹ Over half (57%) had first engagement with the criminal justice system at age thirteen to fifteen.

Jesuit Social Services Snapshot: 60 per cent of participants in the adult and youth justice programs **had Child Protection involvement** either as children, as parents or both.



Firstly I want to Apologize for what I did to you & your family. I have never realised what I was doing affected people lives & family so bad. I know I couldn't really express the words I really wanted to say but it was so hard having to face the embarrassment I had to say in front of everybody.

I now realise how my actions hurt the people around me. You & your dad we really hurt & that killed me inside that I had changed your lives. Nobody ever wants to go through that & I would just be as shattered if it was to happen to me.

I seriously wish I could show you how sorry I really am. Im sorry for having to change your lives. Im sorry for tramping into your property. & Im sorry for everything.

Thank you for taking your time just to face me. I know for sure it ain't an easy thing to do. You were really wonderful people & didn't deserve that. But thanks to you I have tried to change my life.

they may be little changes but there was no way I was going to change if we did not have that meeting. I hope you can get your life back to how they were without having to live in fear.

take care.

B+M Sorry about the messy writing.

Figure 1: Letter of Apology from a Youth Justice Group Conferencing Participant

In practice, we have observed young people living in out-of-home care settings being arrested and remanded over the weekend only to be released straight back to community and the same care placement setting at a court sitting on Monday. *Thinking Outside* highlighted that children in out-of-home care are highly vulnerable to being placed on remand.

Jesuit Social Services believes that there is an opportunity to work in a better way with young people who find themselves in challenging situations in out-of-home care settings. Currently these young people have limited access to a therapeutic, diversionary, restorative based process to work through the issues they face. Too often, the criminal justice system ends up being the default response for these young people. We feel that a restorative justice process using the methodology of Group Conferencing would be an effective means of addressing conflict and repairing the harms experienced by children in residential units.

Restorative Justice Group Conferencing is a proven tool that works particularly well when used alongside purposeful, intentional case management targeted at the needs of the young person, their family and more broadly at community. Importantly, it is also a process that offers the victims of crime and their family a stronger voice in the justice process and an opportunity to seek closure for what has often been a terrible experience in their life. Group Conferencing should be used as

part of a range of interventions to address a young person's offending and a way of starting to get the young person to have the dialogue and begin to consider the impact of their offending.

Additional investment would complement the principles outlined in the *Roadmap for Reform* by providing an effective therapeutic and restorative intervention at the pre-court/pre-sentence stage to address issues that contribute to young people's challenging behaviour within residential units and therefore divert them from possible criminal charges.

We recommend the Victorian Government expand restorative justice conferencing to out-of-home care placement.

CASE STUDY: YOUTH JUSTICE GROUP CONFERENCING

Participating in a Youth Justice Group Conference has been a turning point for Lucas. Arrested for burglary and ordered to attend the diversionary program which aims to intervene at an early stage of contact with the justice system and prevent ongoing crime, Lucas, aged 16, was made to face his victims and learn the true impact of his offence.

Lucas has been out of school since he was 13 and hasn't been participating in any programs that would help keep his life on track. Living out of home, he was 'bored and 'frustrated by family expectations to find stable employment. Although he did want to get a job, he didn't know where to start and found it hard to ask for help even though he desperately needed it. Lucas broke into a family home and burgled it because, "he wanted nice stuff" and didn't think the owners would be particularly impacted by their missing items.

Sitting in a room across from the father and daughter victims, with both parties aided by family and professional supports, Lucas was confronted with the reality of his actions and felt great remorse for what he had done and how the victims felt about it. Both Lucas and the father and daughter spoke about what happened, how they were affected and made a plan to make things better.

Lucas promised to write two apology letters and return the daughter's iPad which he had stolen. In an effort to prevent further offending, Lucas plans to get his life back on track by enrolling in a plastering pre-apprenticeship at TAFE, committing to avoid extended periods in the area which the offence occurred, attend counselling and get his learner's permit. Lucas is now hopefully for his future and is determined to turn his life around.

