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Victorian budget response – A lost opportunity to invest in crime reduction

With the Victorian budget in a strong position, Jesuit Social Services has welcomed investment in family violence, social housing and mental health initiatives.

Jesuit Social Services CEO Julie Edwards said the unprecedented commitment to reducing family violence was a watershed moment and welcomed the full package of announcements.

However, Ms Edwards said that at a time of such significant spending on serious social issues, she was disappointed to see the bulk of law and order spending committed to policing and imprisonment rather than prevention and early intervention.

"I acknowledge the government's commitment to expand of the Navigator program, invest \$28.6 million over four years in specialist mental health services for young people aged 16-24 at risk of entering the justice system and provide \$3.4 million over two years for a youth remand court to speed up processing of young people held without conviction - these measures will help but we need a greater focus on prevention and intervention including smart, targeted investment based on evidence of what works.

"While these announcements are welcome, the spending pales in comparison to the \$2 billion committed to police and \$288 million for a new supermax youth justice facility.

"We currently have record numbers in our adult prisons, historically high recidivism rates and around 80 per cent of young people in detention being held on remand without conviction.

"We support measures to keep the community safe. The Victorian Government commissioned a review into the youth justice system - an extensive process that engaged key stakeholders with extensive knowledge and experience - and I am pleased to hear Minister Mikakos commit to funding a range of programs and interventions as a result of the review.

"I remain hopeful the government will soon invest in the necessary reforms required to fix the system - preventing crime in the first place and helping young people who offend to turn their lives around. If this doesn't happen we're not going to see the safe community we all want. Without this investment it's a bit like locking the gate once the horse has bolted."

In its budget submission, Jesuit Social Services called on the government to:

- 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 Community Crime Prevention program
- Expand restorative justice conferencing to out-of-home care placement
- Extend the age of young people leaving out-of-home care to 21 years, invest in additional services to support this approach
- Invest in more intensive case management with small group of young people committing offences with frequency, including supporting education, training and employment pathways

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