



A PAPER FROM THE JUSTICE REFORM INITIATIVE

ALTERNATIVES TO INCARCERATION IN QUEENSLAND

May 2023

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Queensland relies on a system of incarceration for children and adults that is harmful, expensive and ineffective. Prison does not work to reduce crime; it does not work to build safer communities; and it does not work to address the social drivers of contact with the criminal justice system.

The overuse of incarceration in Queensland has historically been driven by a politicised approach to justice policy, with both major parties frequently competing to promote a 'tough on crime' agenda. Too often, decision-making about critical policy and legislative reform has focused on political rather than policy outcomes. Heated political conversations about how to respond to crime often entirely neglect the evidence about what actually works to reduce it.

However, there are alternatives to the current approach. This report sets out more than 70 examples of community-led programs, place-based initiatives, services, policies and alternative justice approaches (including at the point of contact with police and courts) that are working to reduce the numbers of people in prisons across Australia and internationally. The examples in this report have been subject to evaluations that demonstrate their ability to reduce contact with the criminal justice system.

It is time for both sides of politics in Queensland to press pause on politicised 'law and order' policy and instead look towards responses that align with what the evidence shows will genuinely make a difference when it comes to crime reduction and protecting the community. Although there are already excellent programs, strategies and policies operating in Queensland (several of which are outlined in this report), alternative approaches are struggling to make a systemic difference in the current Queensland policy environment, which remains heavily invested in incarceration.

Despite significant efforts made in recent years by the Queensland Parliament to explore alternative approaches to the current system of incarceration, and the state government's public commitment to adopt many of the important recommendations made in recent rigorous reports,¹ Queensland's prison population continues to grow. Sensible and evidence-based policy commitments have been limited by the consequences of entrenched and long-standing 'law and order' politics. This approach has resulted in a dramatically increasing prison population, skyrocketing costs for Queensland taxpayers, and thousands of people unnecessarily incarcerated in a system with no evidence of efficacy in terms of rehabilitation, deterrence or community safety in the long term.

Queensland has the second-highest rate of children's incarceration (4.8 per 10,000 children) in Australia.² The only jurisdiction with a higher rate of children's incarceration is the Northern Territory. Queensland also has the highest number of children in detention in Australia: more than one-third (38%) of all children aged between 10 and 17 detained in Australia are in Queensland.³ There were on average 267 children imprisoned in Queensland last year, an increase of 41% since 2019–20.⁴ There has also been a dramatic increase in recent years in Queensland's adult prison population. On an average night in 2021–22, 9589 people are locked up in Queensland prisons, an increase of 63.9% over the last decade.⁵

Around eight in 10 children released from sentenced detention in Queensland return within 12 months.⁶ Almost all children released from prison in Queensland (around 90%) are alleged to reoffend within 12 months of their release.⁷ Similarly, over two-thirds of adults in Queensland prisons have been in prison before.⁸ The evidence is very clear that prison is criminogenic, that is, the experience of incarceration makes

re-offending more likely. The over-use of prison fails to keep the community safe. It also causes enormous and inter-generational harm to First Nations communities and other groups that experience multiple and intersecting forms of marginalisation and disadvantage and are disproportionately represented in the prison system.

The total recurrent annual operating expenditure on adult prisons in Queensland is more than \$859 million,⁹ with a further \$218 million spent on children's incarceration each year.¹⁰ The real net costs of the state's prison and correctional services have risen dramatically over the last decade. Queensland has increased expenditure on imprisonment by over \$450 million since 2014–15.¹¹

A series of planned prison expansions across the state will likely result in over one billion dollars of additional taxpayer money spent on a system that is not working to build safer communities. The Queensland Government is planning to expand the adult prison in Gatton by 1500 beds at a cost of \$861 million.¹² The state government has also recently announced it will be building two new youth detention centres. This is in addition to the already increased spending on youth detention centre capacity in 2019, with \$150 million spent on building the 32-bed West Moreton Youth Detention Centre and \$27 million spent on expanding the Brisbane Youth Detention Centre by 16 beds.¹³

Financial commitment to incarceration continues to increase in Queensland, despite overwhelming evidence that the current prison system (for both adults and children) is harmful, expensive and ineffective. Jailing is failing to prevent offending or reduce reoffending, and it is failing to keep the community safe.¹⁴

In many Australian jurisdictions, incarceration rates have fallen over the past few years, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic. Many states and territories have explicitly recognised the deep policy failures of incarceration, and both sides of politics are championing alternative approaches. However, despite all the evidence of its failure, the Queensland Government continues to embrace a justice system that centres the use of imprisonment. Too many Queenslanders are trapped in a cycle of incarceration, becoming entrenched in a justice system that fails to address the causes of crime and fails to keep the community safe.

This report proposes a different approach. We argue that the solutions to both over-incarceration and community safety are located outside the justice system. We cannot imprison our way to a safer society, and it is now time for the Queensland Government to turn away from its reliance on the prison system. This sentiment was recently shared by the Head of the Queensland Police Service Youth Justice Taskforce who publicly stated that police cannot 'arrest their way out' of youth justice issues and 'keeping children in detention is not the end solution'.¹⁵

This report's promotion of evidence-based and evidence-informed alternatives to imprisonment should not be mistaken as a 'soft on crime' approach. Taking crime seriously requires taking the drivers of crime seriously and looking outside the justice system to develop evidence-led solutions. Our aim is not to excuse crime or minimise its impact but to build responses to crime that will genuinely disrupt its re-occurrence. Although imprisonment 'protects the community' for the period of time that someone is incarcerated (especially if someone has been offending prolifically), it does not address the root causes of crime. We know that in the medium and long-term, imprisonment does not rehabilitate people, and makes reoffending much more likely.

There is an opportunity for the Queensland Government to expand its investment in evidence-based programs and services run by the community sector (especially First Nations-led organisations) to keep the community safe, address the social drivers of contact with the criminal justice system, and provide 'off-ramps' out of the justice system.

These programs (if properly resourced) will:

- » Significantly reduce recidivism for children and adults and in turn improve community safety
- » Successfully divert children and adults who are at risk of being involved in the criminal justice system
- » Strengthen families and communities, which are too often 'managed' in justice system settings rather than receiving the support, care and opportunities that improve their prospects
- » Result in significant cost-savings and substantial improvements in health and wellbeing across the community, including for victims.

The collective findings of the evaluations included in this report demonstrate the efficacy of community-led approaches that address the social drivers of over-incarceration. Similarly, the combined findings of evaluations of alternative models of policing, court and prison in this report demonstrate the way in which interactions with the justice system have the capacity to move people away from the justice system, if those interactions are non-punitive and focus on addressing the drivers of criminal justice system contact.

Despite this evidence base, we have only seen a piecemeal approach to resourcing, expanding and evaluating alternative approaches to incarceration in Queensland. Community-led programs in Queensland are already doing considerable work in breaking cycles of disadvantage for individuals impacted by the justice system. First Nations communities and First Nations community-led organisations are leading this work, often achieving remarkable outcomes with very limited support and resourcing.

While excellent programs exist, the policy and legislative environment in Queensland still drives too many people into prison who would be more likely to stop offending if they received support in the community to address the drivers of criminal justice system involvement. The often-limited scope and capacity of existing programs means that many people who are at-risk of imprisonment, or at-risk of recidivism, do not receive the support they require to get out of the system. A significant funding shift is needed so that all Queensland children and adults can receive effective support, care, connection and opportunity in the community rather than being 'managed' in the justice system. This support needs to be available for both children and adults across the life-course and at different stages of contact with the justice system.

This report summarises evaluations and reviews of diversionary programs (including at the point of policing and court) and holistic support programs (including on release from custody). It also highlights evaluations and reviews that demonstrate the importance of early intervention and early prevention strategies to engage children and families at-risk before they encounter the system, and to address the social drivers of incarceration at the whole-of-community level.

The research outlined in the body of this report primarily draws on independent evaluations, some of which use matched administrative data as points of comparison, and some of which include randomised controlled trials (the 'gold standard' of evaluations) or time-series analysis to explore criminal justice trajectories over time. While this report also includes overviews of less comprehensive evaluations, all of the studies included in the body of this report explore the impact of the program, intervention or support on people's contact with the justice system.

The studies overviewed in this report outline findings that include:

- » Early intervention and prevention programs reduce crime at a population level by between 5–31%,¹⁶ reduce offending among at-risk populations by 50%,¹⁷ significantly improve other health and wellbeing outcomes in children and families¹⁸ and result in significant cost savings including those resulting from reduced criminal justice system contact over time.¹⁹
- » First Nations place-based approaches have resulted in significant reductions in crime, criminal justice system contact, youth justice contact and significant cost savings, as well as improvements in a range of cultural, social, health and wellbeing measures.²⁰
- » Bail support programs significantly reduce reoffending (by 33%), increase compliance with bail conditions (by 95%),²¹ improve a range of other social and health wellbeing measures relevant to the drivers of criminal justice system contact²² and achieve cost savings when compared to an absence of bail support.²³
- » Post-release and diversionary community-led programs have resulted in dramatic decreases in recidivism, including:
 - Intensive post-release support programs focusing on people experiencing problematic alcohol and other drug use and other complex needs (483 participants) have achieved reductions in custody days (by 65.8%), reductions in new custody episodes (by 62.6%) and reductions in proven offences (62.1%) measured two years post-referral.²⁴
 - A First Nations-led post-release service has achieved recidivism rates of 4.1% (compared to 57.3% for a comparable cohort).²⁵

- A place-based, intensive support service for children at-risk of criminal justice system involvement has dramatically increased the number of children engaging with education and/or employment (85%) and has led to significant reductions in crime (35%) in the surrounding community.²⁶
 - » Alternative policing and alternative first-responder models reduce criminal justice system involvement and lessen the likelihood of arrest by 58%,²⁷ halve the rate of crime and justice system involvement,²⁸ significantly reduce levels of specific crime, improve health and wellbeing (especially for people with mental health conditions)²⁹ and address the social drivers of incarceration while avoiding contact with police.³⁰
 - » Alternative and specialist court processes reduce contact with the justice system including:
 - In-court diversionary programs reduce reoffending, increase health and wellbeing and address the drivers of incarceration.³¹
 - Those who have their matter dealt with in a community and neighbourhood justice court have reoffending rates that are 25% lower than those whose matters are heard in mainstream courts.³²
 - Restorative justice processes significantly reduce the likelihood of reoffending,³³ work to support people to connect with services and programs in the community³⁴ (as well as provide support to victims of crime)³⁵ and are extraordinarily cost-effective.³⁶
 - Drug courts reduce the likelihood of reoffending and improve access to alcohol and other drug treatment.³⁷
 - Mental health courts reduce reoffending and facilitate access to mental health treatment as well as improve other health and wellbeing measures.³⁸
 - First Nations courts reduce reoffending, empower First Nations communities, increase the likelihood of court attendance, and improve access to other supports and services.³⁹
 - » Alternative detention models have extraordinarily low rates of recidivism including:
 - Rehabilitation and therapeutic incarceration models with a focus on alcohol and other drug treatment have recidivism rates as low as 2.0%.⁴¹
- In Queensland, there is a need to invest in – and increase the availability, scope and capacity of – the kinds of programs identified in this report; that is, programs that have a strong evidence base in terms of breaking cycles of criminal justice system involvement. There is an opportunity in Queensland to move away from the current approach, which prioritises incarceration, in terms of both policy settings and resourcing. The research is very clear that the current approach has been highly ineffective in terms of building safer communities and reducing crime. It has also been extraordinarily expensive and continues to cause enormous harm to the individuals, families and communities that are cycling in and out of the justice system. The main recommendation threaded throughout this report is that there is a need to invest in the supports, programs, services and alternatives that address the drivers of incarceration and that have an evidence base in terms of reducing crime, reducing recidivism and building safer communities.
- There is enormous stakeholder expertise and goodwill in Queensland. A growing coalition of First Nations leaders and communities, researchers, community sector practitioners, people with lived experience of incarceration and diverse advocates are all committed to sharing this expertise and supporting decision-makers in Queensland to develop and properly resource evidence-based approaches to criminal justice. There is a need for leaders in parliament and government in Queensland to first, acknowledge the policy failure of incarceration in Queensland and second, to work alongside stakeholders – who are standing by and ready to assist – to move towards a justice system that genuinely builds a safer community.
- Alongside investing in evidence-based alternatives to incarceration, there is a concurrent need to continue to build and improve the evidence base in Queensland, particularly for community-led programs. The community sector has not historically had the resources or opportunity to evaluate the efficacy of its work in a manner that can easily contribute to the growing body of research in this area. There is the need to ensure community-led organisations are funded adequately to both deliver services

and have access to independent and transparent evaluation that generates high-quality data. There is an opportunity for the Queensland Government to build genuine partnerships with researchers, service providers, First Nations communities and other experts in the sector to continue to build the evidence base of what works in Queensland.

This report shows that there are multiple points of intervention that can make a difference, and that there are many examples of programs that work. They are, however, currently operating on a scale that is too small to make a systemic difference when it comes to reducing recidivism and reducing criminal justice system contact.

There is an opportunity in Queensland to turn around the current over-reliance on incarceration, and to genuinely invest in the evidence-based alternatives. These alternatives will reduce crime, build community safety, reduce recidivism and give people the opportunity to build productive and meaningful lives in the community; these alternatives are also significantly less expensive than incarceration.

ABOUT THE JUSTICE REFORM INITIATIVE

The Justice Reform Initiative was established in September 2020 with a goal to reduce Australia's harmful and costly reliance on incarceration. We seek to reduce incarceration in Australia by 50% by 2030 and build a community in which disadvantage is no longer met with a default criminal justice system response.

Our growing list of patrons include 120 eminent Australians, including two former Governors-General, former Members of Parliament from all sides of politics, academics, respected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders, senior former judges, including High Court judges, and many other community leaders who have added their voices to the movement to end the cycle of incarceration in Australia.

We also have more than 130 supporter organisations that have joined the movement to reduce incarceration. These include the Australian Medical Association, The Law Council of Australia, the Federation of Ethnic Community Councils, the Australian Council of Churches, the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, and multiple First Nations-led organisations and service-delivery organisations that have expertise working with people who have been impacted by the justice system.

The Justice Reform Initiative seeks to work with parliamentarians from all sides of politics, policy makers, people with experience of the justice system, and people of goodwill across the country to embrace evidence-based criminal justice policy in order to reduce crime, reduce recidivism and build safer communities.

We are working to shift the public conversation and public policy away from building more prisons as the primary response of the criminal justice system and move instead to proven alternative evidence-based approaches that break the cycle of incarceration. We are committed to elevating approaches that seek to address the causes and drivers of contact with the criminal justice system. We are also committed to

elevating approaches that see Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led organisations being resourced and supported to provide appropriate support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are impacted by the justice system.

Our Queensland Patrons are:

- » **The Honourable Mike Ahern AO**, former Premier of Queensland, businessman and founder of the Queensland Community Foundation
- » **Sallyanne Atkinson AO**, Co-Chair of the Queensland Interim Body for Treaty and a member of the Queensland University Senate
- » **Professor Kerry Carrington**, Adjunct Professor, University of Sunshine Coast
- » **Mick Gooda**, former Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner and former Royal Commissioner into the Detention of Children in the Northern Territory
- » **Keith Hamburger AM**, former Director-General, Queensland Corrective Services Commission
- » **Gail Mabo**, from the Meriam language group and clan of Mer (Murray Island) in the Torres Strait. She is an Australian visual artist who has had her work exhibited across Australia and is represented in most major Australian art galleries and internationally. She was formerly a dancer and choreographer. Gail is also deeply engaged with young people in her community as a mentor and is the daughter of land rights campaigner Eddie Mabo and educator and activist Bonita Mabo AO
- » **Professor Emeritus Ross Homel AO**, Foundation Professor of Criminology and Criminal Justice, Griffith University
- » **Professor Elena Marchetti**, co-Lead Disrupting Violence Beacon and Deputy Head of School (Research) Griffith Law School, Griffith University and Deputy Chair, Queensland Sentencing Advisory Council

- » **The Honourable Margaret McMurdo AC**, former President of the Court of Appeal, Supreme Court of Queensland, Commissioner of the Victorian Royal Commission into the Management of Police Informants and Chair of the Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce
- » **Dr Mark Rallings**, former Commissioner, Queensland Corrective Services
- » **Greg Vickery AO**, Former President Queensland Law Society and former Chair of the Standing Commission of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement
- » **The Honourable Dean Wells**, former Attorney-General of Queensland
- » **The Honourable Margaret White AO**, former Judge of the Queensland Supreme Court and Queensland Court of Appeal, former Royal Commissioner into the Detention of Children in the Northern Territory, and Adjunct Professor, TC Berne School of Law, The University of Queensland.