Initiative 2: Extending the age of young people leaving out-of-home care

Jesuit Social Services endorses the Home Stretch campaign, advocating for the extension of out-of-home care to the age of 21. The current requirement of young people to leave out-of-home care at the age of 18 is seeing many young people transitioning from out-of-home care directly into welfare, the justice system or homelessness supports.

Children and young people in out-of-home care are some of society's most vulnerable. They have traumatic histories of abuse and neglect that they are often still recovering from. They often experience inadequacies in the quality of their care (this has been highlighted in a 2015 Senate

Inquiry and the Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry). They also can have limited support networks beyond their care setting.

Currently, young people leaving out-of-home care are:

- **more likely to come from areas of lower socioeconomic status:** in 2014-2015, 37% of children involved with child protection were from the lowest socioeconomic area¹²
- **more likely to be of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children are 10 times more likely to be in out-of-home care¹³
- **more likely to come into contact with the justice system:** 62% of children on youth justice orders in Victoria had a current or previous Child Protection order¹⁴
- **more likely to experience periods of homelessness:** 35% of young people experience homelessness within the first 12 months of leaving care¹⁵
- **more likely to have or to develop mental illness**¹⁶
- **more likely to have low levels of educational attainment:** a study of 77 care leavers found that 53% had an educational attainment level of Year 10 or below¹⁷
- **more likely to have a problem with substance abuse:** a study of 77 care leavers found that 53% had a substance abuse problem¹⁸

International research highlights that the extension of the out-of-home care system to 21 years, that provides holistic support and a stable living environment for young people, would see improvements in:

- educational and employment outcomes¹⁹
- housing stability²⁰
- physical and mental health²¹
- alcohol and drug dependency²²
- contact with the justice system²³
- civic participation and social integration²⁴

Alongside these improvements, raising the age of people leaving out-of-home care would also be cost effective. A recent report commissioned by Anglicare Victoria found that for every dollar invested in the extension of out-of-home care to 21 years, the government would gain \$1.84 in savings or increased income.²⁵

Young people leaving care need a graduated transition into adulthood that provides ongoing, holistic support for their needs. Access to stable, supported housing plays a crucial role in assisting those leaving care to transition successfully. Providing the security of a stable living environment and support from carers and support services helps to create an environment for young people where they can build their confidence as young adults and transition safely to independence. For more detail on resolving housing issues, please see the previous budget priority.

We recommend the Victorian Government 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 developed a particularly strong approach to youth justice that has effectively diverted most children from further contact with the justice system, at the same time as consistently having a youth offender rate that is far lower than the national average (21.8 per 1000 children compared with 29.7 per 1000 children nationally)²⁶. In 2014–15, Victoria had the lowest rate of young people aged 10–17 under supervision on an average day of all the states and territories at 14 per 10,000²⁷.

This is the result of policies and investment focused on preventing crime, diverting children and young people from the justice system, and supporting services and restorative justice approaches that foster positive relationships between people who offend, victims and the wider community. Partnerships between government, the courts, public sector agencies and the community sector have been critical to this success.

Through Jesuit Social Services' experience and research, particularly *Thinking Outside: Alternatives to Remand for Children (2013)*²⁸, we know that opportunities are still being missed to intervene and divert vulnerable children and young people from the criminal justice system. All too often this vulnerable group ends up having ongoing involvement in the criminal justice system. We commend the Victorian Government for its commitment to an innovative youth justice approach and call on it to take steps in the 2017/18 Budget to further invest in and strengthen the system and ensure that current gaps are addressed. In particular, we propose:

- expanding the Central After Hours Assessment and Bail Placement Service
- that community or group conferencing be introduced to the out-of-home care sector to address the over-representation of young people who, despite no prior history of offending, are drawn into the criminal justice system by the criminalisation of behaviour/s and use of police as a behavioural management response (see page 17 for details on this proposal)
- additional support for young people sentenced to youth justice orders (and their families)
- targeted but time-limited intensive case management support for young people following participation in a youth justice group conference
- 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.
- a renewed commitment to strengthening the response to Aboriginal children and their families who intersect the criminal justice system (based on the Barreng Moorop model)
- raising the age of criminal responsibility to 12 years.

