

MEDIA RELEASE

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Time is now for all Governments to #RaiseTheAge: Jesuit Social Services

Jesuit Social Services has joined more than 75 social services, legal and human rights organisations to call on all levels to Government to stop condemning primary school aged children to prison and to raise the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 14 years as a matter of urgency.

“Today we are standing alongside many of our sector colleagues who, like Jesuit Social Services, work every day with vulnerable children who have contact with the criminal justice system.

“We are highlighting the body of evidence that supports the need to raise the age, and we are urging our political leaders across the country to commit to supporting children in the community, keeping them connected with family and school, and giving them every opportunity to get their lives back on track,” says Jesuit Social Services CEO Julie Edwards.

Almost 50 submissions, including one by Jesuit Social Services, to the Council of Attorneys-General in support of raising the age of criminal responsibility have been released today.

“These submissions highlight the unique disadvantage and vulnerability of children in prison, and show that supporting children in the community can prevent them from having a lifetime of contact with the criminal justice system.

“The fact that Australian states and territories currently incarcerate children as young as 10 harms children, and in particular Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, who are sadly 22 times more likely to be in detention than non-Indigenous children. These laws are discriminatory, and out of step with human rights standards and medical science on child development,” says Ms Edwards.

The Council of Attorneys-General recently deferred decision making about raising the age of criminal responsibility back to states and territories, despite Australia’s low age of criminal responsibility being out of touch with international standards and against United Nations recommendations.

“This failure to act will result in more vulnerable children who are in need of support being locked up. We urge political leaders across the country to help, not further harm, vulnerable children.”

Ms Edwards says that many children who have contact with the justice system at a young age are victims of trauma, abuse and mental illness.

“It is estimated that children who are arrested before they turn 14 are three times more likely to re-offend as adults than children arrested after they turn 14. Raising the age of criminal responsibility will allow children to be supported in the community and steer their lives in positive directions.”

Jesuit Social Services’ discussion paper [Raising the age of criminal responsibility: There is a better way](#) outlines a range of practical ways in which children can be held accountable for their actions in ways that prevent further anti-social behaviour and better protect the entire community.

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