WHAT WORKS TO REDUCE INCARCERATION

There is no single 'reform fix' to reduce the number of prisoners. However, there are multiple proven, cost-effective reforms that can work together to build pathways away from the justice system. Many of these reforms are already catalogued in many government and non-government reports and reviews.⁴² In addition, there are clear examples and case studies from Australia and overseas that demonstrate the value of approaches led by the community and health sectors in disrupting entrenched criminal justice system trajectories.⁴³ There is also a growing body of more formal research exploring the impact of various models of support.⁴⁴

This report focuses on the evidence in two distinct reform areas:

- 1. Social and community support:** This includes early intervention and prevention; access to person-centred holistic wrap-around support services; place-based culturally modelled support; mental health, social and emotional wellbeing support; alcohol and other drug support; disability support; bail support; supported accommodation; and throughcare and post-release support.
- 2. Justice system:** This includes policing (for instance, first responder models and the use of discretionary powers); courts (specialist and diversionary court models; alternative restorative and transformative justice opportunities) and imprisonment (therapeutic models of care).

We note there are two other critical justice reform areas (which we only touch on lightly in this report). These are:

- 3. Legislative reform:** Raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility; ending mandatory sentencing; restoring the presumption in favour of bail; allowing discretion for bail decisions in the Children's Court; ending the use of solitary confinement for imprisoned children; ending the use of adult prisons to house children; and embracing a human rights framework.

- 4. Systems changes:** Including, importantly, mechanisms for genuine whole-of-government policy approaches.

Although this report is not focused on the specifics of government reform processes, it is worth noting that the theme that runs through this report – the need for greater investment in evidence-based programs that will break the cycle of reoffending and build safer communities – complements and aligns with the justice reform priorities of several government initiatives as well as the voices of many advocates in Queensland, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community leaders, peak organisations and community-based service providers.

Specifically, the Queensland Government has allocated \$6 million over two years to establish a Criminal Justice Innovation Office. This office will provide expert advice on systemic issues, lead evidence-based policy making, and advise the government on system priorities within Queensland's justice system. This includes facilitating the development of innovative evidence-based solutions to reduce the rate of imprisonment and deliver on the government's response to the Queensland Productivity Commission's Inquiry into Imprisonment and Recidivism.⁴⁵

Additionally, the Queensland Government participates in the Commonwealth Justice Policy Partnership and recently announced funding of \$9.4 million over three years to establish a First Nations Justice Office (FNJO) within the Queensland Department of Justice and Attorney-General to drive this work. The FNJO will develop and implement a co-designed whole-of-government and community justice strategy to address the over-representation of First Nations people in the criminal justice system (as recommended in the first Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce Report). This work sits alongside the Queensland Government's priorities around implementing Path to Treaty⁴⁶ and the Local Thriving Communities model.⁴⁷

The evidence base and parameters of this report

This report explores what keeps people out of prison and provides a road map for Queensland to move towards a service system that reduces over-incarceration and improves social and justice outcomes for the whole community. A selection of evidence-based Australian and international approaches that have a proven impact in terms of reducing incarceration are overviewed.

There are many excellent programs and services in Queensland working with people impacted by the justice system, and wherever evaluations exist, we have tried to include these programs. However, in recent years in Queensland, there has been limited investment in evaluation and research of community sector programs and there are barriers for community sector organisations to access government evaluations.

The absence of recent accessible evidence via evaluations in Queensland is not of course evidence that programs are not working. What it does highlight, however, is the importance of supporting and resourcing community-led organisations to implement independent and transparent evaluations. A good culture of funded evaluation will allow the sector to share and build on its excellent work, and to also respond thoughtfully to the ever-present challenges of both implementation and service design.

It is important to note that this report is by no means an exhaustive account of 'what works'. It is intended to provide examples of the alternative approaches that are making a difference and that have been robustly evaluated. The Justice Reform Initiative will continue to collate existing research and we welcome any opportunity to learn about additional evaluations and programs that are not outlined in this report.

Examples of these programs are outlined throughout the report. An overview of the principles underpinning best practice is included in **Appendix A**.

Appendix B provides a list of other programs and services that provide support to children and adults at-risk of, or already experiencing, involvement with the justice system. The following programs have been identified through conversations with stakeholders in Queensland, through desk-top research and, in some instances, via evaluation literature. Programs were not included in the body of the report if they did not have a publicly available evaluation, or they had an evaluation completed but the evaluation did not focus on the impact of the project in terms of contact with the criminal justice system.

The Justice Reform Initiative is progressing ongoing mapping work of programs in Queensland and welcomes any further information, evaluations and case studies that people and organisations would like to share with us.

This report is focused on community-led alternatives at multiple points along the criminal justice system trajectory. However, we recognise that these alternatives are only part of the picture in terms of breaking cycles of disadvantage. Alongside this work there is also the need for significant investment in affordable and safe housing, mental health and disability support, alcohol and other drug treatment, employment and education, workforce development, and a range of infrastructure projects in regional and remote communities.

The examples and case studies overviewed in this report are from all around Australia, and also include some international examples. However, we note the unique context of Queensland when it comes to thinking through implementation. This context includes the structural and systemic issues noted above, as well as the highly politicised justice decision-making environment, particularly in relation to young people in the criminal justice system; high rates and high levels of concern about certain kinds of crime in several Queensland locations; and the ongoing impact of systemic and institutional racism, including discriminatory policing and extraordinarily high rates of incarceration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

JAILING IS FAILING: THE STATE OF INCARCERATION IN QUEENSLAND

Queensland has the second-highest rate of children's incarceration (4.8 per 10,000 children) in Australia, after the Northern Territory.⁴⁸ In terms of raw numbers, more children are incarcerated in Queensland than anywhere else in Australia, with Queensland incarcerating the highest number of children nationally since 2020.⁴⁹ On an average night in 2021–22, there were 267 children imprisoned in the state.⁵⁰ This is significantly higher than jurisdictions with larger populations, including New South Wales and Victoria. Queensland has more than three times as many incarcerated children than Victoria (which has 78 children incarcerated).⁵¹ The number of children in Queensland prisons also continues to rise. There has been a 41% increase in the children's prison population since 2019–20.⁵² In contrast, over this period, the children's prison population has decreased 34% in Victoria and 24% in New South Wales.⁵³

The adult prison population in Queensland has also dramatically increased in recent years. There are, on average, 9,589 people imprisoned in Queensland, which represents an increase of 63.9% over the last decade.⁵⁴ There has been an increase of more than 3740 adults imprisoned on an average night since 2012–13.⁵⁵

This rise in the number of prisoners in Queensland has been driven by systematic failings and legislative and policy choices that funnel people unnecessarily into imprisonment, particularly people experiencing disadvantage. As shown in a recent in-depth analysis of crime in Australia, imprisonment does not have a significant impact on crime rates.⁵⁶ There is no causal relationship between imprisonment rates and crime reduction. At the same time as the rate of incarceration has been increasing in Queensland, there has been a decrease in the rate of offending.⁵⁷ Recorded crime data shows us that in 2012–13, the Queensland rate of offending was 2,175.1 per 100,000. In 2021–22, the rate was 1,761.9 per 100,000.⁵⁸

In addition to an increase in the Queensland prison population, we have seen an increase in the number of adults and children held on remand. In 2012, the adult remand population in Queensland constituted

22.4% of the total prison population.⁵⁹ In 2022, over one-third of all adults imprisoned in Queensland were unsentenced.⁶⁰ Remand numbers are even higher for children. According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 89.0% of children in Queensland prisons on an average night in the June 2022 quarter were being held on remand.⁶¹ This is important in the context of this report, as there are specific supports, services and approaches for people on bail that have a strong evidence base in terms of reducing reoffending.

Although there are 9,589 adults in prison on average in Queensland, reception and release data provides a more comprehensive picture of the 'churn' within the Queensland prison population. In 2022, 14,528 adults were received into Queensland prisons and 14,241 adults were released over the same period.⁶² Similarly, Productivity Commission data shows there were 1,049 unique children under the age of 17 who were supervised in Queensland prisons during 2021–22.⁶³ These are the numbers we must consider when we are considering 'what works' to reduce the number of people in prison (121 of these children were aged 10 to 13 years old).⁶⁴ The Australian Institute for Health and Welfare notes children across Australia who are incarcerated have on average two receptions into custody over a year. Although data on the actual number of children who flow through Queensland prisons is not as readily available as the data by the Australian Bureau of Statistics on the adult prison population, we can assume (as is the case with adults) that it is significantly higher than the number of children incarcerated, given that short stays, multiple receptions for each child and high rates of recidivism are all realities of Queensland's youth justice system.

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data shows that the adult imprisonment rate in Queensland is the third-highest in the country (behind Western Australia and the Northern Territory) at 228.9 people imprisoned per 100,000 adults; this is higher than the Australian national average of 200.9.⁶⁵ This rate has increased by 44% over the past decade, which is the most dramatic increase of all states.⁶⁶

Like every other jurisdiction in Australia, Queensland continues to disproportionately imprison First Nations people. The crude adult imprisonment rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders is 2,236.1 people per 100,000, compared to 151.2 per 100,000 for non-Indigenous Queenslanders.⁶⁷ This means Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults are 14.8 times more likely to be in prison than non-Indigenous adults.⁶⁸ Similarly, the imprisonment rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Queensland aged 10 to 17 years old is 40.9 per 10,000, compared to 1.8 per 10,000 for non-Indigenous children.⁶⁹ On an average night, two-thirds (66.6%) of children and over one-third (36.4%) of adults⁷⁰ in Queensland prisons identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, despite making up only 4.6% of the general population.⁷¹

We also know that the majority of people in Queensland prisons have been to prison before. According to 2022 ABS data, over two-thirds (68.1%) of people in Queensland prisons have been previously imprisoned.⁷² This rate has increased over time. In 2012, just under two-thirds (60.2%) of people in Queensland prisons had been to prison before.⁷³

Not only is prison ineffective, it is also extremely expensive. The most recent Productivity Commission data shows the annual operating cost of imprisoning adults in Queensland is over \$859 million.⁷⁴ When capital costs are included, this increases to over \$1.1 billion.⁷⁵ For children, the total costs are over \$218 million.⁷⁶ The real direct cost per adult prisoner is \$240.81 per day, equivalent to \$87,896 per year.⁷⁷ For children, this cost is higher at \$2,068.32 per day, equivalent to \$761,507 per year.⁷⁸ This is an incredible investment in a system that is failing.

The responsibility for the persistent overuse of imprisonment cannot be attributed to one side of politics or the other in Queensland. This trend has been replicated across Australia. We have followed the politicised approach of the United States: building more prisons at enormous cost and ultimately failing to reduce reoffending. This situation is compounded through the often relentless ‘tough on crime’ rhetoric perpetuated in the media, which has the capacity to undermine evidence-based reform efforts.⁷⁹

There are opportunities to build pathways out of the justice system and to improve our service delivery response at every stage across the life-course and at every contact point in the criminal justice system. Queensland must significantly scale-up programs in the community sector and expand the capacity of the sector to provide people who are caught in the justice system with a range of opportunities to genuinely rebuild their lives – as well as prevent people from ending up in the justice system in the first place.

Instead of committing to additional expensive prison beds, there is an opportunity for the Queensland Government to focus attention and resources on evidence-based programs that work to reduce incarceration and decrease recidivism. The rest of this report is focused on this evidence base and the research that tells us what is working and what we could be doing differently. Over-incarceration is preventable. We need to focus on resourcing evidence-based alternatives and encouraging political will on all sides of politics to build a different kind of justice system.

EVIDENCE-BASED EARLY INTERVENTION AND EARLY CRIME PREVENTION

Investment in a wide-variety of community-based early intervention and developmental crime prevention policies and initiatives is key to preventing offending and diverting children away from the justice system in Queensland.⁸⁰

Early intervention (secondary crime prevention) aims to intervene early in an individual's developmental pathway to address risk factors associated with offending and strengthen protective factors that support engagement in pro-social behaviour.⁸¹ Early intervention commonly occurs early in life, but it can also occur later in life at a crucial transition point on a pathway to offending.⁸² Children who are at-risk of justice system involvement often experience a number of individual, family, peer, school and community risk factors such as disconnection from education, unstable home environments, homelessness and poverty.⁸³ Programs that work to reduce contact with the justice system tend to address a multitude of these factors at once.⁸⁴

Early crime prevention focuses on modifying 'criminogenic' factors in physical and social environments to stop crime before it is committed.⁸⁵ Although there has been some investment in early intervention programs in Queensland, this resourcing has been piecemeal. Primary crime prevention initiatives are lacking in Queensland and Australia, despite their demonstrated crime prevention potential.⁸⁶

Queensland Government representatives and other parliamentarians – including the Queensland Premier, the Leader of the Queensland Opposition and members of the Queensland Police Service – have spoken publicly about the importance of early intervention.⁸⁷ In 2020, the Queensland Government released a whole-of-government plan to support children in their early years (zero to eight years old). This plan commits to 'targeting early intervention and prevention' and using 'evidence-informed' programs and services as guiding principles.⁸⁸ In 2021, the *Queensland Police Union National Youth Crime Symposium Report* noted that 'early intervention is

critical to the achievement of positive outcomes, the changing of behaviours and the reduction of crime, and should be the fundamental platform of any justice program'. However, it is clear that the resourcing priority in Queensland has been on 'tough on crime' responses (such as creating more prison beds), despite the evidence that this approach is ineffective⁸⁹ and despite the compounding criminogenic nature of any criminal justice system involvement.⁹⁰

While there are clear limitations to studies that focus primarily on costs, these findings are important in framing the significance of the impact of early intervention and prevention, not just financially, but in terms of a range of social and health wellbeing measures. A study of children at-risk of criminalisation in New South Wales found that 7% of individuals under the age of 25 will account for half the estimated cost of the state's social services by the time they are 40 years old. Additionally, 1% of this cohort will be responsible for 32% of New South Wales' justice service costs, highlighting that early intervention targeting a small percentage can reduce future costs significantly.⁹¹

A recent economic analysis of early intervention resourcing in Australia found that one dollar invested in early childhood education yields a return of two dollars.⁹² The cost of late intervention in Australia has been estimated to be \$15.2 billion per year, including \$2.7 billion (18%) for youth crime.⁹³ Research findings support investing in capacity-building strategies that scale-up community-based approaches to early intervention. Building on the success of relatively small-scale and economically efficient community-led innovations that create the conditions for healthy development pathways early in life can be a path to larger-scale crime prevention.⁹⁴

There remains a genuine opportunity in Queensland to further invest in early intervention responses and build capacity for sustainable, scalable, place-based primary youth crime prevention.⁹⁵ Alongside this investment, there is the need for adjacent research in this area so that there is sufficient high-quality

data and evaluations that can drive evidence-based policy and investment. There is a particular need for longitudinal studies, using some form of matched-

group comparisons at the baseline to determine the impact of existing and new early intervention programs to reduce offending and improve

community safety.

Evidence-based case studies: **What works in early intervention and prevention?**

You Got This (Queensland, 7 Locations)

The University of Sunshine Coast conducted an independent evaluation of the Johnathon Thurston Academy 'You Got This' initiative, which aims to boost courage and self-belief in young people aged nine to 16 years old experiencing disadvantage. The Queensland Government noted the success of the program, outlining that the evaluation (based on the data of 39 participants, and also interviews with staff members and stakeholders) found successes in diversion, school re-engagement and a reduction of offending. The evaluation found there was a reduction in the number of offences committed by the young people who were at-risk and who participated in the program in Cairns. Nine out of 10 young people with a prior offending history who participated in the program in Cairns did not reoffend within nine months after completing the program.⁹⁶

Home Visitation Programs (United States)

Pre-natal and infancy home visitation programs show positive outcomes in terms of improving the health and wellbeing of children and families and reducing contact with the criminal justice system.⁹⁷ Within these programs, health professionals visit new parents (typically mothers or expected mothers) to provide support, care and education pre- and post-birth. The most common home visiting programs involve sustained nurse home visiting (SNHV). The Elmira Nurse-Family Partnership program is an evidence-based SNHV program that originated in the United States.⁹⁸ This program has been shown to have sustained effects on outcomes for children and mothers within several randomised-controlled trials in the United States, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom.⁹⁹ In the United States, young girls whose mothers participated in the program were less likely to be arrested than those whose mothers did not participate in the program.¹⁰⁰ In addition, participation in the program was shown to be associated with significantly reduced reports of child abuse and neglect, among other benefits.¹⁰¹ As highlighted in Appendix B, Queensland has implemented a version of this evidence-based program.

Parenting Programs (Australia and International)

The parenting programs found to be the most effective at reducing antisocial behaviour and youth crime include parent–child interaction therapy, the Triple P (Positive Parenting Program) and the Incredible Years Parenting Program.¹⁰² These programs typically involve training and education that supports parents to develop positive parenting skills and strong relationships with their children.¹⁰³ Systematic reviews of parenting program evaluations have estimated such interventions have resulted in anywhere between a 34–48% reduction in problematic child behaviour.¹⁰⁴

The Triple P was developed in Australia and is now delivered around the world including in Queensland where it is free for all parents and carers of a child who is aged 16 years or younger.¹⁰⁵ There is an abundance of research demonstrating the effectiveness of the Triple P in addressing risk factors for offending. In addition, the Triple P has been recognised as a cost-saving intervention in the Queensland context.¹⁰⁶ The program has the potential to save the government and the taxpayer money by reducing the costs associated with conduct disorder and problematic behaviour.