Further investment in evidence-based programs and approaches such as these will strengthen our capacity to divert children and young people from the justice system. In Victoria, we are fortunate to have infrastructure and expertise in our youth justice system which can be strengthened and bolstered in order to maximise impact. Our proposals will help achieve this, along with policy reforms that would further support an effective youth justice system. The outcomes of these initiatives will be better pathways for vulnerable children and young people, less burden on Victoria's police, courts and custodial services, and ultimately a safer community.

Initiative 1: Expand resourcing to the Central After Hours Assessment and Bail Placement Service (CAHABPS) and other after-hours services

Although a majority of arrests of children and young people in Victoria take place outside of business hours, almost all services for young people are only open between 9am and 5pm on weekdays (see below for current hours). A key component of after-hours support is the Central After Hours Assessment and Bail Placement Service (CAHABPS) which assesses children, provides necessary supports, and advocates in favour of bail to police and bail justices. Placement options are often limited and there are no resources to purchase accommodation for children. Also, CAHABPS can only provide outreach services and assessments in metropolitan areas.

Eleven per cent of arrests occur outside of the CAHABPS hours of operation. There is a clear need to extend the opening hours of the service between 3.00 am and 10.00am to ensure equal and consistent access to the program after hours and provide in-person assessments in regional areas during peak periods (i.e. where there are high levels of arrests of young people out of hours).

Current Central After Hours Assessment and Bail Placement Service Hours of operation:

- Monday to Friday 5pm to 3am
- Saturday and Sunday 10am to 3am
- Public Holidays 10am to 3am

OFFENDER INCIDENTS AGED 10 - 17 YRS, ARRESTS BY TIME



Source: Crime Statistics Agency 2016

We recommend the Victorian Government expand 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.**

Initiative 2: Young people sentenced to Youth Justice Orders (and their families) to be linked with appropriate levels of support

We believe more can be done to support young people sentenced to youth justice orders (and their families) to be linked with appropriate levels of support. As the delivery of Jesuit Social Services' Youth Diversion Pilot Program has demonstrated, a brief, targeted and time-limited intervention can prevent further penetration of children and young people into the youth justice system. We believe this sort of intervention could be introduced for young people on a Probation or Youth Attendance Order to compliment the statutory role of Youth Justice workers, support young people to positively engage with family and community, and ensure links with education and training.

We recommend the Victorian Government invest in additional support for young people sentenced to youth justice orders (and their families).

Initiative 3: Targeted case management support for young people following a youth justice group conference

We believe that more can be done with young people who commit serious offences. In addition to proven programs like youth justice group conferencing, we believe many of these young people and their families would benefit from targeted but time-limited intensive case management support post-group conference. The focus of this work would hold young people and their families accountable for their commitment made at the group conference. This support would complement statutory work and focus on engaging the young person back into purposeful activity, including education, training and employment pathways.

We recommend the Victorian Government invest in targeted but time-limited intensive case management support for young people following participation in a youth justice group conference.

Initiative 4: Intensive support for young people who are committing a high number of offences

Research published by the Victorian Crimes Statistics Agency shows that the proportion of young offenders recorded for multiple incidents has increased; indeed, in 2015-16 the 3.8 per cent of high-frequency young offenders who were recorded for 11 or more incidents (i.e. 1,685 unique offenders) accounted for almost one third (28.9 per cent) of all incidents committed by those under 25²⁹. In light of this data, any strategy must tackle the drivers of repeat offending.

