

MEDIA RELEASE – DECEMBER 8, 2021

**Time is now for Governments to commit to raise the age:
Jesuit Social Services**

Jesuit Social Services has joined more than 30 health, medical and community services organisations in signing an [open letter](#) to state and territory Premiers, Health Ministers and Attorneys-General calling on them to urgently raise the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to at least 14 years.

“The evidence is clear – and has been clear for a long time – that by incarcerating primary school aged children as young as 10, Australia is out of step with human rights standards and medical science on child development,” says Jesuit Social Services Acting CEO Sally Parnell.

“For almost 45 years, Jesuit Social Services has worked with vulnerable children who have contact with the criminal justice system. We know the unique disadvantage and vulnerability they experience, and that if they are supported to connect with family and school in the community they have the best chance to get their lives back on track and avoid a potential lifetime of involvement with the justice system.

“By continuing to lock up primary school aged children, Australia remains out of touch with international standards and against United Nations recommendations. We cannot continue to condemn children as young as 10 to the detention system when it causes such significant harm.”

The open letter highlights evidence that children in the youth justice system in Australia have high rates of additional neurocognitive impairment, trauma and mental health issues. This is in line with the most recent survey of young people in Victoria’s youth detention system, which found that 66 per cent of young people were victims of abuse, trauma and neglect, 46 per cent were accessing mental health support and 20 per cent had a cognitive difficulty diagnosed or documented by a professional.

“These are some of the most vulnerable children in the community, and they need support to turn their lives around in the community. 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. By raising the age of criminal responsibility and keeping children out of prison, we can ensure more children have the opportunity to reach their potential and lead healthy and fulfilling lives.

“Jesuit Social Services has long advocated for Governments across the country to raise the age. We commend the ACT Government for committing to this, which has included outlining options for therapeutic and restorative care to reduce children and young people's interaction with the criminal justice system. Their positive work must be the catalyst for other states and territories to follow their lead,” says Ms Parnell.

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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