Mentoring Programs (International)

Internationally, evaluations have found that mentoring programs are effective at reducing offending and supporting children and young people to engage in prosocial behaviour.¹⁰⁷ One study that reviewed 25 experimental and quasi-experimental evaluations of mentoring programs and their impact on delinquency found a 19–26% reduction in behaviours of concern. As outlined in Appendix B, there are mentoring programs (yet to be evaluated) in Queensland that support children and young people at-risk of antisocial behaviour.¹⁰⁸

After-School Programs (International)

Evaluations have shown that after-school programs that incorporate skills training, mentoring and/or academic components may reduce antisocial behaviour. Two robust systematic reviews of after-school program evaluations estimated between a 6–14% decrease in antisocial behaviour among the program participants.¹⁰⁹

Anti-Bullying/Anti-Cyber Bullying Programs (International)

Bullying is a known predictor of future offending and violence. Anti-bullying and anti-cyber bullying programs have the potential to reduce youth offending. There are various examples of programs in Australia and overseas that aim to intervene early (mostly during the school years) to reduce bullying. Several systematic reviews of anti-bullying and anti-cyberbullying program evaluations have estimated such interventions result in a reduction in bullying anywhere between 10–35% among the program cohort.¹¹⁰

Child Skills Training and Behavioural Change Programs (Australia and International)

In young people, the pre-frontal cortex (the part of the brain that controls executive functioning) is still developing. This means that children and young people are still developing the cognitive processes required to plan, control impulses and weigh-up the consequences of decisions before acting.¹¹¹ There are various examples of programs that aim to build children's skills and cognitive abilities in areas that are often related to antisocial behaviour and offending (for example, self-control, impulsiveness, perspective and delayed gratification). Systematic reviews examining randomised-controlled trials of child skills training programs reported such interventions decrease antisocial behaviour by anywhere between 24–32% among the participants.¹¹² Similarly, systematic reviews of interventions that involve cognitive-behavioural therapy have shown effects on youth offending with anywhere between a 21–35% reduction in recidivism among the participants.¹¹³

The Queensland Government runs several evidence-informed behavioural change intervention programs for young people in the youth justice system including Rethinking our Attitude to Driving (ROAD),¹¹⁴ Changing Habits and Reaching Targets (CHART), Aggression Replacement Training (ART), Re-navigating Anger and Guilty Emotions (RAGE) and Emotional Regulation and Impulse Control (ERIC).¹¹⁵

Sport Programs (Australia and International)

There are limited evaluations in Australia with sound designs that evaluate the effectiveness of sport programs in preventing and reducing crime. However, a recent systematic review and meta-analysis of 13 control-group evaluations (two in Australia and the remainder overseas) found sport programs significantly protect against offending behaviour and related antisocial attitudes as well as significantly increase self-esteem and psychological wellbeing.¹¹⁶

Resolve (Logan, Qld)

Resolve is an early intervention program for young people aged 10 to 16 years old who are at-risk of justice system involvement. The program is delivered in Logan through a joint partnership between Youth and Family Service, Griffith University, Overflow Foundation and Queensland Police Service. The program includes community outreach, diversionary activities and intensive case management that uses a flexible, relational and strengths-based approach. The program also offers targeted and flexible individualised alcohol and drug interventions. A six-month review of the program showed early positive outcomes, with the majority of young people who exited the program meeting their goals or needs (79%), improving their level of hope (94%), improving their life skills (82%) and improving their wellbeing (88%). Griffith University is currently undertaking an outcome evaluation of the program.¹¹⁷

The Perry Preschool Project (United States)

Preschool programs provide early intervention and support for children at a crucial transition point in their development. There is evidence that certain behaviours in childhood are indicative of future offending.¹¹⁸ In the United States, the Perry Preschool Project is an evidence-based program that supports children from disadvantaged backgrounds to prevent the onset of offending. The Perry Preschool Project provides high-quality preschool education to children aged three and four years old in small school-based sessions delivered by qualified teachers. In addition, teachers conduct a weekly home visit to support parents with at-home learning. An evaluation of the Perry Preschool Project found the program produced sustained effects well into adulthood. Positive outcomes include improved educational attainment, fewer teen pregnancies, reduced likelihood of spending time in prison, lower arrest rates for violent crimes, higher median incomes, and reduced likelihood of receiving government assistance.¹¹⁹ As outlined in Appendix B, Queensland has implemented kindergarten programs that share similarities with the Perry Preschool Project.

Communities That Care (Australia and International)

There is strong evidence that primary prevention models – such as the Communities That Care (CTC) model¹²⁰ – are successful in mobilising communities to address factors that increase the risk of justice system involvement. These risk factors include harmful substance use, low academic achievement, early school leaving and violence. A recent study evaluated the impact of the CTC model across communities in Victoria, Australia, between 2010 and 2019. This study supports the existing evidence that shows that CTC prevents youth crime at a population level. The findings demonstrate significant reductions in crimes associated with CTC including a 2% annual reduction in risk for crimes against persons and a 5% annual reduction in risk for crimes of property and deception.¹²¹

Fast Track (United States)

Fast Track is an evidence-based early intervention program in the United States that focuses on disrupting the school-to-prison pipeline. The program delivers a series of multi-level, developmental and age-appropriate interventions to support children (from the age of five onwards), families and schools over a long-term developmental period. A 10-year longitudinal study found children who were randomly assigned to the intervention displayed a reduction in violent offences (31% reduction) and drug offences (35% reduction) as well as significantly lower internalising problems, externalising problems and alcohol and other drug use.¹²² Fast Track costs \$58,000 per child over the 10-year investment period, which is cheaper than incarcerating one child for just one year.¹²³

Youth Advocate Program (United States)

The Youth Advocate Program was developed in the United States. It is a strengths-based intensive support and advocacy program that provides individually tailored and wrap-around support to young people who are at-risk of, or already experiencing, involvement with the justice system. Evaluations have shown the program is more cost-effective than incarceration, it reduces justice system involvement, and improves other factors in children's lives.¹²⁴ The Queensland Government has funded a 12-month trial of the Youth Advocate Program on the Gold Coast for children aged 10 to 17 years old.¹²⁵

Youth Partnership Project (Western Australia)

The Youth Partnership Project (YPP) brings together state government, local government and the community sector in a place-based, collective impact approach to youth justice. The project focuses on the early identification of young people aged 8 to 12 years old with complex needs, and the delivery of targeted community services to prevent their involvement with the justice system.

The Armadale Youth Intervention Partnership, part of the YPP, achieved a 50% reduction in reoffending for those who completed the program.¹²⁶ Evaluation of YPP social outcomes used modelling to estimate that without the intervention, participants were likely to cost the government ~\$3 million in the future. It concluded that if the YPP Youth Justice Model reduces participants' future reliance on government by 10%, the program almost pays for itself, with ~\$300,000 of reduced government costs.¹²⁷

Youth Crime Action Plan (New Zealand)

The New Zealand 10-year Youth Crime Action Plan¹²⁸ is an approach to reducing youth offending rates, with a focus on the overrepresentation of Māori people in the New Zealand justice system. The program has sought to have a 'genuine partnership with communities' by involving Māori communities, frontline practitioners and schools. The program has involved working with 20 communities across New Zealand to develop their own solutions to youth offending problems.¹²⁹ In 2015, the New Zealand Justice and Courts Minister reported that the number of young people (aged 10–16) appearing in court had more than halved since 2007.¹³⁰ This approach is similar to that undertaken in the evidence-based Communities that Care program.

Fire Project (Cairns, Qld)

In 2022, James Cook University conducted an evaluation of the Fire Project, which is an early intervention and prevention initiative delivered by Harbrow Mentoring in partnership with Queensland Police. This evaluation notes that the program diverted 1341 young people from in CBD area in Cairns who were at-risk of offending behaviour over the 20 weeks it was operational. The evaluation recommended that the program be improved by establishing a safe place in Cairns for young people to engage in structured activities and developing a holistic plan with stakeholders to ensure young people and their families receive the appropriate supports and services.¹³¹

Evidence-based tertiary responses For children and young people

Children – especially young First Nations children – need off-ramps from the criminal justice system into effective community-based supports and interventions. Tertiary prevention programs occur after a young person has offended or after a person has become a victim of crime, with the aim of preventing recidivism and repeat victimisation.¹³² Like adult programs, community-led services and strategies for children and young people in contact with the justice system encompass diversion and sentencing alternatives, in-prison programs and post-release support. Developmental and age appropriate options consider the specific needs of young people and their families.

According to the Queensland Government, 17% of children who have offended are responsible for 48% of all youth crime in Queensland.¹³³ This is consistent with existing evidence that shows a small proportion of people who offend are responsible for a disproportionate amount of all crime.¹³⁴

In 2023, the Queensland Parliament passed the Strengthening Community Safety Bill 2023 (Qld), which introduced ineffective ‘tough on crime’ responses (including introducing breach of bail as an offence); this will lead to more young people in prison, which will exacerbate the existing youth justice crisis. The Queensland Government has already assessed that over half of all children (51%) remanded in custody in Queensland prisons have not committed serious repeat offences.¹³⁵ This suggests that too many children are already being unnecessarily funnelled into prison, rather than being diverted into community-led alternatives that will wrap supports around children

and their families to prevent future offending. The effectiveness of community-led tertiary interventions in responding to youth offending (including serious and violent offending) is well documented in the literature.¹³⁶

Existing solutions to repeat offending among young people are top-down rather than community-led. The Queensland Government established a Youth Justice Taskforce to provide a whole-of-government response to serious repeat offending.¹³⁷ While many of the initiatives implemented under this response (see Appendix B) have merit and potential, they are largely tertiary (rather than preventative) and government-led; these initiatives include multi-agency collaborative panels, intensive case management, Transition to Success and the Youth Co-Responder teams.

The Strengthening Community Safety Bill 2023 (Qld) embeds a punitive approach rather than an evidence-led solution. Key stakeholders, including the Queensland Police Union, have noted that alternatives approaches will be more effective.

The Queensland Police Union National Youth Crime Symposium report noted that, ‘There was a powerful and united view that the punitive model for children is not effective. There has to be, and is, a better way. The research and best-practice model already exist. We do not need to reinvent the wheel to get the best outcomes.’ This report recommended that ‘the primary, overriding aim of [youth] justice strategies should be to provide alternatives to the criminal justice process and keep [young people] out of court and custody’.

Griffith Youth Forensic Service (Qld)

Griffith University delivers the Griffith Youth Forensic Service in Queensland, which provides state-wide multisystemic and specialist assessment and treatment services for young people adjudicated for sexual offences. In 2015, a study evaluating the impact of the treatment provided by this service found it was equally effective at preventing sexual recidivism for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous youth. It also prevented violent and other recidivism for non-Indigenous youth living in remote and non-remote locations.¹³⁸

Ted Noffs Foundation (Qld and NSW)

The Ted Noffs Foundation runs a residential alcohol and other drug treatment service called Program for Adolescent Life Management (PALM) for young people aged 13 to 18 years old with problematic substance and crime-related behaviours. A recent evaluation of this program analysed three pre-referral trajectories of convictions (no or low, moderate or high-incline convictions) for over 891 young people referred to the PALM service in New South Wales. This study found treatment was associated with a significant decrease in convictions for the high-incline convictions trajectory, with 4.36 fewer convictions on average over five years post referral.¹³⁹ The Queensland Government has allocated \$12.7 million to build a 10-bed PALM residential facility in Queensland, which will be located in the Moreton Bay Region and will be available to young people aged 14 to 17 years old. The Ted Noffs Foundation also runs Street Universities in two locations in Queensland (Logan and Gold Coast) to support young people aged 12 to 25 years experiencing disadvantage.¹⁴⁰ In February 2023, the Queensland Government committed an additional \$4.2 million to establish a Ted Noffs Foundation Street University in Townsville.¹⁴¹

Transition to Success (Qld, 20 Locations)

In 2018, Deloitte undertook a six-month outcome evaluation of the Queensland Government Youth Justice run Transition to Success (T2S) voluntary vocational and therapeutic service for young people.¹⁴² Following this, Deloitte released further analysis evaluating outcomes from the program over a 12-month reporting period. This analysis found, when compared with a comparison group, T2S participants with a youth justice history had a lower reoffending rate (58% compared to 73% reoffended), a reduction in custody nights (0.7 decrease in average custody nights compared to a 1.7 increase in average custody nights) and a reduction in the average supervision days (1.4 decrease in average supervision days per month compared to a 1.9 increase in average supervision days per month). Additionally, the evaluation found for every \$1.00 spent on the T2S program, the program results in \$2.13 of benefits.¹⁴³ The Queensland Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs reports that it has allocated \$61.5 million towards delivering this initiative in 20 locations across Queensland.

Intensive Case Management (Qld, 15 Locations)

In February 2023, the Queensland Government published a report summarising findings from a 2022 Nous Group evaluation of the government-led Intensive Case Management (ICM) program. ICM is modelled on evidence-based practice frameworks including multi-systemic therapy,¹⁴⁴ Collaborative Family Work,¹⁴⁵ the Good Lives Model¹⁴⁶ and Strengthening Families Protective Factors.¹⁴⁷ This evaluation found 42% of ICM clients did not reoffend (some for as long as three years post-intervention). Additionally, the evaluation showed ICM resulted in a 51% reduction in the frequency of offending (in comparison to a 29% reduction for young people receiving alternative youth justice supports) and a 72% reduction in the proportion of crimes against the person (in comparison to a 13% reduction for young people receiving alternative youth justice supports). It is estimated that the program results in an \$8.1–15.7 million saving through reduced frequency and severity of offending and reduced time in custody.¹⁴⁸ The Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs reports that it has allocated \$56.8 million towards delivering this program in 15 locations in Queensland. In February 2023, the program's capacity was expanded in seven of the existing locations to increase the number of young people who can be supported.¹⁴⁹

Supervised Community Accommodation (Qld)

In 2019, Griffith University conducted an evaluation of the Supervised Community Accommodation (SCA) program for young people in Queensland. This evaluation found SCA provided young people with a high level of service delivery that addressed the drivers of offending and provided long-term safe and stable accommodation in a home-like environment. This evaluation highlighted the relatively strong integration of case management partnerships between youth justice staff and non-government service providers operating the facilities.¹⁵⁰ In 2020, Ernst & Young produced a follow-up evaluation and comparative analysis of SCAs in comparison to other residential care and bail support services. This evaluation concluded that SCA and residential care are higher in cost than bail support programs due to offering housing 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It also found that over 70% of young people did not offend while residing at SCAs but 83% of young people reoffended after exiting the program.¹⁵¹ Following this review in January 2021, the Queensland Government ceased operation and funding of SCA facilities. There is an opportunity to adopt lessons learnt from this supported bail accommodation model in Queensland and evidence-based models in other jurisdictions to establish alternative community-based accommodation options that support children to comply with their bail conditions and address the drivers of incarceration. Importantly, future alternative residential options in Queensland must be designed and delivered in collaboration with Elders, First Nations service providers and local communities.

Weave (Creating Futures) Evaluation (NSW)

This independent three-year evaluation of the Weave Creating Futures program (which provides intensive, culturally safe case work support to Aboriginal young people on release from custody) found that only 4.11% of the 93 young people who engaged in the program over the period of the evaluation reoffended. This compared to BOCSAR reoffending rates for young Aboriginal people, which are 57.30% for a comparable cohort.¹⁵²

Backtrack Youth Services Impact Report (NSW)

Over the last 10 years, the intensive, holistic and relational case work provided by Backtrack Youth Services has supported 1,000 children and young people at-risk of criminal justice system involvement or who are entrenched in the justice system. An impressive 87% of the young people who leave Backtrack transition into employment or education. A University of New South Wales' report about the impact of the program on the local community in Armidale found a 35% reduction in crime because of the engagement of young people in the program.¹⁵³

A Place to Go (NSW)

The A Place to Go pilot has been operational in the Nepean Police Area Command and Parramatta Children's Court since November 2018. The program aims to improve supports and deliver a better service response for 10 to 17-year-olds in contact with the justice system, with a focus on young people on remand. It draws on services from across New South Wales Government and non-government service providers to deliver a coordinated and multiagency service solution that can support young people to change their life trajectory. A Place to Go uses a young person's contact with police and/or the court as an opportunity to intervene early and link them with appropriate community supports and services, court liaison staff, cross-agency panels and dedicated short-term transitional accommodation. An independent evaluation found that young people were supported in finding stable and appropriate accommodation, accessing health services, removing barriers to education and connecting with their communities.¹⁵⁴

Focused Deterrence (United Kingdom)

Internationally, focused deterrence strategies have been shown to reduce crime in circumstances where a small cohort of people are responsible for a disproportionate amount of crime. Focused deterrence works by gaining an understanding of the drivers behind offending and implementing appropriate interventions that combine police engagement, community mobilisation and social service responses. It involves directly communicating the consequences of continued offending, while also ensuring required social services are available to the target groups or individuals. A systematic review of 24 evaluations on focused deterrence in the United Kingdom found it contributed to a reduction in crime by anywhere between 33–43%.¹⁵⁵ Exploration of focused deterrence strategies in Queensland must ensure appropriate representatives (such as youth workers or Elders) deliver deterrence messaging and connect young people with relevant supports.