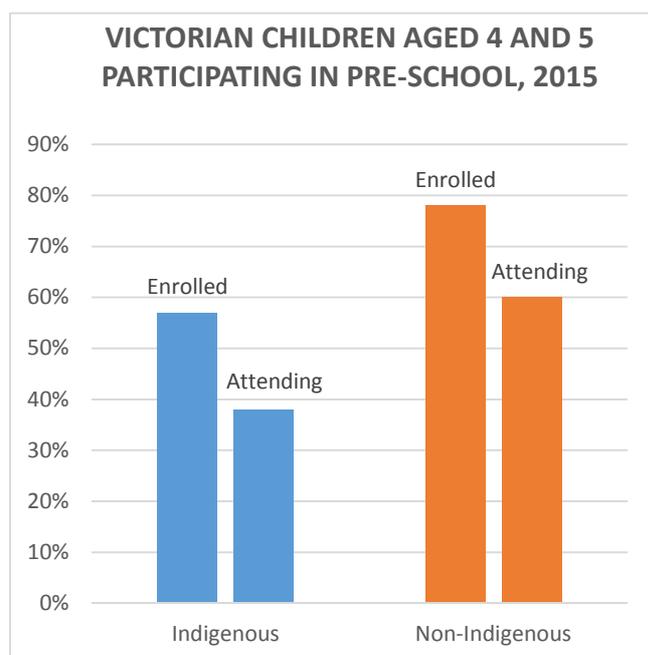
Jesuit Social Services has identified a need to deliver more intensive case management for this small group of young people who are committing a high number of offences. This includes working with the young person's family, building social and community connections, providing purposeful activity (such as The Outdoor Experience, which engages young people with alcohol and drug problems in meaningful, safe and appropriate therapeutic adventure activities and journeys) and supporting education, training and employment pathways. This would build on the Youth Justice Community Support Service by providing wrap-around and tailored support after hours and on weekends to address the complex needs of this vulnerable cohort.

We recommend the Victorian Government 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.

Initiative 5: Divert Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people from the youth justice system

Young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who first have contact with the justice system aged 14 or younger are among the highest risk indicators of subsequent involvement with the system in later life.

In Victoria, children who become involved in the youth justice system at a young age are also more likely to be Aboriginal, with 27 per cent of Aboriginal children receiving their first youth justice order at 13 years or younger, compared to 11 per cent of non-Aboriginal children.³⁰ Aboriginal children are 11 times more likely to be under youth justice supervision on an average day in Victoria compared to the non-Aboriginal population.³¹



Source: ABS. (2015). 4240.0 Preschool Education – Australia, 2015, Canberra: ABS.



Source: AIHW. (2016). Youth Justice in Australia 2014–15, Bulletin No. 133. Cat. No. AUS 198. AIHW: Canberra.

More needs to be done to divert Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people away from the youth justice system to prevent them from becoming entrenched in the justice system. Responses to Koori youth offending need to recognise the role that intergenerational trauma and disadvantage play in children and young people’s behaviour. It is equally important that responses to Koori youth offending are culturally appropriate, recognise the importance of community Elders and involve the whole family, including extended relatives.

Recognising the need to divert vulnerable children away from the youth justice system, Jesuit Social Services delivers the Barreng Moorop program in partnership with the Victorian Aboriginal Legal

Service (VALS) and the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA). Barreng Moorop works with 10-14 year old children, their siblings and their families residing in the North and West metropolitan regions of Melbourne who intersect the criminal justice system. The program provides a culturally responsive and trauma informed service to divert young Aboriginal people away from the criminal justice system. Since its inception in 2015, the Barreng Moorop has assisted 35 Aboriginal children and their families.

CASE STUDY: BARRENG MOOROP

For mother Karen, the parent of 13 year-old Caleb, Barreng Moorop has been a life-changer.

“The support we get from this program means we aren’t living paycheck to paycheck – they’ve helped supply food vouchers and pay for Caleb’s football registration. Sometimes I can take him to the pictures which I don’t have the money for myself,” she says.

“If you’re used to having nothing and you get something, it feels like a million dollars.”

Karen says it’s not just “the fun stuff” that the program has assisted with.

“They’re here to keep an eye on him, they are always asking what we need to make our lives easier.”

Karen and Caleb are working to re-build their lives after experiencing trauma such as family violence.

Seeing the difference in her son – who Karen says has become more confident and trusting as a result of the program – has been a huge gain.

“He thinks they’ve done a hell of a lot to help him. He says life is so much better now and for the first time ever he is happy for the future.”

The program, recently re-funded by a further three years by the Commonwealth Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, is delivered in partnership with Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service (VALS) and the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA).

Barreng Moorop works with the whole family and community (where appropriate) to provide a wrap-around response, understanding the composition of Aboriginal families, in which the extended family is the norm. The responsibility of child care and rearing is shared amongst a range of family members with, in many cases, a multi-generational core of kin providing primary care. In response Barreng Moorop works with, and provides support to family members with the focus of using family, community and culture as a protective factor to divert young people away from the criminal justice system.

