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Emphasis on place-based responses an effective way to prevent crime

The implementation of a range of recommendations to prevent crime through targeted work in disadvantaged communities, as highlighted in the final report of the Inquiry into Victoria's Criminal Justice System, will ultimately support a more cohesive Victoria with less crime and fewer victims, says Jesuit Social Services.

"This report, tabled today, is the result of a wide-ranging Inquiry that has explored a number of serious issues that have plagued Victoria's criminal justice systems in recent years including growing remand and prison populations that have ultimately expanded the state's prison population," says Jesuit Social Services CEO Julie Edwards.

"The recommendations in the report make it clear that there is a better way forward – by focusing on what works in reducing crime in the first place, strengthening diversion pathways to ensure prison is only ever used as a last resort and providing holistic and effective support to prevent people from having contact with the system in the first place."

Jesuit Social Services welcomes recommendations to increase the emphasis on place-based responses, such as the provision of youth workers and youth mentors to young people in primary and secondary schools in disadvantaged communities and community-designed and led early intervention efforts to facilitate coordination between schools, social supports and legal services.

"Through our research into locational disadvantage across Australia, conducted over more than 20 years including a major *Dropping off the Edge* report released late last year, we know that areas that have high rates of criminal and juvenile convictions are often struggling with other multiple and complex forms of disadvantage including long-term unemployment, child maltreatment, housing stress and family violence.

"We cannot expect to truly change outcomes for people who live in these communities – both now and for future generations – without addressing the web of disadvantage they experience. We are pleased that the Legal and Social Issues Committee has recognised the importance of community led efforts and partnerships, including with schools, to give people the best chance to break the cycle of intergenerational disadvantage and lead healthy, positive and fulfilling lives."

Jesuit Social Services also supports the report's recommendations for the Victorian Government to raise the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 14 years, for investigation into a state-wide, 24-hour bail system for children and to expand eligibility for diversion programs to hold people accountable for their actions in the community.

"In this Victorian election year, we call for a bi-partisan, evidence-based approach to reduce the number of people who are incarcerated – and most importantly to keep people out of custody in the first place," says Ms Edwards.

"We hope this report is a catalyst for systemic change across the state to ensure our justice systems help, not further harm, vulnerable people."

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