ALTERNATIVES TO POLICING

The way policing operates around Australia has a significant impact on imprisonment rates. Reducing the number of people in prisons requires an examination of the 'front end' of the justice system, including the role, function and operations of police. To stem the flow of people unnecessarily funnelled into the prison system, there is a need to rethink policing, particularly in communities that are over-policed.

A significant proportion of police resources and police personnel (some estimates are as high as 65%) are devoted to street policing.¹⁵⁶ The overwhelming majority of contact with the criminal justice system occurs through interactions with police on the street.¹⁵⁷ The nature of this interaction often determines the extent to which involvement in the criminal justice system is escalated or de-escalated, and whether a person is arrested, charged and subsequently imprisoned.¹⁵⁸

The current nature of policing results in many people being unnecessarily or inappropriately funnelled into the criminal justice system, rather than being free to go about their lives while receiving the support, care and connection they require in the community. This is especially the case for First Nations communities, other racialised people,¹⁵⁹ people with disability, people with mental health conditions, and people living with other forms of disadvantage.¹⁶⁰ Of particular concern is the way in which policing activity in Australia can both accelerate and entrench contact with the criminal justice system for people who are not engaged in activity that puts the community at-risk.

Moreover, the nature of police interaction and engagement itself can be the exacerbating incident that results in activity or conduct that amounts to a criminal offence, resulting in charges being laid.¹⁶¹ The following are examples of policing activities that cause particular problems for people experiencing marginalisation:

- » Preventative and race-based policing that targets particular groups of people, especially Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities and other racialised groups¹⁶²
- » Police focus on enforcing minor and public order offences resulting in an escalation of conflict and a confrontational atmosphere
- » Discriminatory exercise of police discretion in relation to the decisions to stop and search, arrest and charge.

Police are frequently called upon to perform a 'first responder' role that would be better performed by social and community support services and networks. Due to an under-resourced social sector, police are often called upon to 'manage' people in need of support services, rather than such people receiving the care, support and assistance that is required in the community. Too often, people with mental health conditions, disabilities and other forms of disadvantage are 'criminalised' in their interactions with police, when alternative pathways outside of the criminal justice system are not available.

In Australia and internationally, there are alternative models of positive policing where interactions with police result in improved outcomes in terms of both community safety and reducing the likelihood of criminal justice system involvement.

Evidence-based case studies:

What works in alternative policing models?

Beat Policing Pilot Project (Toowoomba, Qld)

In 1993, the Criminal Justice Commission and Queensland Police Service established a two-year Toowoomba Policing Pilot Project, which focused on trialling community policing methods in Queensland. An evaluation of this pilot project found community policing increased community confidence and satisfaction with police, and decreased calls for service during the trial period.¹⁶³

Mental Health Co-Responder (Qld)

In partnership with the Queensland Police Service (QPS), mental health co-responder models were established in Cairns in 2011¹⁶⁴ and in the West Moreton region in 2017. In 2019, the model was expanded to service the metropolitan south region and include Queensland Ambulance Service (QAS). Under this model, a team of experienced mental health clinicians are integrated either into a QPS or QAS first responder unit, which enables people experiencing a mental health crisis to be assessed and receive onsite intervention in the community.

A 2022 Queensland Government review of this program found the mental health co-responder model enabled timely and appropriate mental health care to be provided to people presenting to QPS and QAS in a mental health crisis, and that the program builds the capacity of QPS and QAS to respond to mental health crises when co-responder clinicians are not available. This evaluation further found the majority of participants (74%) were diverted from custody and the emergency department. Of the people who interacted with the program, 45% did not require further assistance after the crises was resolved, 17% were referred to primary care or community-based services, and 12% were referred to mental health services. Only 2% of people were taken in custody, while the remaining 24% of people were transported to the emergency department.¹⁶⁵ This model has since been expanded to cover other regions in Queensland such as Townsville¹⁶⁶ and Mackay.¹⁶⁷

Domestic and Family Violence Co-Responder Models (Qld)

In Australia and overseas, co-responder models that incorporate specialist domestic and family violence (DFV) workers within police responses have shown to improve the quality of services provided at incidents and improve access to additional supports. In January 2021, the Queensland Police Service (QPS) commenced a collaborative project with the Domestic Violence Action Centre where a domestic violence specialist was co-located within the Toowoomba QPS station. In April 2022, Queensland University of Technology Centre for Justice published an evaluation of this project, which concluded that the co-responder model improved the experience and integrated response for people experiencing DFV in Toowoomba. Other reported benefits included emotional support, information sharing, communication, efficiency, education, access to networks, and improved policy legitimacy.¹⁶⁸ Similar co-responder models have since commenced in other locations across Queensland including Logan,¹⁶⁹ Brisbane and Ipswich.¹⁷⁰

Police Force Mental Health Co-Response Trial (WA)

In January 2016, the Western Australia Police Force implemented the Western Australia Police Force Mental Health Co-Response (MHCR) Commissioning Trial. The MHCR involved mental health practitioners co-located with police at the Police Operations Centre, and two mobile teams operating in north-west metropolitan and south-east metropolitan districts and the Perth Watch House. Mental health practitioners were involved at each stage of a police response to and management of people experiencing a mental health crisis. An independent evaluation of the trial found that it had improved the safety and wellbeing of police and mental health consumers and increased collaboration between the relevant services. Mental health consumers and families, carers and supporters saw the model as a considerable improvement over the traditional police crisis response. Based on the success of the trial, in 2019 the model was expanded to cover the whole Perth metropolitan area.¹⁷¹

Cooperative Initiatives – Redfern Police and Tribal Warrior (NSW)

Several cooperative initiatives between police and the local community have been introduced in Redfern, Sydney. In 2009, Redfern Police, Aboriginal community leaders and Tribal Warrior Aboriginal Corporation, instigated the 'Clean Slate Without Prejudice' program. In 2016, the 'Never Going Back' program was implemented with the additional assistance of Long Bay Correctional Complex General Manager. A 2016 review found the programs were having significant positive effects, including reductions in reported crime (particularly robbery and burglary), increased community confidence in police and enhanced resilience of communities and 'at-risk' groups.¹⁷² The principles underlying the success of the programs were:

1. Treating community members with respect, giving them a clear voice that is listened to by police, giving community members explanations for police activity and decisions, and utilising reliable and fair approaches towards community members.
2. Enhancing trust between police and community.
3. Police familiarity with key leaders and community collaborators to assist with the design of programs that will have the greatest influence in communities.

Aboriginal Community Patrols (Australia)

There are over 130 Aboriginal community patrols in operation across Australia in metropolitan and rural locations.¹⁷³ Patrols operate without police powers and rely on mediation to move people on from risky situations. They rely on 'cultural authority' as well as their local knowledge of Aboriginal families and issues to navigate their way through and resolve situations which may, in the hands of state authorities, deteriorate.¹⁷⁴ These patrols work to keep people safe, assist in finding people accommodation and provide people with referrals. While each has a different focus depending on the local need, they work with people to encourage and support them towards safer behaviours and to find safe accommodation. They also work to keep women safe from violence and discourage violence through their presence and the respect they carry in communities. These models operate from a basis of caring for their communities, not criminalising them. They provide healthy role models for community members and their work reduces contact between Aboriginal people and the police.¹⁷⁵ The patrols have made a significant contribution to crime reduction and community safety strategies. Several favourable evaluations have found that the Patrols have resulted in reduced levels of offending, reduced fear of crime and reductions in alcohol and other drug-related problems. There is also evidence to suggest significant cost savings for key justice, health, and education agencies from the presence of community patrols.¹⁷⁶

Aboriginal Community Liason Officers (Australia)

The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC) recommended that jurisdictions improve relations between police and Aboriginal people by appointing police aides and police liaison officers. Aboriginal Community Liaison Officers (ACLOs) play a pivotal liaison role between the relevant local Aboriginal community and police. They are community representatives within the organisation. In consultation with the community, ACLOs:

- » Provide advice to senior police members on local Aboriginal issues
- » Encourage Aboriginal communities to engage with police members to resolve issues
- » Help to develop and deliver appropriate training programs.¹⁷⁷

In its Pathways to Justice inquiry the ALRC received several submissions from Aboriginal Legal Services in the Northern Territory, Western Australia, New South Wales, and Victoria regarding the positive contribution from ACLOs in brokering connections between police and the community, with several noting the need for ACLOs to be stationed at all police stations and the need for them to be available after hours and on weekends.¹⁷⁸

Lead Bureau (United States, Multiple Jurisdictions)

Law enforcement assisted diversion is a community-based diversion approach that uses a harm-reduction lens with the aim of reducing involvement in the criminal justice system and improving community safety. Case managers work closely with police, prosecutors, and communities to provide alternative diversionary pathways that focus on addressing the drivers of contact with the criminal justice system. People involved in lead programs were 58% less likely to be arrested (compared to people in a control group who were not participating in lead programs).¹⁷⁹

Cahoots (Crisis Assistance Helping Out on the Streets) (Eugene, Oregon, United States)

CAHOOTS is a different first responder model that has been running for more than 30 years. It is a mental-health-crisis intervention program founded in 1989 by the Eugene Police Department and White Bird Clinic, a non-profit mental health crisis intervention initiative. Calls to 911 related to drug use, disorientation, mental health crises and homelessness are routed to CAHOOTS.

Staff members respond in pairs; usually one has training as a medic and the other has experience in street outreach or mental health support. Responders attend to immediate health issues, de-escalate, and help formulate a plan, which may include finding a bed in a homeless shelter or transportation to a healthcare facility. The service operates 24 hours a day. Cahoots diverts close to 8% of all police calls, reducing the load on the police department. Evaluations of CAHOOTS have found it to improve access to health and welfare services¹⁸⁰ as well as saving an estimated \$8.5 million annually in public safety spending.¹⁸¹

Portland Street Response (Oregon, United States)

Portland Street Response (PSR), a program within Portland Fire & Rescue (PF&R), assists people experiencing mental health and behavioural health crises. The team is made up of mental health crisis responders, community health medics, community health workers, and peer support specialists. In their outcome evaluation it is noted that, in the six months between April and September 2022, PSR responded to 3,228 incidents. This represented a reduction of more than 3.2% of total calls to police; an 18.7% reduction for the police in non-emergency responses and reduced the numbers of people called out to emergency departments. Most people were responded to by PSR, with only 1.9% of all calls resulting in a hospital admission.¹⁸²

The Behavioural Health Emergency Assistance Response Division, B-Heard (New York City, United States)

The B-HEARD Team is an alternative first responder model in New York City. Responders use their mental health expertise in crisis response to de-escalate emergency situations and provide immediate care. Evaluation of the pilot has found that the project reduces unnecessary transports to hospitals, increases connection to ongoing mental health care and reduces the number of times police respond to 911 mental health calls. In the 12 months to June 2022, there were approximately 11,000 mental health 911 calls in the pilot area. Of people assisted by B-HEARD:

- » 54% were transported to a hospital for additional care – (compared to 87% under the traditional response)
- » 36% were served in their community
- » 24% were served onsite, including de-escalation, counselling, or referral to community-based care
- » 12% were transported to a community-based healthcare or social service location.¹⁸³

Pre-Charge Diversion (International)

A 2018 review of 19 studies evaluated the effects of police-initiated diversion programs on re-offending behaviour, compared to traditional system processing. The review summarises evidence from four countries – the United States (11), Canada (four) the United Kingdom (two) and Australia (two). The general pattern of evidence suggests that police-led diversion reduces future offending behaviour of low-risk youth relative to traditional processing. Assuming a 50% reoffending rate for the traditional processing condition, the results suggest a reoffending rate of roughly 44% for the diverted young people. The findings from this systematic review support the use of police-led diversion for low-risk youth with limited or no prior involvement with the juvenile justice system.¹⁸⁴

ALTERNATIVES TO MAINSTREAM COURT PROCESSES

The moment that a person attends court is a critical point in the justice system process. The outcome of a court process, and the process itself, have the capacity to either further entrench someone in the justice system, or provide a 'springboard' out. There is a significant evidence base supporting alternative, diversionary, specialist, restorative and problem-solving court processes. These alternative court options should be expanded throughout Queensland, particularly in regional and remote areas.

Alternatives to mainstream court processes, including restorative and transformative justice, should be available to a much larger cohort of people who come into contact with the court system. Although there are complexities and challenges involved in the implementation of alternative models, the principles on which they are based, and the bulk of the evidence

evaluating their outcomes tells a compelling story in terms of their utility. On the other hand, mainstream court processes often fail to address the drivers of incarceration. There are limitations with mainstream courts recognising or accommodating the unique needs of people experiencing marginalisation and disadvantage. This is especially the case for people with disability, mental health conditions, and for First Nations communities. Mainstream courts are also limited in their capacity to divert people from the criminal justice system. They are limited in their abilities to address the underlying, complex, and compounding disadvantages that steer people towards the justice system. They are also often limited because they do not have access to the services, supports and programs in the community that are fundamental when it comes to allowing magistrates to consider alternative options.

Evidence-based case studies:

What works in alternative court processes?

In-Court Diversion

In-court diversion programs divert people from the criminal justice system at the point a case comes before a court. These procedures enable matters to be resolved in various ways outside traditional court processes and outcomes. Many court-based programs allow for diversion before the case is heard (otherwise known as pre-plea diversion). In some cases, the outcome of the diversion program influences whether or not someone has their matter heard in court, and in some cases whether or not someone spends time in prison.

The key objective of this process is to reduce a person's contact with the criminal justice system at an early stage and instead provide appropriate therapeutic interventions. This includes addressing factors related to offending, and in some circumstances allowing for the participation of victims in the process. In-court diversion to practical, alternative programs aims to provide opportunities to address some of the underlying causes of contact with the justice system (including harmful use of alcohol and other drugs, harmful gambling, mental illness, cognitive impairment, poverty, and disadvantage) and reduce the likelihood of continuing contact with the criminal justice system.

Evaluations have found in-court diversion programs are effective at reducing contact with the justice system, reducing imprisonment, and facilitating access to support and treatment. The Magistrates' Court of Victoria noted that participants in its In-Court Diversion program have reduced likelihood of re-offending, avoidance of a criminal record, and increased access to supports, counselling and treatment.¹⁸⁵ Evaluations of the Magistrates Early Release into Treatment (MERIT) program in New South Wales have found reduced likelihood of reconviction¹⁸⁶ alongside increased health and wellbeing.¹⁸⁷ Evaluations of the Court Integrated Services Program (CISP) and Bail Support Diversion in Victoria found the program has reduced the number of defendants remanded, contributed to the successful completion of bail, reduced likelihood of re-offending and likelihood of homelessness.¹⁸⁸ A recent evaluation of the Australian Capital Territory sentencing list also found positive outcomes, reporting early indications of reduced offending, as well as positive shifts with regard to alcohol and other drug use and improved outcomes in terms of social reintegration.¹⁸⁹

Pre-Court Diversion for Children (Australia)

Children and young people may undertake pre-court diversion that involves an intervention (for example they are required to participate in a formal diversion program) or no intervention (for example they just receive a caution, reprimand, or warning).¹⁹⁰ Systematic reviews of studies that compare children who were diverted with children who were processed through formal court proceedings show pre-court diversion is associated with a decrease in recidivism anywhere between 9–36%.¹⁹¹ Pre-court diversion programs that include services and supports have been found to be significantly more effective than diversion on its own.¹⁹²

A 2011 study in Queensland found that in comparison to children who were processed through the court on their first contact with the justice system, children who were cautioned for their first contact were significantly less likely to have repeated contact with the justice system (as well as less frequent and less serious re-contact). This study also found that, when compared to non-Indigenous young people, First Nations young people were less likely to be diverted to cautioning for their first contact and less likely to be diverted by police for conferencing for their second, third and fourth contact with the justice system. This study noted there is a particular need to undertake rigorous evaluations of diversion programs to better understand what programs are working and could be expanded across the state.¹⁹³

Children's Court Youth Diversion (Victoria)

In Victoria, the Children's Court operates a Youth Diversion Service based on restorative justice principles that aim to assist participants to take responsibility for their actions, repair harm and increase insight into the impacts of their offending upon the victim, their family, and the community. Children and young people can have court proceedings adjourned for up to four months to participate in diversion programs or services. They must acknowledge responsibility for the offence. An evaluation report found that the program was successful in diverting young people from the formal justice system. The magistrates working across the pilot sites for the program uniformly agreed that it provided them with an important additional option to their decision-making process. All stakeholders and young people agreed that the program offered a positive alternative and filled an important gap to help keep the young people diverted from the formal justice system.¹⁹⁴

Community and Neighbourhood Justice Centres

Community justice courts and centres typically focus on particular neighbourhoods, types of offences and crimes and provide holistic support. The community justice model offers a holistic, wrap-around suite of services to support individuals in contact with the criminal justice system and address the causes of offending. This includes triaging participants to appropriate social and health services and programs.