We recommend the Victorian Government expand the Barreng Moorop model throughout Victoria to provide a whole-of-family approach in Koori communities.

Initiative 6: Raise the age of criminal responsibility to 12 years

A small number of vulnerable children enter the criminal justice system at a very young age. According to Crime Statistics Agency data, there were 418 alleged offender incidents involving children aged 10 or 11 years recorded in Victoria by Victoria Police from April 2015 – March 2016, a

19 per cent increase on the previous year.³² We know this group is among the most vulnerable in our community and the most likely to penetrate further into the criminal justice system without early intervention.

The most effective approach to prevent these children’s trajectories into the justice system is to address the issues driving their vulnerability such as family dysfunction, trauma, abuse and neglect. In line with international standards and UN rulings³³, we recommend raising the age of criminal responsibility to the age of 12 and putting in place evidence-based approaches to supporting vulnerable children who are below this age and their families with wrap around support. This could include less formal methods of holding them to account, such as restorative justice and family centred approaches.

International comparison of age of criminal responsibility

According to an international study of 90 countries, 68 per cent had a minimum criminal age of 12 or higher, with the most common age being 14 years.³⁴

AUS	NZ	CAN	ENG	USA**	FRA	GER	SWE	NED	CHN	JPN
10	10-14*	12	10	6-12	13	14	15	12	14	14

*Age varies on type and severity of crime

**Varies across states

We recommend the Victorian Government 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 years.

Adult Justice

We welcome the Victorian Government's stated commitment to slow the rate of people returning to prison³⁵ and initiatives aimed at supporting prisoners to rehabilitate contained in the 2016–17 State Budget. The Victorian Government can continue to do this by increasing the transition planning and support available to prisoners.

Initiative 1: Address the specific needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the justice system

There is significant over-representation of Aboriginal prisoners and offenders in the criminal justice system. Victoria's Aboriginal prisoner population has doubled over the past decade³⁶ and the daily average number of Indigenous prisoners increased by 77 per cent between 2010-11 and 2014-15 (compared with a 36 per cent increase for non-Indigenous prisoners)³⁷. With the high rates of incarceration of Aboriginal people, including the significant increase of Aboriginal women entering the prison system, and the links between out-of-home care placements and juvenile justice, there is a greater need to ensure the issues facing Aboriginal people in prison are front and centre of planning and delivery of prison and post-release services.

Responding to the over-incarceration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the justice system needs a long-term, whole-of-government approach that is built on trusting, strong relationships with Aboriginal organisations. A community capacity building approach provides a framework to bring together the government, community organisations, Aboriginal organisations and Aboriginal communities. Through this partnership, knowledge and capacity can be built to respond more effectively, by addressing underlying issues and strengthening connection to traditional culture and ways of living.

We recommend the Victorian Government commit to reducing the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the justice system by:

- **Funding a community capacity building pilot in an Aboriginal community**
- **Funding a pilot therapeutic jurisprudence response that incorporates a whole-of-family approach from an Indigenous perspective**
- **Funding ongoing cultural awareness training for all staff in prisons, and those delivering services to prisoners**
- **Funding identified positions in prisons for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander case managers to work with prisoners**
- **Strengthening the capacity of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to work within the justice system**
- **Funding 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**

