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Federal Government must follow Opposition’s lead in closing the gap: Jesuit Social Services

Australia can only begin to address its shocking over-representation of Aboriginal people in prison when both major parties commit to targets aimed at reducing incarceration rates, says Jesuit Social Services.

Following the Federal Opposition’s commitment to deliver a nationally coordinated approach to close the gap in Aboriginal incarceration if elected, Jesuit Social Services calls on the Federal Government to do the same.

“The fact that an Aboriginal adult is 15 times more likely to be imprisoned than a non-Aboriginal adult is an indictment on our nation,” says Jesuit Social Services CEO Julie Edwards.

“This over-representation begins from a young age. Recently, we analysed data from the Australian Health and Welfare Institute that revealed a ten-fold over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people on community orders and in youth detention.”

That analysis showed that while Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders represent just six per cent of the general 10-14 year old population, the same age group accounts for a staggering 60 per cent of young people under youth justice supervision across Australia. Ms Edwards says the possibility of young people cycling in and out of the criminal justice system through to adulthood poses the risk of becoming “another Stolen Generation.”

According to [ABC’s Vote Compass data](#), two-thirds of Australians would like to see the Federal Government commit to reducing the rates of Aboriginal people in prison. Fifty per cent of respondents said they would be happy to see more money spent to address Aboriginal disadvantage.

“The Australian public has clearly identified preventing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from cycling in and out of the prison system as an area of priority,” says Ms Edwards.

Ms Edwards says justice targets must be accompanied by community-driven solutions to address Aboriginal offending, and says a justice reinvestment project in the New South Wales town of Bourke is a model that could be emulated in other disadvantaged communities.

“By steering money away from keeping people locked up and instead investing in helping communities tackle the underlying issues behind crime, we can work to prevent crime before it occurs and create safer communities. Whichever major party forms the next Federal Government, they must show true leadership in working with, and providing investment into, communities to address the over-representation of Aboriginal people in this country.”

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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