The most high-profile and well evaluated example in Australia of a community justice approach is the Neighbourhood Justice Centre (NJC) in Collingwood, Victoria. A 2015 evaluation conducted by the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) found:

- » The NJC had 25% lower rates of reoffending than other Magistrates' Courts in Victoria
- » Participants who went through the NJC were three-times less likely to breach community corrections orders; and
- » Participants who went through the NJC demonstrate lower breach rates for intervention orders.¹⁹⁵

Restorative Justice Conferencing for Children And Adults (Qld and New Zealand)

Internationally, studies have found restorative justice conferencing is cost effective in terms of reducing repeat reoffending.¹⁹⁶ In Australia, restorative youth justice conferencing has also been shown to reduce reoffending in circumstances where young people are remorseful, and their conference outcomes are reached via consensus.¹⁹⁷ According to an internal 2018 12-month program evaluation of restorative youth justice conferencing in Queensland, 59% of young people who participated in restorative justice conferencing did not reoffend within six months of their conference.¹⁹⁸ The Queensland Government has since reported that it has over a number of years invested \$65.1 million towards restorative youth justice conferencing¹⁹⁹ and 77% of participants either did not reoffend or decreased the magnitude of their offending.²⁰⁰ Regardless of reoffending outcomes, restorative youth justice conferencing results in positive outcomes for victims and communities through actions that repair the harm caused by the young person's offending.²⁰¹ 70% of victims in Queensland reported youth justice conferencing helped them to 'manage the effects of the crime'.²⁰² Yet, restorative youth justice conferencing remains underutilised in Queensland²⁰³ and the number of children referred to a restorative justice conference decreased substantially from 3,169 referrals in 2020–21²⁰⁴ to 2,249 referrals in 2021–22.²⁰⁵ Reasons cited for the underutilisation of restorative justice conferencing in Queensland include discretionary gatekeeping by police, lack of a systematic and comprehensive consultation process with victims and children who are referred, and lack of evidence-based implementation of restorative youth justice conferencing.²⁰⁶

In Queensland, restorative youth justice conferences are convened by departmental staff.²⁰⁷ Comparatively, Jesuit Social Services in Australia run restorative justice conferences in Victoria and the Northern Territory. In a recent evaluation by Swinburne University, it was found that group conferencing was associated with a reduction in recidivism of between 24–40% compared to mainstream justice processes. This evaluation also found conferencing was extraordinarily cost-effective (running one conference costs about the equivalent of keeping a child in custody for four days).²⁰⁸

In New Zealand, family-group conferences are used at different stages of interaction with the youth justice system,²⁰⁹ including where there is an intention to charge, as a court-ordered option pre-or post-sentencing, when a young person is remanded (to explore alternative community-based options), and where there is a care and protection consideration (for children aged 10 to 13 years old).²¹⁰ Importantly, this model focuses on ensuring young people received community-based supports that address the drivers of offending.

There have been some important critiques in Australia of the way in which restorative conferencing has not always adequately engaged in a meaningful or respectful way with First Nations communities. The research in this space notes the importance of ensuring restorative programs are developed and implemented by First Nations communities with appropriate self-determination and resourcing.²¹¹

Drug Courts

Drug courts recognise the association between alcohol and other drug dependence and contact with the justice system and acknowledge the importance of addressing dependency to reduce the risk of recidivism. Drug courts operate as pre-adjudicative (where prosecution is deferred) or post adjudicative (where sentencing is deferred or suspended following a guilty plea).²¹²

There is now a significant evidence base examining the impact of drug courts in Australia and internationally. Although there are clear challenges to be addressed regarding the associated importance of access to quality services, supports and treatments outside of the justice system, the overwhelming evidence suggests drug courts have a positive impact when it comes to reducing the likelihood of reoffending, and improving access to alcohol and other drug treatment and support. Drug courts have been found to be more effective than mainstream courts at addressing the intersection of drug dependency with the criminal justice system.²¹³

In 2014–15, the Queensland Government commissioned an independent review of Queensland drug and specialist courts over the initial 13-year period of operation in Queensland (from 2000 to 2013 when the courts were defunded).²¹⁴ This review recognised previous evidence demonstrating drug courts can effectively reduce reoffending and supported the re-introduction of a drug court in Queensland. The Queensland Drug and Alcohol Court (QDAC) was reinstated in 2018. An external evaluation of the QDAC is underway, with an expected completion in 2023.²¹⁵ People who are assessed as suitable for participation in the QDAC (by a multi-agency assessment process) are sentenced to a Drug and Alcohol Treatment Order as an alternative to imprisonment. Fifty people commenced treatment orders in 2021–22 and a total of 21 people have completed the program since its commencement.²¹⁶ This supports anecdotal reports that there is an opportunity to increase access and expand operations for the QDAC.

Evaluations in other Australian jurisdictions have also shown positive results. An independent 2014 evaluation of the Victorian drug court found participants reported improvements in a range of social and health wellbeing measures (including measures like connectedness to community, which is associated with reduced risk of harmful alcohol and other drug use). Participants also had reduced risks in terms of mental health and alcohol and other drug use. This study further found participants had lower rates of reoffending over both 12 months (lower by 31%) and 24 months (lower by 34%) follow up.²¹⁷ Similarly, an evaluation of the New South Wales Drug Court found participants (compared to a control group) were 17% less likely to be reconvicted for a new offence, 30% less likely to be reconvicted for a violent offence, and 38% less likely to be reconvicted for a drug offence.²¹⁸

Mental Health Courts

There are a variety of alternative court models for people with mental health conditions and/or cognitive disability. These courts typically adopt a similar approach as drug courts, combining intensive judicial monitoring and treatment to ensure that people with mental health conditions and/or cognitive disability access treatment and support while subject to proceedings and supervision. Some are specifically targeted at people with mental health conditions and co-occurring problematic substance use, with the aim of stabilising mental health and targeting drug use in a drug-court-style treatment and testing regime. There is a robust international evidence base demonstrating the way mental health courts are likely to reduce reoffending and facilitate access to support and treatment services.²¹⁹

Mental health court diversion has operated in Queensland (in some form) for almost 40 years.²²⁰ Currently, it occurs through the Queensland Mental Health Court (QMHC), which aims to divert people with mental health conditions and intellectual disability from the criminal justice system into treatment services.²²¹ In accordance with the Mental Health Act 2016, the QMHC determines whether a person was of unsound mind when they committed an offence and whether a person is fit for trial. Unlike the mainstream court processes, supreme court judges within QMHC are advised by two assisting psychiatrists and receive a range of evidence including information relating to a person's mental health and/or intellectual disability.

A 2011 study of mental health court diversion in Queensland found people who were determined to be of unsound mind reoffended at lower levels for general and violent offences, committed less general and violent offences on average, committed less serious offences, and had longer periods of desistance from offending.²²² There is an opportunity for future research to explore the effectiveness of QMHC diversion in terms of reducing reoffending and facilitating access to support and treatment services. Additionally, future research should explore the implications of involuntary treatment and indefinite detention in Queensland. Current practice in Queensland allows for the indefinite involuntary treatment of people in prison or within a forensic mental health facility, with a recent study finding Queensland has the third highest rate of involuntary treatment in Australia behind South Australia and New South Wales.²²³

First Nations Courts

For First Nations people, courts have regularly failed to acknowledge or recognise the impact and context of the history of colonisation, and the specific set of circumstances in which contact with the justice system has occurred. Mainstream courts have also often failed to respond to First Nations people in ways that are culturally meaningful.

Specialist First Nations alternative courts models differ to the mainstream court system in that they incorporate restorative principles, support First Nations leadership (usually involving First Nations Elders) and adopt a culturally safe model for working with First Nations People.²²⁴ First Nations Courts put culture and healing at the centre of the court process, often through Elders participation, with the ultimate aim of reducing incarceration and ongoing criminal justice system involvement. First Nations specialist courts have been introduced throughout Australia, such as Queensland's Murri Courts, New South Wales's Circle Sentencing, Victoria's Koori Courts, South Australia's Nunga Courts and Western Australia's Kalgoorlie Court.²²⁵

In a recent evaluation of the Queensland Murri Court (operating across 14 jurisdictions in Queensland), participants reported that participation in the court had reduced their contact with the justice system, and that the involvement of Elders encouraged attendance at court and provided a layer of support and accountability that encouraged people before the court to take responsibility.²²⁶

Overall, evaluations have found First Nations-led courts to be highly effective in several ways. For instance, court attendance is higher for specialist First Nations courts in comparison to mainstream courts²²⁷ and court staff are better equipped to support First Nations people.²²⁸ There are also strong indications that reoffending rates are also reduced when processes are implemented well and when there are resources to support participants. For example, a New South Wales BOCSAR evaluation found First Nations participation in Circle Sentencing led to a 9.3% reduction in people receiving a prison sentence and a 3.9% reduction in reoffending within 12 months.²²⁹ The study also noted that it took an extra 55 days for a reoffence to occur. Similarly, an evaluation of the Youth Koori Court pilot in Parramatta, New South Wales found fewer children were locked up in youth detention as a result of the Youth Koori Court, and days in custody were reduced.²³⁰

An evaluation of the original Koori Court Pilot program in Victoria found Koori Courts improved rates of recidivism, with a 16.91% and 13.91% reduction of reoffending in the Shepparton Court and the Broadmeadow Court respectively.²³¹ The success of the Victorian Koori courts was more recently noted in the recent Parliamentary Inquiry into the Criminal Justice System in Victoria, where the committee recommended expanding the reach, the jurisdiction and scope of the Koori Court.²³²

In South Australia, an earlier study compared outcomes from the South Australian mainstream Magistrates Court and the Nunga Court between 2007 and 2009.²³³ This study found Nunga Court defendants were significantly less likely to be sent to prison, receive a monetary penalty, and have their drivers licence disqualified in comparison to similarly positioned First Nations defendants who had their matter processed through the conventional courts.

Internationally, studies on the impact of the Iwi Justice Panels in New Zealand and the Gladue Court in Canada have also found that people who participated in specialist courts were less likely to reoffend, and where reoffending did occur, it was less severe.²³⁴

Other benefits associated with specialist First Nations courts include their ability to empower First Nations by ensuring they self-determine their own outcomes related to criminal justice, increase access to justice, and foster a better relationship between First Nations communities and criminal justice authorities.²³⁵ Additionally, participants in the Iwi Justice Panels reported positive lifestyle changes such as finding employment and education opportunities.²³⁶

There have been some examples where specialist sentencing courts have not appeared to have an impact in terms of recidivism. In 2015, the two specialist Aboriginal sentencing courts in Western Australia were abolished following evaluations that found recidivism did not significantly reduce as a consequence of participation. Although subsequently re-established, this also happened in Queensland to Murri Courts in 2012.²³⁷ Evaluation of Nunga courts in South Australia also found unclear results relating to the impact of the court on reoffending.²³⁸ There have however been clearly identified limitations related to data collection, data analysis and methodology in these evaluations.²³⁹

Other issues have emerged in response to these evaluations, which identify some of the complexities and challenges of successful implementation. For instance, the evaluation of the Murri Courts in Queensland noted the effectiveness and success of specialist courts was also dependent on external factors such as the availability of adequate resources in First Nations communities, particularly services that are culturally appropriate and First Nations-led. This includes the opportunities to improve the availability of culturally meaningful diversionary programs, alongside addressing the structural and economic factors associated with First Nations over-incarceration. This means for instance addressing unemployment, low school attendance, problematic alcohol and other drug use, homelessness, lack of crisis support, and family support.²⁴⁰

The Australian Law Reform Commission suggests First Nations courts should ideally:

- » Involve active participation by the defendant and the community
- » Provide individualised case management for the defendant and wrap-around services
- » Be culturally appropriate and competent
- » Ensure their design, implementation and evaluation is led by relevant Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander organisations.²⁴¹

Specialist Domestic and Family Violence Courts

There are various models of Specialist Domestic and Family Violence courts that operate across Australia and internationally, which in some cases have shown through evaluations to improve outcomes and experiences for people who use the court.²⁴² Domestic and Family Violence Courts operate in five locations across Queensland to provide a specialist multidisciplinary and collaborative court response to domestic and family violence cases.²⁴³

A 2017 mixed-methodology Griffith University evaluation of the Specialist Domestic and Family Violence Court trial in Southport found that compared to traditional court processes the specialist court had many short/medium term outcomes such as strong positive assessments about the process from stakeholders and court users; improved management, coordination, and proactive partnerships; and increased reported understanding of the court processes.²⁴⁴ The recommendations in this evaluation informed the implementation and operation of Specialist Domestic and Family Violence in the other locations across Queensland.²⁴⁵

BAIL SUPPORT AND ALTERNATIVES TO REMAND

Bail laws must be informed by an evidence-based approach that genuinely centres community safety. Remanding people in custodial settings should only be used as a last resort. There is a particular need for evidence-based alternatives that are community-led and managed outside of custodial settings. This includes looking at appropriate diversion alternatives such as access to alcohol and other drug services, mental health and disability support, holistic wrap-around case management, culturally safe First Nations supports, and safe and secure accommodation.

The overuse of pre-trial detention does not ultimately make the community safer. In fact, it increases the risk of reoffending because of the criminogenic nature of incarceration.²⁴⁶ People who do not receive bail and are remanded in custody suffer the hardships of incarceration (loss of liberty, disconnection and separation from community, loss of housing, loss of employment, loss of identity, institutionalisation, de-humanisation, the traumatic experience of imprisonment) without having been found guilty of an offence. People on remand are typically housed in high security custodial environments, with limited access to programs and services. There is also strong evidence to suggest that pre-trial detention and remand, even for short-term periods, contributes to future offending.²⁴⁷

Reducing the use of remand requires complementary increases to bail support. Bail support refers to the provision of services, intervention or support designed to assist an accused person to successfully comply with their bail obligations.²⁴⁸ The principal aims of bail support are to prevent reoffending while on bail, increase the likelihood of a person facing criminal charges appearing in court, and to provide an alternative to remand in custody given prison has a detrimental impact on a person's likelihood of reoffending.

Bail support programs may also be combined with diversionary programs that seek to address factors such as problematic alcohol and other drug use. Such combined programs aim to provide an integrated approach to assisting people to obtain and remain on bail.²⁴⁹

The Queensland Council of Social Services (QCOSS) blueprint notes there has been a 3.6% increase between 2011–12 to 2020–21 in the number of people released from prison who have accessed specialised homelessness services in Queensland. Based on the average monthly caseload of Queensland specialist homelessness services, homelessness in has also increased by 22% in the four years to 2021–22 (much higher than the national increase of 8%).²⁵⁰ Lack of suitable and stable accommodation poses a barrier for many individuals to meet bail requirements, especially those in rural, regional, or remote areas.²⁵¹ Bail hostels and bail supported accommodation provide a potential solution as these services ensure adequate access to housing, thereby increasing access to bail. When coupled with effective bail support, such support services can increase bail compliance.²⁵²

Bail hostels and bail supported accommodation are residential establishments that accommodate people as a condition of bail, generally with some degree of endorsement or regulation by the government. While there are long-standing examples of bail hostels and supported accommodation in some jurisdictions in Australia, these services have not been systematically implemented throughout Australian states and territories.²⁵³

The Law Council of Australia and many others have recommended the introduction of more bail hostel programs in Australia. The Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) and others have noted the features that influence the success of bail hostels and bail supported accommodation include:

- » Their affordability
- » Ensuring they are targeted towards people who do not have access to alternative accommodation to avoid net widening
- » Ensuring they are geographically available in regional and remote areas

- » Ensuring availability for diverse populations including First Nations people, people with mental health or cognitive impairment, people at-risk of domestic violence and people who are experiencing homelessness
- » Taking care to ensure the safety of all people residing in bail hostels and allocating beds occurs thoughtfully.²⁵⁴

Overall, the research and analysis suggest it is more cost effective to house a person in a bail hostel or bail supported accommodation than in prison, after considering the economic and social benefits of individuals maintaining employment and relationships and contributing to rent, as well as reduced recidivism.²⁵⁵

Evidence-based case studies:

What works in bail support?