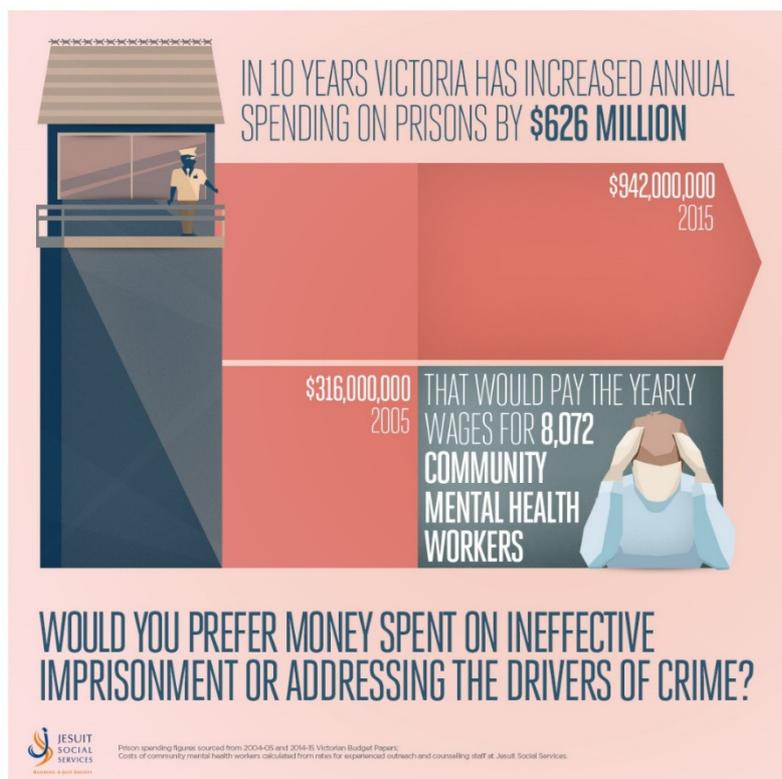
Initiative 2: Invest in more intensive transition support for highly vulnerable people exiting prison

People exiting prison in Victoria include some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged members of our community. Yet the limited support that is available to them means they often cycle through the justice system. The Victorian Ombudsman's *Investigation into the Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Prisoners in Victoria* (2015) reported that only 700 of the approximately 6,600 people who leave prison each year are provided with transitional support and most of this group receive between 3 and 22 contact hours of support. The limited nature of support means people exiting prison do not get to adequately address the problems they face and this, in turn, exacerbates the likelihood of reoffending.

A small number of male prisoners can access 25 beds at the Judy Lazarus Transitional Centre, which has been found to reduce recidivism and better prepare people for transition back to the community. This model provides a staged release which has been shown to help people develop the skills and confidence to live in the community. The recidivism rate for those who exit via the intensive transitional support program at the Judy Lazarus Centre is 10.4 per cent compared to 44.1 per cent for the overall prison population.³⁸

The women's imprisonment rate has climbed over the past decade, up 40 per cent between 2005 and 2015.³⁹

The Victorian Ombudsman has recommended that the Department of Justice and Regulation investigate options to ensure the specific needs of women prisoners are recognised. There is currently no comparable service to the Judy Lazarus Centre available to women.



We recommend the Victorian Government invest in more intensive transition support services for highly vulnerable people leaving prison by:

- **expanding the Judy Lazarus Transitional Centre to enable a greater proportion of the prisoner population to access intensive transitional support, including an equivalent transitional support facility for women.**

Initiative 3: Address the specific needs of young adults in the system

Several factors put young adults at more risk of becoming involved in offending behaviour, including high levels of mental health problems, higher levels of substance misuse, unemployment, homelessness, educational disadvantage and a lack of family support⁴⁰. We know that a significant number of young adults in the justice system are faced with considerable difficulties and that without assistance will be more likely to reoffend. Recent reports find that:

- In 2014-15 the recidivism rate for prisoners in Victoria under 25 years of age was 52.7 per cent, more than 8 per cent higher than the rate for the general population⁴¹.
- Victoria has only one dedicated youth unit, housing 35 of the 751 young offenders in adult prisons.
- Current post-release support is voluntary and some individuals, particularly younger adults, are unlikely to put themselves forward for access to post-release support programs while in custody.

However, young adults are more amenable to rehabilitation than older adults who commit the same offences. The high rates of reoffending on release from prison indicate that the current corrections system is failing too many young adults.

Currently existing transitional services (such as ReConnect) do not target young adults and as a result many young people do not access these programs, or do not receive the type of support they need. In response to this, Jesuit Social Services proposes to deliver a youth specific program (for those 18-25 years with provision for those up to 30 years of age) to break the cycle of offending before it becomes entrenched. It will address the key difficulties facing young adults including providing pathways to education, employment, housing and reconnection to family and community, as well as provide support for people to recognise the impact of their offending on individuals, family and community.

The program model will draw on our expertise in the delivery of post-released programs to young adults – including the Youth Justice Community Support Service – and work in partnership with other agencies to provide a ‘wrap around’ response.

