

MEDIA RELEASE – JUNE 9, 2016

Positive signs as Victorian imprisonment rates stabilise: Jesuit Social Services

New data released today showing Victoria's rates of imprisonment have stabilised is a sign that the pressure on the state's criminal justice system is beginning to ease, says Jesuit Social Services.

Quarterly Corrective Services statistics published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics show that Victoria's rate of imprisonment in the March quarter 2016 was 137 per 100,000 adult population – well below the national figure of 204.7 per 100,000.

"The fact rates have slightly decreased over the past year (from 140.8 per 100,000 people to 137 per 100,000) is a step in the right direction," says Jesuit Social Services CEO Julie Edwards.

"We must continue to develop effective justice responses to prevent people cycling in and out of the prison system."

According to the ABS, the average daily number of prisoners in Victoria in the March quarter 2016 was 6,394. This number has been largely stable since 2015.

"We need to hold people accountable for their actions and prison has a role to play in our society, but we know that people who exit prison are often worse off than when they entered. Keeping people in the community, where appropriate, ultimately reduces the likelihood of them re-offending which in turn makes our community safer."

Ms Edwards says the Victorian Government has also made positive investments into initiatives such as the Drug Court, which will expand to the Melbourne Magistrates' Court, and a state-wide rollout of the Youth Diversion Pilot Program which Jesuit Social Services has operated in partnership with Youth Support and Advocacy Service (YSAS) and Centacare Ballarat.

Over 90 per cent of more than 270 participants have successfully completed the Pilot Program, avoiding a criminal conviction while strengthening their connections to family, community and education.

"Programs like this make sense on every level – they are substantially cheaper than the costs involved in keeping somebody in detention, they work to help people become productive members of society and ultimately they promote community safety."

Jesuit Social Services is a social change organisation working to build a just society where all people can live to their full potential.

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