Caxton Legal Centre Men's Bail Support Program (Qld)

The Men's Bail Support Program (MBSP) was delivered by Caxton Legal Centre in Brisbane from April 2019 to August 2022 and externally evaluated as being highly successful. Men supported by the program had improved pro-social behaviours and were less likely to re-offend in the short to medium term. In 2021–22:

- » 77% of applications for bail made by the MBSP were granted
- » 95% MSBP participants were bail compliant
- » 25% were Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander men – they were supported to access Aboriginal health services, culturally appropriate alcohol and other drug counselling and residential programs, men's yarning groups, culturally appropriate employment, and skills training programs.²⁵⁶

Sisters Inside Women's Bail Support Program (Qld)

In 2021, an external evaluation of the Sisters Inside Women's Bail Support Program (WBSP) found the program effectively supports women to access bail, comply with bail conditions, and connect to services in the community. The evaluation, commissioned by Queensland Corrective Services and undertaken by ARTD consultants, found 61% of women who accessed the service and completed their bail order did not return to prison or have another warrant issued. Additionally, the evaluation found the WBSP is cost-effective and much cheaper than incarceration (\$66 compared to \$111 per woman per day), saving the Queensland Government \$45 per woman per day.²⁵⁷

Bail Support Court Integrated Services Program (VIC) and other Court Diversion Programs

Evaluations have found these programs to be effective at reducing contact with the justice system, reducing imprisonment, and facilitating access to support and treatment. The Magistrates' Court of Victoria noted participants in its In-Court Diversion program have reduced likelihood of re-offending, avoidance of a criminal record, and increased access to supports, counselling and treatment.²⁵⁸ Evaluations of the Magistrates Early Release into Treatment (MERIT) program in New South Wales found reduced likelihood of reconviction²⁵⁹ and increased health and wellbeing.²⁶⁰ Evaluations of the Court Integrated Services Program (CISP) and Bail Support Diversion programs in Victoria found the programs reduced the number of defendants remanded, contributed to the successful completion of bail, reduced likelihood of re-offending, and reduced likelihood of homelessness.²⁶¹ A recent evaluation of the ACT Drug and Alcohol Sentencing list found positive outcomes and reported early indications of reduced offending, as well as positive shifts with regard to problematic alcohol and other drug use and improved outcomes relating to social reintegration.²⁶² In 2009, the CISP was favourably evaluated for its effectiveness and cost benefit. People involved in the CISP showed a 33% reduction in reoffending. Where a person did reoffend, the offending was less frequent (30.4% less) and less serious. For every \$1 invested in the CISP the economic benefit to the community is \$2.60 after five years and the long-term benefit is \$5.90 after 30 years.²⁶³

Metropolitan Youth Bail Support Service (WA)

The Metropolitan Youth Bail Support (MYBS) aims to prevent the excessive detainment of young people in the metropolitan area who are eligible for bail but lack a suitable responsible adult. The Bail Act 1982 permits Youth Bail Coordinators to fill this role as the responsible person. The MYBS provides education on the court process and court attendance for young people, as well as referrals to community-based services to address the drivers of offending and ensure adequate supervision and monitoring while on bail. Placements may include short and long-term housing options, rehabilitation services, psychiatric facilities or with family members.

The Youth Support Officers Program assigns positive role models to support young people who have committed crimes or are at-risk of offending. A youth support officer is assigned based on a youth justice officer assessment or a request from the court or the Supervised Release Review Board. The youth support officer offers practical assistance with transportation, education, emotional needs, and organises positive leisure activities. Young people in Western Australia who finished the program completed their bail orders at a rate of 70% compared to 50% for young people who were granted bail with an undertaking from a responsible person.²⁶⁴

FIRST NATIONS-LED PLACE-BASED APPROACHES

Place-based approaches seek to address complex social problems at the local level rather than through top-down policies. They draw on the unique capabilities and strengths, as well as the challenges, faced by First Nations communities and challenge governments to develop genuine partnerships with communities to alleviate complex disadvantage.²⁶⁵ Place-based initiatives prioritise physical infrastructure, employment, education, community capacity building and cultural connection as ways to address the social drivers of crime.

As outlined below, Community Justice Groups (CJGs) have been leading important work to implement place-based responses and improve justice outcomes for First Nations communities across Queensland. In July 2022, CJGs and governmental representatives attended a Stop Black Deaths in Custody (Meanjin) Forum on First Nations justice. A comprehensive report from this forum sets out a roadmap for Queensland to implement justice reforms that will improve outcomes for First Nations communities at both the local and state level. This report provides a number of concrete recommendations about how to immediately improve outcomes for First Nations people at multiple touchpoints in the criminal justice system.

Evidence-based case studies: **What works in First Nations-led place-based responses**

Community Justice Groups (Statewide, Qld)

Community Justice Groups (CJGs) were first trialled in three Queensland communities in 1993 in response to the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. The program has since been expanded state-wide, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led CJGs now operating in 41 communities across Queensland. CJGs work with key stakeholders to coordinate place-based responses that support First Nations people interacting with the justice system. A 2010 KPMG-led evaluation found stakeholders involved in Queensland CJGs widely supported the initiative and that it is closely aligned with state and national justice priorities; however, CJGs required greater resourcing and support to improve their capacity to deliver responses that reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in prison.²⁶⁶ Following this evaluation, Queensland Government released a Framework for Stronger CJGs and allocated an additional \$19.1 million over four years in the 2019–20 state budget to enhance the initiative. Myuma Pty Ltd is currently undertaking a second outcome evaluation of the CJG initiative (due for completion in December 2023). A Phase 1 implementation evaluation report was released in November 2021, which noted the extensive outputs of CJGs and provided recommendations to strengthen program implementation and inputs during the program enhancement phase.²⁶⁷ This implementation evaluation as well as the Our Community Justice website share early success stories from CJGs across Queensland.²⁶⁸

The Yiriman Project (WA)

The Yiriman Project – which is run by the elders of four Kimberley language groups to reconnect their young people to culture while also reducing contact with the criminal justice system, harmful substance use and suicide – has received numerous awards and positive evaluations.²⁶⁹ Yet it has struggled over the past two decades to secure the funding it needs to continue its services. Children and young people aged 15 to 25 years are taken out on country to visit Elders where they are involved in deep learning and transmission of culture and language, workshops, making of artefacts and taking care of the land. A three-year evaluation found it reduced participants' subsequent contact with the criminal justice system, with some concluding it was better than most other sentencing and diversionary options in this regard.²⁷⁰

Maranguka Justice Reinvestment Project (NSW)

The independent review of the Maranguka justice reinvestment Project at Bourke in 2016–17 found a 23% reduction in domestic violence offending; 38% reduction in the number of youth proceeded against for driving offences, alongside increased rates of school retention and estimated savings of \$3.1 million over the course of a year.²⁷¹ The close partnership between the community and police was critical to the success of this work, with regular meetings between police and community members, sharing of data, and working together to identify community members in need.²⁷²

Yuwaya Ngarra-li (NSW)

Yuwaya Ngarra-li is community-led partnership between the Dharriwaa Elders Group and the University of New South Wales aims to improve the wellbeing, social, built and physical environment and life pathways of Aboriginal people in Walgett, New South Wales, through collaboration on evidence-based initiatives, research and capacity building. A 2022 report from Yuwaya Ngarra-li evaluating change in youth justice outcomes since the commencement of the partnership in 2018 showed there were overall increases in diversions in 2019 and 2020 (but decreases again in 2021); overall reductions in charges and court cases; and reductions in youth custody episodes but noted the need for ongoing work to embed systemic change.²⁷³

Olabud Doogethu (WA)

The Kimberley-based Olabud Doogethu project is Western Australia's first justice reinvestment site. Olabud Doogethu aims to create stronger communities, more resilient families and young people, and reduce youth involvement in the criminal justice system in the Halls Creek Shire. The project's focus is community-driven and Aboriginal-led initiatives that build local community cohesion, capacity, leadership and infrastructure; tackle disadvantage; and create local justice support opportunities. 90% local Aboriginal employment has been achieved for all Olabud Doogethu service programs.²⁷⁴ Data provided by Western Australia Police for the period 2017–20 showed significant reductions in youth crime at the site, including a 63% reduction in burglaries; a 43% reduction in oral cautions, a 69% reduction in arrests; a 64% reduction in Aboriginal persons admitted to police custody (aged 10-plus) and a 59% reduction in stealing of motor vehicles.²⁷⁵

Indigenous Healing Lodges (Canada)

In Canada, there are currently 10 Indigenous Healing Centres that operate as alternatives to custody for Indigenous peoples. These centres are modelled on Indigenous values, traditions, and beliefs, and provide culturally responsive services and programs to address the drivers of incarceration and prepare a person for their release into the community. The most recent evaluation of Indigenous Healing Lodges outlines their success in terms of supporting and preparing Indigenous people to return to the community. When compared with a matched control group, Indigenous people who resided at a healing lodge demonstrated greater positive changes in dynamic risk factors over the course of their stay and were more likely to participate in services, programs and supports available to them. When controlling for other factors, Indigenous people residing at a healing lodge who engaged with Indigenous specific services and interventions were also less likely to have further engagements with the justice system. Men who completed Indigenous programs at the lodge had a 54% lower risk of revocation of release, while women who demonstrated an interest at intake had a 65% lower risk of return to custody.²⁷⁶ Elders and First Nations communities in Queensland continue to call for funding to establish First Nations-led healing centres for both children and adults.

POST-RELEASE SUPPORT AND THROUGH CARE

Support is critical at the point when people are released from prison back into the community. People leaving prison face homelessness, joblessness and ongoing health and social disadvantages. While there are valuable services operating in Queensland, there is a great deal more that needs to be done to invest in community-led interventions for people leaving prison. There is significant research noting that for many people who are 'caught' in the cycle of justice system involvement, it is much easier to return to prison than it is to survive in the community.²⁷⁷ There are multiple reasons for this. Most people leave prison in Queensland with no meaningful community-based supports, nowhere safe to live, minimal financial stability, and limited employment opportunities. Although there are some highly effective specialist services that work to support people to connect with community, they are chronically under-resourced.

There are multiple barriers for people leaving prison to access mainstream welfare and support services. Most mainstream welfare services will not do 'in-reach' into prisons. Many services (including many homeless,

alcohol and other drugs and domestic violence services) will not take people straight from prison. Many services will not take people with a criminal record, and many will not take people who have any history of violence. Across the sector, there is also a lack of specialist knowledge, resources, and structural capacity for already stretched organisations to take on the complexity of working with post-incarceration clients. The absence of First Nations-led culturally safe services acts as another barrier to many people accessing the necessary support.

The multiplicity and complexity of need also means many people leaving prison are excluded from support. For instance, many people face barriers accessing alcohol and other drug services if they have a complex mental health condition. Many people are not able to access mental health services if they are currently using alcohol and other drugs. There are very few residential services that will support people who are currently using alcohol and other drugs.

Evidence-based case studies:

What works in post-release support?

Community Restorative Centre Evaluation (NSW)

This University of New South Wales (UNSW)/Community Restorative Centre Evaluation (CRC) evaluation, undertaken over two years, explored outcomes for 483 CRC clients who participated in intensive, case-work, post-release, and diversionary programs between 2014 and 2017. An interrupted time series analysis examined criminal justice system trajectories over 10 years (including post-participation in programs), and found that for participants:

- » The number of new custody episodes fell by 62.6%
- » The number of days in custody fell by 65.8%
- » The number of proven offences fell by 62.1% following CRC support.

The report also undertook a comparison analysis with clients from the Mental Health Disorders and Cognitive Disabilities (MHDCCD) linked administrative dataset at UNSW, comparing their outcomes to CRC clients. This analysis found engagement in CRC programs dramatically reduced contact with the justice system when compared to a similar group who did not receive support. The research also showed savings to the criminal justice system of up to \$16 million over three years for an intake of 275 new clients (not including institutional and community savings).²⁷⁸

Borallon Throughcare (Qld)

In 2020, the University of Queensland (UQ) evaluated the Borallon Training and Correctional Centre alternative rehabilitation custody model using a mixed-methods approach.²⁷⁹ This model includes a co-designed centre-based throughcare service that focuses on education and employment pathways.²⁸⁰ This study was not openly published; however, UQ reports it found strong evidence that elements of the model are working well and that there are many reasons to support the model.²⁸¹

Miranda Project Evaluation (NSW)

This CRC program entails intensive case work, diversionary support, and post-release support for women at-risk of both domestic violence and justice system involvement. A recent evaluation found that of the 90 women participating in the program during the evaluation period, 14% returned to prison, 62% reported improved housing stability, and 62% reported improved safety in terms of domestic and family violence.²⁸²

Barnardos Beyond Barbed Wire Evaluation (NSW)

The Beyond Barbed Wire program (based in central-west New South Wales and part of Barnardos) evaluated the outcomes of the intensive casework and support service for women released from prison who were also mothers. Only 6% of the 52 women participating in the program returned to prison.²⁸³

Alice Springs Life Skills Camp (NT)

A life skills program that provides an alternative to custody for women in Alice Springs has shown solid outcomes in terms of reducing recidivism. The Life Skills Camp was opened in 2020 as a sentencing alternative for Aboriginal women as part of the Aboriginal Justice Agreement. The Life Skills Camp has delivered more than 2000 program sessions to residents and other women on day programs from the Alice Springs Correctional Centre. The Northern Territory Government has noted that 90% of the 25 women who have completed the program have not reoffended.²⁸⁴

Hutt Street Centre: The Aspire Social Impact Bond Program

The program was established by the South Australian Labor state government in 2017 and delivered by the Hutt Street Centre in partnership with Social Ventures Australia and Housing Choices. In the first five years of Aspire, it saved \$12 million in justice and other services and is projected to save \$25 million once all 575 participants have completed their three years of intensive wrap around supports. Of the 575 participants since 2017, criminal convictions have reduced by 28% (with the flow on effect of fewer victims of crime and safer communities).²⁸⁵

Outcare Throughcare (WA)

Outcare's Aboriginal Throughcare program is offered to people in the final three months of their sentence. The program supports people during their transition from custody to the community and continues for 12 months after their release. The program focuses on building stronger relationships with family, culture, and community. Early analysis of the program determined it had delivered sound community outcomes, with only 20% of clients receiving post-release case management returned to prison during that period.²⁸⁶

IN-PRISON PROGRAMS

While reduction in incarceration is the overarching goal of this report, there are alternative models for prison settings and in-prison programs that can align with the goals of therapeutic, supportive, and

community-led approaches. There is significant evidence that these approaches lead to better post-release outcomes.

Evidence-based case studies: **What works in prison?**

Sisters For Change (Townsville, Qld)

Sisters for Change is the Community-Based Health and First Aid program that Australian Red Cross delivers with women in the Townsville Women's Correctional Centre (this program is also offered in prisons in New South Wales, Western Australia and South Australia). Flinders University conducted a formal evaluation of the Sisters for Change program 12 months after its initial implementation in 2019. The report found multiple positive outcomes including a cleaner prison environment, nurses prescribing less medications, a safer prison environment with better relationships between women in prison and officers, and improved capacity within the prison community to provide support when someone has mental health concerns.²⁸⁷

Keeping Us Together (Qld)

In June 2021, the University of Newcastle Australia published an evaluation examining implementation of the SHINE for Kids Keeping Us Together program within three women's correctional centres in Queensland. Keeping Us Together is an evidence-informed parenting program delivered to parents in custody over a six-week period. Pre-and post-intervention questionnaires showed the program improved women's perception of their parenting and communication with their children. It also found greater resourcing would support SHINE for Kids to meet program demand, enable post-release support, and optimise care for participants and staff.²⁸⁸ In addition to this program, SHINE for Kids delivers the Belonging to Family (previously called Keeping Us Strong), which is an extension of Keeping Us Together designed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents.²⁸⁹ Both programs are modelled on the evidence-based Australian Childhood Foundation Bringing Up Great Kids program that has been shown to effectively support parents to build positive and nurturing relationships with their children.²⁹⁰

Prison Entrepreneurship Program (Texas, United States)

The Prison Entrepreneurship Program (PEP) is an innovative business entrepreneurship program for people in prison in Texas, which also provides intensive post-release support to participants once they are released from prison. A 2013 study found the PEP resulted in a 380% greater reduction in reoffending compared to nine other rehabilitation programs offered in Texas. This study compared 94 people who completed the PEP with a control group of over 50 people who were eligible for participation but did not complete the PEP and instead participated in other programs. PEP participants were less likely to return to prison when compared to the control group, and a follow-up survey one year post-release found 95% of PEP participants remained employed. It was further estimated that for every \$1 donated towards the delivery of PEP, there is a 340% return on investment resulting from reduced incarceration, reduced social welfare costs, and increased economic participation through high post-release employment.²⁹¹

Wandoo Rehabilitation Prison (WA)

Wandoo Rehabilitation Prison is Western Australia's first dedicated alcohol and other drug rehabilitation prison for women in custody, offering intensive trauma-informed treatment within a therapeutic community. Wandoo operates in partnership with Cyrenian House. Since opening in 2018, more 170 women have graduated from its alcohol and other drug program, and only four having returned to custody, a success rate of nearly 98%.