We recommend the Victorian Government invest in more intensive, therapeutic interventions focused on personal development through personal and vocational skill building, housing support, counselling and reintegration support for young adults post-release and on a community corrections order.

Initiative 4: Address the housing needs of people leaving prison

Housing is a critical issue for people leaving prison. Having stable and affordable housing can make a significant difference in the life of a person leaving prison and whether they reoffend, yet almost a third (31%) of prisoners expect to exit custody into homelessness.⁴² In Victoria, significant limitations on the availability of housing and support mean many highly vulnerable people exiting prison are homeless or accommodated in inappropriate housing, such as unregistered private rooming houses or motels. For people seeking bail or parole, lack of suitable housing can prolong the time they spend in custody.⁴³

A lack of safe and affordable housing has been identified as a significant criminal justice and public safety issue for women exiting prison, particularly Aboriginal women.⁴⁴ Research shows that a high proportion of women who exit prison, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, are too often forced to return to unsafe and insecure housing (including family violence situations) due to a lack of affordable housing options⁴⁵, and unstable housing has been found to be the most significant factor affecting return to prison outcomes.⁴⁶

Safe and affordable housing is fundamental to people's ability to get their lives back on track, and it is vital that housing issues be resolved prior to release from prison. A range of appropriate housing options is needed, as well as support to maintain housing.⁴⁷ People who are exiting prison have a wide variety of needs and a diversity of housing options, including independent living and supported housing arrangements, is crucial to ensure each individual's needs are met. For some prisoners with highly complex needs the goal of economic independence may be unrealistic, and therefore a suitable, long-term living arrangement is essential to prevent further offending.

Experiences of an Enabling Justice participant

...they were supposed to set me up with support services, and they did none of that...They put me in a boarding house. So that was my assistance. They were supposed to get me a proper worker like arbias or DHS or something...but they let me out homeless. And that many times I went to Corrections, and seen my parole officer, and said, I need to see you. She'd say, oh alright I'll fit it in after this client. I'd wait around, I'd see her, and she says, 'what's wrong?' I'd say, 'I'm homeless'.*

She'd go, 'what's wrong with these agencies?' Then she'd ring them up, and they'd put me in a hotel for a week or two – this went on for twelve months.

The Enabling Justice project is a pilot being delivered in partnership by Jesuit Social Services and RMIT University's Centre for Innovative Justice. The project focuses on the over-representation of people with an acquired brain injury (ABI) in the Victorian criminal justice system and supports a self-advocacy group (the Justice User Group) to improve outcomes for this group of people.

* arbias Ltd provides specialist services for people with acquired brain injury and high complex needs which include alcohol and other drug and mental health issues.

Post-release services help people find housing and work, and access health and other support services. However, only one in five prisoners receive post-release support from Corrections Victoria, and less than two per cent have access to housing through state government programs specifically for former prisoners.⁴⁸ Existing services target the most serious offenders and those most likely to be a risk to the community. This leaves many people transitioning out of prison with only limited access to post-release support. Access to housing support and services in the justice system for people exiting prison needs to be better coordinated.

We recommend the Victorian Government address the housing needs of people leaving prison by:

- **establishing a diverse range of housing and support options for people leaving prison**
- **expanding and identifying the availability of affordable and appropriate housing options for women exiting prison**
- **identifying and funding options to address post-release housing support**

Mental Health

We support the Victorian Government's 10 Year Mental Health Plan, including the commitment to develop a comprehensive strategy to divert people with mental illness from the criminal justice system, as well as the recognition that people with multiple needs too often fall through the gaps.

We support a holistic approach to mental health that takes account of key drivers of poor mental health, including poverty and disadvantage, discrimination, family dysfunction and histories of trauma. We know that mental illness (as well as alcohol and drug issues) is often a contributing factor to involvement in the criminal justice system. Strategies are required to address the drivers of poor mental health, and to provide service responses that better assist people experiencing poor mental health, including youth specific responses.

Initiative 1: Invest in postvention, early intervention services for suicide bereavement

We are heartened by the Victorian Government's commitment to halve the number of suicides over the next decade, along with the \$27.5 million investment in the 2016/17 State Budget for new suicide prevention initiatives.

