

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – SEPTEMBER 19, 2018

Victoria needs evidence-based justice system, not new prison

A new 1,000-plus bed prison for Victoria, plans of which were revealed in the *Herald-Sun* this week, would be counter-productive to community safety, according to Jesuit Social Services.

“We are extremely disappointed to learn of plans for another prison in Victoria, after the Victorian Government has already committed money to a new 700-bed prison in Lara, a new 224-bed youth facility at Cherry Creek and additional beds at other prisons including Ravenhall,” says Jesuit Social Services CEO Julie Edwards.

“Instead of locking up more and more people, we should focus our efforts and investments towards supporting people to address their issues in the community and preventing crime from occurring. This report is an admission that we are failing, as a society, to achieve that.

Jesuit Social Services’ program participant Charles says that prison environments can be a breeding ground for further crime.

“If one kid gets drunk all the time and offends, then that kid should be put in a detox instead of just locking them up – because then they’ll just get locked up, come out and reoffend again,” he says.

Ms Edwards says that the current recidivism rate of 43 per cent, meaning almost half of people who leave Victoria’s prison system return within two years, demonstrates increasing the prison population will not lead to less crime.

“It is clear that too many people leave the prison system worse off than when they entered and too many people find it challenging to become productive members of the community on their return.

“Ultimately this means that building a new prison is counter-productive to community safety because we know that if we build prisons we will fill prisons. This approach is unsustainable and ultimately will create more victims,” says Ms Edwards.

In its soon-to-be-published Victorian election platform, Jesuit Social Services recommends a range of solutions to prevent crime from occurring and to support people who have contact with the justice system. Key recommendations include:

- Invest in more intensive transition support services for highly vulnerable people leaving prison;
- Address the housing needs of people leaving prison;
- Aim to reduce reoffending by 15 per cent by piloting a sustained community capacity building approach to community crime prevention in disadvantaged communities.

“We also encourage all Victorians to join our [#WorthASecondChance](#) campaign which shows what an effective justice system can look like.”

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