Mallee Rehabilitation Centre (WA)

Following the success of Wandoo, the Mallee Rehabilitation Centre began operations at Casuarina Prison in 2020 as the state's first residential alcohol and other drug facility for male prisoners. The Centre can house up to 128, with the Palmerston Association and the Wungening Aboriginal Corporation providing program design and delivery. Of the 75 Mallee Solid Steps Program graduates who have been discharged from custody in the first two years of operation, only four have returned to custody with a new offence.²⁹²

The Fairbridge Bindjareb Project (WA)

The Fairbridge Bindjareb Project provides Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in custody with a 16-week work training program in the mining industry. The program was designed and is run by local Aboriginal men and focuses on reconnection to and respect of Aboriginal culture. An evaluation found that only 18% of participants returned to prison within two years of being released (and only 4% for new offences), compared to 40% recidivism rates among the general prison population. Moreover, three-quarters (73%) of participants had gained and retained full-time employment seven months post conclusion of the program. A cost benefit analysis by Deloitte has found that every dollar invested in the program generates \$2.45 worth of economic benefits.²⁹³ The review has also calculated that the scheme saves the federal government up to \$460,000 in welfare payments for each participant over a decade.²⁹⁴

Boronia Cultural, Social And Emotional Wellbeing Project (WA)

The cultural, social and emotional wellbeing project delivered at the Boronia pre-release centre is a strengths-based, holistic program for First Nations people. An independent evaluation of the program conducted in 2022 found that completing the program resulted in significantly reduced levels of psychological distress for the women who participated.²⁹⁵

Diagrama Model (Spain)

Diagrama is an international non-profit organisation and operates over 35 custodial centres across Spain for young people aged 14 to 23 who have been remanded or sentenced to custody. The Diagrama model has demonstrated it reduces rates of recidivism and its operational costs are comparable to or lower than those of other providers. The model has been implemented across France and the United Kingdom. A study of 757 young people who had attended a Diagrama re-education centre in 2011 found that by December 2017, only 13.6% had been placed back in custody.²⁹⁶

ACCESS TO OTHER SERVICES IN THE COMMUNITY

The majority of people incarcerated in Queensland (and Australia) come from circumstances where they have experienced multiple and intersecting disadvantage. The fact of disadvantage²⁹⁷ cannot of course be used to discount the consequences of crime. However, it is crucial to understand the context in which most crime is committed²⁹⁸ to build and implement effective policy to reduce the numbers of people in custody and strengthen genuine alternatives to prison.

People with mental health conditions are disproportionately represented in prisons (at least 40% of people in prison)²⁹⁹ as are people with cognitive impairment.³⁰⁰ Around 60% of people in prison have alcohol and other drug dependency.³⁰¹ Half of all people in prison were homeless before entering custody³⁰² and more than half of all people leaving prison exit into homelessness.³⁰³ A disproportionate number come from a small number of 'postcodes of disadvantage' where access to education, healthcare, support, and employment are all comparatively lacking.³⁰⁴

62% of people leaving prison in Australia do not have any employment organised on release.³⁰⁵ Health services in prison remain underfunded, a problem exacerbated by the absence of Medicare and the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme to people while incarcerated. Ensuring that disability, mental health, and homelessness services are accessible to those in contact with the justice system, and that the sector has

the training and resources to serve them, is essential to reducing incarceration and recidivism in Queensland.

A 2018 study by the Telethon Kids Institute and the University of Western Australia showed that 9 out of 10 (90%) of incarcerated young people in WA had some form of neuro-disability, ranging from dyslexia or similar learning disability, language disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, intellectual disability, executive function disorder, memory impairment or motor coordination disorder.³⁰⁶ There is no reason that this finding would not also be generalised to children who are incarcerated in Queensland.

A 2017 cohort study of 1325 people who had been incarcerated in Queensland found one in 15 of these people presented to an emergency department due to self-harm following their release.³⁰⁷ A 2015 study of 1051 adults who were incarcerated in Queensland found non-fatal overdoses were highest one to three months post-release prison. This study also found injecting drugs, pre-release distress, and a lifetime history of a mental health condition predicted non-fatal post-release overdoses.³⁰⁸ In 2014, a study of 41,970 people released from prison in Queensland found women who were formerly incarcerated were 14.2 times more likely and men who were released from prison were 4.8 times more likely to die from suicide than would be expected in the population. This study found a similar rate of drug related deaths among the cohort of people who were formerly incarcerated.³⁰⁹

A 2012 study found a very high prevalence of mental health conditions among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults in Queensland prisons (73% for men and 81% for women). This study noted there is an urgent need to develop and resource culturally responsive services to support the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in prison.³¹⁰

Community Justice Groups, through the Stop Black Deaths in Custody (Meanjin) Forum, have recommended that all agencies working with First Nations people adopt the Australian Government National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People's Mental Health and Social

and Emotional Wellbeing³¹¹ in policy development and service delivery. There is a focus in Aboriginal controlled health services on the need to address the social determinants of health, and recognition of the similarities between these determinants and the social determinants of imprisonment.

Robust social supports within the community, including general health, housing, education, and welfare programs, as well as specialist programs, are proven to work to prevent contact with the justice system. Mental health support, alcohol and other drug treatments and disability support play particularly critical roles.

Evidence-based case studies:

Reducing incarceration by improving access to services and supports in the community

Housing Post-Release Evaluation (Australia)

This evaluation included an interrupted time-series analysis and matched comparison analysis of 623 people who received public housing after leaving prison and 612 people who received rental assistance only. It found public housing improves criminal justice outcomes when compared to rental assistance only. It also found public housing 'flattens the curve' and sees reductions in predicted police incidents (down 8.9% per year), custody time (down 11.2% per year) and justice system costs (down \$4996 initially, then a further \$2040 per year). The evaluation showed there was a net-benefit in dollar terms of housing people on release from prison in public housing (between \$5200 and \$35,000) relative to homelessness services or private rental assistance.³¹²

Common Ground Queensland (Brisbane and Gold Coast, Qld)

Common Ground Queensland provides affordable supported accommodation for people who have experienced chronic homelessness or who require social housing. The Institute of Social Science Research conducted an independent evaluation of the Brisbane Common Ground housing model and found governments can save over \$13,000 per person each year through the provision of secure, long-term housing with relevant support services. This evaluation further found in the first 12 months Brisbane Common Ground residents had a reduction in the number of court appearances (by 47 days), days incarcerated (by 132 days), days on probation and parole (by 88 days), and a reduction of interventions involving police. In comparison to the 12 months prior to residency at Brisbane Common Grounds, this equated to an estimated cost savings of \$122,904 for the criminal justice system.³¹³

Intellectual Disability Rights Service – Justice Advocacy Evaluation (NSW)

This independent EY evaluation of the support provided by the Intellectual Disability Rights Service's Justice Advocacy Program concluded it improved access to justice, improved understanding of court processes, and improved outcomes for people with cognitive impairments in police and court settings.³¹⁴ The evaluation noted that people who received Justice Advocacy Service (JAS) support were more likely to understand and follow court orders, more likely to understand cautions and bail conditions, less likely to be found guilty and more likely to receive a section 32 diversion order.

The evaluation noted that when the JAS program operated at full capacity, the program would deliver \$3.37 in return for every dollar invested. The report also recommended exploring the value of case management for people participating in the JAS program.

Intellectual Disability Rights Service – Criminal Justice Support Network Economic Evaluation (Released 2018)

An economic evaluation of the Criminal Justice Support Network (CJSN) (run by the Intellectual Disability Rights Service) found the CJSN generates a net benefit of at least \$1.2 million per annum. That represents a return of \$2.5 for every \$1 invested in the service.³¹⁵

Institutional Costs Research (Australia)

Costings research conducted by the University of New South Wales in partnership with PricewaterhouseCoopers looked at linked administrative data to gauge the life-course institutional costs associated with people with mental illness and disabilities in the criminal justice system. It found that more than \$1 million was spent on many individuals each year through prison and crisis responses. It also noted the value of targeted, holistic support, finding that for every dollar spent on early investment, between \$1.40 and \$2.40 is saved in the longer term.³¹⁶

A BRIEF NOTE: THE CRIMINALISATION OF DRUG USE AND THE NEED FOR PUBLIC HEALTH APPROACHES

The prevalence of illicit drug use and alcohol consumption is a significant health and social issue in Australia and as such, requires a health and social policy response. The research is very clear that reliance on criminal law and criminal justice responses to discourage illicit drug use does not work to reduce demand and fails to address the health and social harms associated with such drug use.³¹⁷

Criminalisation of illicit drug use has failed to address the health and social problems associated with problematic alcohol and other drug use and often serves to further exacerbate disadvantage. Criminal law should not be used to regulate personal drug use. Health responses are required to address the harms and health impacts of drug use. There is a need for both:

- » The decriminalisation of the use and possession of prohibited drugs by removing all criminal sanctions and to remove the offence from the law and
- » Adequate resourcing of effective drug assessment, treatment, and support services, with culturally appropriate services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across Australia, including in regional and remote areas.

This is an issue across Australia.

- » 65% of people entering prison around Australia have used illicit drugs in the previous year.³¹⁸
- » Half of all people in prison have a history of injecting drug use.³¹⁹
- » 85% of people in prison who have a history of injecting drug use, report being under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol at the time they committed the offence that resulted in their imprisonment.³²⁰
- » 40% of people in prison with a history of injecting drug use, attribute their offending to their need to get money to support their drug use.³²¹

- » The justice and law enforcement cost of drug related harm is at least \$5.8 billion per annum. The justice and law enforcement costs of alcohol related harm is \$6.4 billion per annum.³²²
- » The policy landscape in Australia prioritises expenditure on law enforcement ahead of treatment and harm reduction. These priorities are reflected in the budgetary allocation of Australia's National Drug Strategy, with 65% of its budget allocated to law enforcement, and 25% to treatment and harm reduction.³²³
- » At least half a million people each year in Australia cannot access the alcohol and other drug treatment and support they need.³²⁴

The criminalisation of illicit drug possession and use increases the likelihood of confrontational interaction with police, criminal proceedings in court, and incarceration. Decriminalisation will reduce this contact at every stage of the criminal justice system, removing barriers to harm reduction and treatment seeking, and increasing voluntary treatment uptake. There is an urgent need to shift the focus of the policies from criminal law enforcement to initiatives that focus on health, treatment, and harm reduction. Public investment in support services, harm reduction, alcohol and other drug treatment and health responses to alcohol and other drug use will result in significant savings for the criminal justice system and improved outcomes for the whole community.

Although it is beyond the scope of this report to overview in detail all the alcohol and other drug treatment responses that reduce the likelihood of incarceration, we note that we have already highlighted multiple successful programs in this report focused on supporting people with problematic alcohol and other drug use or related issues at the point of prison, at the point of release from prison, at the point of interaction with police, and at the point of interaction with the courts.

Shifts towards health-oriented and harm reduction approaches in drug law reform are significant as levers to reduce incarceration and reoffending. Reforms in this space enable people who use drugs to be diverted from the criminal justice system and prevent offending through the provision of harm reduction and effective treatment strategies. Traditional policing approaches to drug use-related crime do not reduce arrests or incarceration and are also associated with increased risk of fatal future overdoses.³²⁵

It is of note that in February 2023, the Queensland Government announced a significant policy shift towards decriminalisation. This included expanding options for police to divert people in minor possession of all types of drugs into the Queensland Police Drug Diversion program (rather than just people found with minor quantities of cannabis). As the Queensland Government has highlighted, diversion into health and education services significantly reduces the likelihood of reoffending and frees up police resources.³²⁶

CONCLUSION

Too many people in Queensland and across Australia are unnecessarily trapped in cycles of incarceration and disadvantage. Too many children and adults are 'managed' in justice system settings, rather than receiving the necessary support in the community. Investment by the Queensland Government in evidence-based programs and services run by the community sector (including critically, by First Nations-led community organisations) that address the social drivers of criminal justice system contact will lead to significant reductions in recidivism and incarceration. This shift in funding approach will also result in significant cost-savings and lead to substantial improvements in health and wellbeing.

Existing community-led justice programs in Queensland are making a difference. Their approaches are based on local expertise, evidence-informed practice, and models of success in other jurisdictions. However, some of the most successful interventions are under-resourced. There is a need for a comprehensive state-wide commitment to drive long-term, sustainable and responsive evidence-based community-led justice solutions.

This comprehensive state-wide commitment should also support and resource evaluation and monitoring/improvement work to ensure programs and services are continuously measuring success. Community-based service providers should receive resourcing support to fund independent evaluations that generate additional, high-quality efficacy data.

Instead of committing to additional expensive prison beds, there is an opportunity for the Queensland Parliament to focus attention and resources on evidence-based programs that work to reduce incarceration and decrease recidivism. Cross-party support for a shift in funding towards alternatives to

incarceration has the potential to make a concrete difference across the state in preventing offending, diverting people from the justice system, and ensuring the provision of systemic support for people who are leaving custody outside of the justice system. Some experts have suggested the establishment of an all-party parliamentary committee to drive evidence-based justice reform in Queensland.³²⁷

There is no single 'reform fix' to reduce prison numbers in Queensland. There are multiple proven, cost-effective alternatives that can both effectively reduce incarceration and improve community-level outcomes. Prison does not work to deter, to rehabilitate or to make communities safer. We need recognition that the over-reliance on prison for both adults and children has been a policy failure in Queensland, and we need a commitment to significant investment in community-led alternatives.

This report does not seek to outline detailed policy and legislative justice reform priorities. These are already catalogued in countless reviews, inquiries and reports published long before this report, including critically the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody,³²⁸ the 2019 Queensland Productivity Commission (QPC) Inquiry into Imprisonment and Recidivism,³²⁹ the QPC Inquiry into service delivery in remote and discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities,³³⁰ and the Bob Atkinson March 2022 review.³³¹

Instead, this report emphasises the importance of adequate resourcing of evidence-based community-led alternatives. There are several promising programs being delivered in Queensland, but piecemeal resourcing, sporadic evaluation and service silos are preventing these best-practice approaches from having a wide impact across the state.

Community-led services and place-based responses should be funded in ways that genuinely build sustainable long-term service delivery capacity. This includes the capacity to adequately pay staff and develop a professionalised workforce. Short-term and pilot projects, and inadequate funding for staff, alongside overly onerous reporting requirements, can make the core business of quality service delivery, together with staff retention, more difficult than it needs to be. To significantly reduce over-incarceration and keep the community safe, Queensland needs a funding environment where community-led approaches can sustainably thrive. A lack of resourcing for robust evaluation also makes measuring success extraordinarily difficult. A current lack of transparency in terms of evaluation in Queensland compounds this issue; there is very little publicly available evaluation data, which limits knowledge sharing between providers and across sectors on what works.

There is also a necessity for services to be adequately resourced to improve their capacity to be accessible and available to all people at every point in the justice system. Too often, people are not able to access services because there are explicit and implicit exclusion criteria. For instance, many people on remand cannot access services in prison. Programs and services are often not available for people in both remote and regional areas.

Additionally, many people are excluded from services because they have multiple and co-existing support needs; for instance, alcohol and other drug dependence and a mental health condition. Services and programs are frequently not supported or resourced to provide the long-term, intensive, holistic, wrap-around support that the research makes clear is extraordinarily effective at reducing justice system involvement.

Multiple specialist services are needed throughout Queensland that can cross geographic boundaries, given that many people incarcerated in the state's prisons are not imprisoned anywhere near their intended place of residence in the community. Services must be able to incorporate the critical element of pre-release engagement and in-reach into the correctional centres. Workers must be able to visit clients and begin the process of engagement prior to release to sustain connection during the often chaotic post-release period.

Queensland imprisons the highest number of children in Australia and the adult prison population has grown by 64% in the last 10 years. However, the state has an opportunity to mobilise a state-wide, best-practice approach to investment in community-led services that can get people out of prison and support them to live productively in the community.

Queensland already has innovative and impactful place-based and community-led initiatives that are achieving incredible outcomes with minimal resourcing. There is an opportunity to build on what works in the state to drive long-term and sustainable systemic change. It is also important to note that alongside existing programs, there are also well-developed, researched and detailed proposals for new alternatives to youth justice centres. The remote healing centres – the proposals for which have been put together by respected First Nations leaders alongside subject matter experts – have the potential to be an extraordinarily helpful tool in the development of alternative youth justice responses.³³²

Investing in evidence-based services instead of incarceration will break entrenched cycles of engagement with the criminal justice system and reduce recidivism. In addition to creating substantial cost-savings to the government, this approach will have enormous benefits for people who have too often been 'managed' in justice systems, rather than being supported in the community.

'Tough on crime' rhetoric and policies do not make the community safer, nor does the current overuse of imprisonment. To genuinely build a safer, more cohesive community, Queensland must invest in community-led programs that address the drivers of crime and incarceration.

Queenslanders would be far better served through government investment in programs that provide opportunities for people who are trapped in the cycle of incarceration to rebuild their lives in the community. There is an opportunity for Queensland to embrace a criminal justice model that genuinely relegates prisons to a position of last resort, and instead centres community-led interventions that really work to break cycles of disadvantage, reduce reoffending, and build safer communities.

APPENDIX A: GOOD PRACTICE PRINCIPLES IN SERVICE DELIVERY: **HOW TO BUILD A SERVICE THAT WORKS TO REDUCE RECIDIVISM**

The successful programs around Australia that have been evaluated and noted above share a remarkably consistent service delivery model. It should be noted that there are multiple other small-scale programs using similar principles around Australia, which are reporting anecdotally similar successes but have not yet undertaken evaluation.