Recent research has highlighted the extensive ripple effect of suicide, highlighting the degree to which one person's suicide impacts the rest of the population.⁴⁹ 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 (Pitman, Osborn, Rantell & King, 2016). Represented in terms of absolute risk, this equates to 1 in 10 people who lose friends or relatives to suicide being at risk of following suit.

Other studies have suggested that exposure to suicide of a close contact is associated with:

Increased risk of suicide in partners bereaved by suicide, increased risk of required admission to psychiatric care for parents bereaved by the suicide of an offspring, increased risk of suicide in mothers bereaved by an adult child's suicide, and increased risk of depression in offspring bereaved by the suicide of a parent.

Pitman, Osborn, King & Erlangsen (2014)

Children and adolescents bereaved by suicide are known to be more at risk of suffering from a variety of mental health issues. A study by Sethi and Bhargava (2003) found that bereaved children and adolescents are at elevated risk for major depressive disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Victoria has the third highest number of deaths by suicide of all Australian states and territories: 2,859 deaths from 2011 to 2015.⁵⁰ The number of deaths by suicide in Victoria has increased by almost a quarter (24 per cent) between 2011 and 2015.

Recognising the gap in service response for people who are bereaved by suicide, Jesuit Social Services has been running Support After Suicide throughout Melbourne and regional Victoria since 2004. This service provides counselling, support groups and online resources to those bereaved by suicide, as well as delivering training to health, welfare and education professionals. The need for this specialist service for suicide bereavement is significant, particularly given the mix of grief, trauma and unique set of issues that contributed to the suicide that each person experiences.

Building on the *10 Year Mental Health Plan's* commitment to reduce the rate of suicide in Victoria, it is critical to recognise the risk of suicide amongst those who are bereaved by suicide. The current lack of certainty regarding ongoing funding is problematic, with a risk that many Victorians may miss out on a timely service, including those referred by the police. Additionally, while Support After Suicide operates in regional areas (the Macedon Ranges, Warrnambool and Geelong), its ability to provide robust services, in spite of increased demand, is limited due to restricted funding.

We recommend the Victorian Government 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.

PERSONAL STORY: SUPPORT AFTER SUICIDE – ALLAN, PARTNER OF DON

It's ironic that the horrific bushfires that devastated Victoria in 2009 led to my involvement with the Jesuit Social Services Support After Suicide program. I wasn't caught up in the fires myself but my partner, Don, took his own life around the same time as the devastating blazes due to his mental illness. The Coroner's Court was so caught up with dealing with the fires that rather than line up some counselling with me they connected me with Support After Suicide instead.

I am so glad they did. I don't think I would have done so myself without their prompting and it has made a big, big difference in my life. For me, counselling was really important, I think it saved my life.

Don and I were together for 22 years. He had a diagnosis of bi-polar disorder which he had managed really well for most of his life but in the last four years of his life it was a real struggle. He'd made four attempts on his life so I was living with the constant fear of his suicide and I was bracing myself for it. Every time I got home I wondered if I would find him and eventually I actually was the one who found him at home after his suicide.

I had no idea how I would get through my partner's suicide. My normal life just stopped for six months. Initially I had a lot of help from family and friends but I didn't know what to do. When I could not even take myself to the supermarket some counselling seemed a good idea.

A little door did open within me where for the first time I contemplated suicide myself. Yes, I did think of killing myself and it was scary. Seeing a counsellor helped me get through this. It was just vital for me. It was frightening to be starting to plan my death. I couldn't see my life without him.

I was in deep shock after his suicide even though I had been bracing for it. He'd attempted four times, so I guess I thought he wasn't really ever going to die, that it would be OK.

A week after Don's death I had my first session with Support After Suicide. I cannot speak more highly of the support I received. I needed to talk about it over and over again. I was seeing my counsellor twice a week at some stages. I truly valued our time together and it would have been a very dangerous time for me without it.

I found it much easier to have help from a counsellor because good friends and family can't keep hearing the same old things over and over all the time. I learnt to cope minute by minute, then hour by hour and now it is day by day. I don't need the counselling now but it is very comforting to know they are still there if I ever need to talk to someone again has helped me so much."

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