The principles underpinning successful services have been noted across multiple academic research reports into 'what works'³³³ as well as in these evaluations. The collective findings acknowledge the importance of responding to the social drivers of over-incarceration, working holistically with people leaving prison, ensuring a flexible and person-centred approach to service delivery, and working with people long-term to address the significant challenges in 'staying out' of prison. The research recognises the centrality of relational casework, the importance of housing, and the necessity of long-term support.

Models that work are very much about 'meeting people where they are at' and recognising the enormous challenges faced by people at-risk of, or already in contact with, the justice system, including people leaving prison. Programs that work do not require people at-risk of justice system involvement to fit into models that are appointment-based, require abstinence, or have limited flexibility. The successful programs recognise the referral fatigue experienced by so many people and recognise the importance of non-siloed service provision; that is, services that are able to work with people around a range of factors (housing, mental health, drug, and alcohol use, and so on).

The programs and principles for good practice (long term, holistic, housing first, wrap-around, culturally safe, person centred, flexible) differ significantly in scope and approach to the 'Risk, Needs, Responsivity models' that many corrections departments around Australia have committed to for the last decade. This distinction is important when designing community-led programs.

Criminogenic approaches are primarily focused on addressing individual offending behaviour (for instance things like anger management and impulsivity) rather than addressing the social drivers of incarceration. The programs that have had success in reducing recidivism, note the importance of looking outside of 'offending behaviour' when working with people at-risk of justice system involvement. Successful programs work with people holistically around a multitude of factors, including housing, alcohol and other drug treatment, employment, mental health, disability support, and cultural and community connection alongside the formulation of a sense of identity and belonging outside of the justice system.

Too many people at-risk of re-incarceration are not able to access the kinds of support they require at the time that they most need it. This is especially critical for people at the point of release from prison, and for people who are keen to participate in diversionary options at the point of court. There is significant research noting that for many people who are 'caught' in the cycle of justice system involvement, it is in fact much easier to return to prison than it is to survive in the community. There are multiple reasons for this. Most people leave prison with no meaningful community-based supports, nowhere safe to live, minimal financial stability, and limited employment opportunities. Although, as noted above, there are some highly effective specialist services that work to support people with connecting to community, they are chronically under-resourced.

In addition to specialist services, there are of course mainstream welfare, homelessness and other support services that should theoretically be available for people leaving prison. However, there are multiple barriers to accessing mainstream welfare services for people leaving prison. There are many reasons for this, including a lack of specialist knowledge, a lack of resources, and a lack of structural capacity for already stretched organisations to take on the

complexity and time resources of working with incarcerated populations. Most mainstream welfare services cannot do 'in-reach' into prisons. Some services will not take people straight from prison. Some services will not take people with a criminal record, and many will not take people who have any history of violence.

In addition, multiplicity and complexity of need means many people from prison are excluded from support. For instance, there are barriers accessing mental health services if there are ongoing alcohol and/or other drug problem. There are almost no residential services that will take people who are using alcohol and/or other drugs, and for many the group and literacy requirements of many rehabilitation services means that they are very challenging to access. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the absence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led culturally safe services acts as another barrier to accessing the necessary support.

There is a need for multiple specialist services throughout Australia that can cross geographic boundaries, recognising the fact that many people incarcerated are not incarcerated anywhere near their intended place of residence in the community. There is a need for services that are resourced and able to incorporate the critical element of pre-release engagement and in-reach into the correctional centres. There is the need for support services and workers to physically be where the client is at (including police stations, courts, and prisons). There is a need for services that are long-term – building sustainable pathways outside of the criminal justice system takes time, particularly for people who have survived trauma and have spent their lives being managed in such settings. Services must have the capacity to be intensive, and primarily outreach. This often means picking someone up from prison on the day of release and working intensively over the first high-risk three months, and then slowly and flexibly tapering support down over 12 months or more (while ensuring the person receives support for as long as they require it). Services must also have housing front and centre of their service delivery design.

In summary, we outline the key principles for good practice below. Please note these principles have been published (by the author of this section of the report) in a number of previous publications, including most recently *Precedent* (issue 161, November–December 2020).

Reintegration Framed Outside the Lens of Rehabilitation

There is a need to create and facilitate pathways for people leaving prison that focus on addressing systemic barriers to reintegration and creating a strong sense of identity outside of the justice system. This means explicitly addressing barriers to reintegration including discrimination, poverty, and homelessness. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations, identity is often related to culture, family, and community. 'Non-prison' identities might also be accessed in the form of employment, volunteering, and educational opportunities. The critical point here is that reintegration should not just be framed in terms of addressing offending, but rather about building a life outside of the prison environment.³³⁴

Service delivery must include a significant advocacy component that addresses structural barriers for individuals (such as access to housing, employment, education, health and social security benefits) and advocates systemically for change when it is required (for instance, in the case of discriminatory employment practices). Systemic advocacy sees workers walking alongside people leaving custody and challenging the multiple forms of perpetual punishment experienced by people with criminal records and those who have experienced imprisonment.³³⁵

Pre-Release Engagement for People in Custody

Meeting and working with people prior to release, where possible, is extraordinarily useful when it comes to building the engagement necessary to sustain the casework relationship, building trust between the person in prison and the community organisation on the outside, and practically planning for re-entry into the community with complex needs populations.³³⁶

Holistic, Relational, Intensive and Long-Term Casework Models

People should not be excluded from services on the basis of complexity, criminal records, or past offending behaviour. That is, services should be resourced to work with people with multiple and complex support needs. People with long histories of trauma, combined with the 'referral fatigue' often experienced by this group, require long-term support to build engagement and trust. Long-term support also allows people the opportunity to develop the skills required to navigate frequently hostile or unwieldy service systems. Services that can work with people around their various support needs, rather than simply referring on, are also critical in terms of building engagement, trust and providing meaningful support. Although there is the need for specialist services (for instance, specialist mental health support), the role of the case worker is to genuinely support this engagement (not just make a referral). This might mean, for example, assisting people with getting to appointments (at least initially), and where appropriate attending appointments to support the development of the connection.³³⁷

Community-Based and Community-Led Outreach

Services that work with people with histories of involvement in the criminal justice system need to operate outside of the criminal justice system and within the communities in which people are living. Services should be outreach in focus; that is, workers should travel to where clients are 'at' rather than relying on appointment-based systems (at least initially).³³⁸

First Nations-Led

For First Nations children, the most effective early intervention responses are those that are culturally responsive, designed and delivered by local First Nations communities and organisations, and which foster a genuine sense of community ownership and accountability.³³⁹ Many First Nations people have intergenerational and/or personal experience of mainstream services working against them.³⁴⁰ Engaging with First Nations communities ensures programs are more effectively targeted to local priorities and needs, and are aligned with local systems and circumstances.³⁴¹ Community involvement and local decision-making should occur at each stage of the process, including at the feedback stage to ensure that the feedback methods used align with First Nations communication and knowledge.

Centering Housing

Support must be practical: people need somewhere safe and secure to live. Regardless of the service provider's 'focus', the majority of people leaving prison, or at-risk of justice system involvement, require assistance with housing, and this should not be something that is 'referred out'. People require a solid base from which they can make the changes required to stay out of prison.³⁴²

Genuine Collaboration with People with Lived Experience of Incarceration at all Levels of Program Delivery

The expertise of people who have themselves been to prison is critical in both the design and delivery of community-based reintegration services.³⁴³

APPENDIX B: QUEENSLAND PROGRAMS WITHOUT OUTCOMES EVALUATION

The following programs have been identified through conversations with stakeholders in Queensland, through desk-top research, and in some instances via evaluation literature. Programs were not included in the body of report if they:

1. Did not have a publicly available evaluation or
2. Had an evaluation completed but the evaluation did not focus on the impact of the project in terms of contact with the criminal justice system.

The Justice Reform Initiative is progressing ongoing mapping work of programs in Queensland and welcomes any further information, evaluations and case studies that people would like to share with us.

Case studies:

Early intervention and prevention programs in Queensland

Australian Nurse–Family Partnership Program (Cairns and Brisbane, Qld)

The Australian Nurse–Family Partnership Program (ANFPP) is an adaption of the evidence-based United States Elmira Nurse–Family Partnership program, designed to be culturally appropriate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.³⁴⁴ This program is currently delivered in Queensland (Cairns, Brisbane north, Brisbane south), New South Wales (Wellington, Blacktown, Kempsey), the ACT (Canberra), Victoria (Goulburn Valley), South Australia (Adelaide) and Northern Territory (Alice Springs, Katherine, Darwin, and four remote communities including Maningrida, Gunbalanya, Wadeye, and Wurrumiyanga with the hub in Darwin). In 2012, Ernst and Young conducted a process evaluation of the ANFPP using qualitative data. This evaluation concluded there were some challenges associated with implementation of the program; however, most mothers, families, and services reported positive outcomes in the early stages of the program.³⁴⁵ In 2020, the Australian Government Department of Health sought a provider to undertake an independent outcomes evaluation of the ANFPP over four years.³⁴⁶ It appears as though this evaluation is yet to be completed.

Right@Home Nurse Visiting Program (Qld)

In addition to the ANFPP, Queensland has implemented the right@home nurse visiting program.³⁴⁷ The right@home nurse visiting program is an adaption of an evidence-based Australian program called the Maternal Early Childhood Sustained Home-visiting (MECSH) program.³⁴⁸ The MECSH program is delivered in a universal healthcare setting and has demonstrated several positive outcomes including: more confident and supportive parenting, improved child cognitive development, better child and parenting experiences, and longer periods of breastfeeding.³⁴⁹ Similarly, the right@home program is embedded in the universal healthcare setting to provide support to children aged zero to two years old and their families.³⁵⁰ Parents who participate in the program receive support from a nurse and social worker over 25 home visits. Similar to other SNHV programs, the right@home program was found to improve home environments and parenting relationships.³⁵¹ This included increased safety, increased warm parenting, less hostile parenting, increased parental involvement, increased variety in experience, and more regular bedtimes.³⁵²

'I think it's fantastic, this right@home ... and it's specifically about your bub, and family and wellbeing ... it was just brilliant.' (Mother)³⁵³

Kindergarten Programs (Qld)

Queensland Government has implemented some early intervention programs that aim to support children and families as they prepare to transition from pre-school to school. Similar to the evidence-based Perry Preschool Project, the KindyLinQ Program aims to provide active learning and development opportunities for children as well as build up a family's capacity to support their child's learning and development at home.³⁵⁴ The sessions are delivered by a qualified teacher and an early years support coordinator. The Queensland Government Department of Education designed the KindyLinQ program based on the Western Australian (WA) KindiLink Program. A qualitative evaluation of WA KindiLink found children and families who participated in the program experienced considerable learning and social and emotional benefits.³⁵⁵ The University of Queensland is undertaking an evaluation of the KindyLinQ Program through the Social Ventures Australia's Evidence for Learning (E4L) Program and the Queensland Department of Education.³⁵⁶ The evaluation will utilise mixed methods to assess short-term outcomes of the program for the period between October 2020 and May 2022. In addition to the KindyLinQ Program, Queensland has implemented Early Years Places and the Step up into Education 2021–2024 initiative. Early Years Places have been set up in over 50 communities in Queensland to provide a central location for families to access early childhood supports and services.³⁵⁷ There is the opportunity for future research to assess longitudinal child and family outcomes of these initiatives, like those examined in the Perry Preschool Project randomised controlled trial evaluation, related to imprisonment and offending.

Indigenous Youth and Family Workers/Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Wellbeing Services (Qld)

Thirty-four Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Wellbeing Services operate across Queensland to provide culturally safe and responsive support to First Nations families who may be experiencing disadvantage.³⁵⁸ Indigenous Youth and Family Workers are embedded within 17 of these Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Wellbeing Services to support young people under the age of 18 years old who are at-risk of involvement in the justice system and wrap support around their families.³⁵⁹ This includes referring children and families to specialised services and delivering family-based early interventions that aim to strengthen cultural connections, build skills, and prevent future offending. The Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs has allocated \$30.1 million to fund this program up until 2026–27.³⁶⁰

Safe Dads Program (Townsville, Qld)

The North Queensland Domestic Violence Resource Service runs a Safe Dads parenting program that aims to provide education and information to fathers to address the use of domestic violence.³⁶¹

Child and Parenting Support (South-East Qld)

The Sisters Inside Child and Parenting Support Program provides intensive support and parenting education/peer support group sessions with women in the community to help improve their parenting skills and child/parenting relationships.³⁶²

Project Overhaul and Proud Warrior Project (Townsville and Mount Isa, Qld)

Project Overhaul is an early intervention and diversion program available to young people aged 15 to 21 years old in Townsville and Mount Isa who are at-risk of engaging in offending or antisocial behaviour.³⁶³ The project is offered by Queensland Youth Service in partnership with Chameleon Upcycled Products, Pitstop Karting and Kalkadoon Elder, Doug Bruce. The program provides case management and support as well as offers different opportunities for young people (depending on their location) to develop socially acceptable behaviours and practice skills that will assist them to transition to a better path. In April 2023, Queensland Youth Services also received \$128,592 for the Project Warrior Project, which provides multi-agency intervention and support for primarily First Nations young people experiencing specific risk factors for offending.³⁶⁴

Youth Empowering Strength (Mount Isa, Qld)

Youth Empowering Strength (YES) is an early intervention program that works with young people aged 12 to 21 years old who present with risk factors relating to individual, school, family, and community circumstances.³⁶⁵ YES aims to provide support to young people, in the context of their families, to assist them to develop positive relationships with their family and community; engage in education, training and/or employment; lead health healthy and violence free lives; and have safe and stable places to live.

Mount Isa Youth Transitional Hub

Queensland Government has allocated \$12.7 million for the Mount Isa Youth Transitional Hub, which provides a safe space for young people and delivers support services based on culturally appropriate assessments of risk and need.³⁶⁶ This includes engaging with local services providers to ensure young people and their families receive intensive and specialised support.

Weeburra Thulgarri Mentoring and Family Wellbeing Program (Townsville, Qld)

Weeburra Thulgarri means 'one big family'. Yumba-Meta Limited has set up a community centre in Townsville where this program is delivered to provide early intervention tutoring and mentoring support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged seven to eight years old. The program aims to improve children's physical, social and emotional wellbeing; strengthen their connection to culture; and build resilience and coping skills.³⁶⁷

Queensland Youth Partnership Initiative

The Queensland Youth Partnership (QYPI) Initiative aims to prevent youth crime and antisocial behaviour by engaging with young people in shopping centres.³⁶⁸ The QYPI involves retailers, youth services, security officers, and police working collaboratively to keep young people connected and engaging in pro-social behaviours. This includes delivering youth focused crime prevention and diversion activities that incorporate activities such as sport, art, and music. The QYPI Stockland's Outreach program in Rockhampton is supported by Darumbal Community Youth Service in partnership with Stockland's management and security staff.³⁶⁹

Shine For Kids Mentoring Program (Ipswich and Townsville, Qld)

The SHINE for Kids mentoring program is a place-based community mentoring program run by SHINE for Kids, which aims to support young people aged 12 to 21 years old who have (or have had) a parent in custody and are at-risk of justice system involvement (as well as young people aged 12 to 18 years old in Ipswich). The program matches young people with a consistent adult mentor for 12 months to support the delivery of structured activities; support young people to engage with education, training, and employment; and connect young people with community and culture.³⁷⁰

Stay Together, Play Together, Townsville (Brisbane and Gold Coast, Qld)

SHINE for Kids runs the Stay Together Play Together program with the aim of supporting mothers and fathers in prison to maintain relationships with their children and families, build their parenting skills, and develop familial and social networks. The program was developed from the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia and is delivered through structured and unstructured playgroup activities.³⁷¹

Aspire, Uniting Care (Townsville, Qld)

Aspire is a community-based service that supports young people aged 12 to 21 years old (as well as siblings aged 8 to 11 years old) who are at-risk of involvement with the youth justice system.³⁷² The program aims to support young people through individualised assistance, tailored youth development activities, recreational programs, education, community participation, and advocacy.

Deterring Drivers Program (Townsville, Qld)

The Deterring Drivers Program is an innovative six-week pilot program designed by criminologists from Australian Catholic University (ACU), which aims to prevent motor vehicle offending by intervening early and engaging youth in alternative educational and adrenaline-based activities. ACU is planning to evaluate the program using mixed methodologies including pre- and post-intervention interviews and surveys with participants; interviews with police, caseworkers, families, and other stakeholders; participant observations; and analysis of available data relating to offending behaviour pre- and post-intervention.³⁷³

Youth Step-Up Step-Down Service (Caboolture, Logan and Cairns, Qld)

The Youth Step-Up Step-Down Service (SUSD) is an evidence-informed initiative that offers short-term (up to 28 days), sub-acute community bed-based mental health support and treatment to young people aged 16 to 21 years old who are experiencing severe and complex mental health concerns. In addition to clinical services, a non-government organisation is integrated within the Youth SUSD to provide non-clinical holistic support.³⁷⁴

Family and Child Connect (Qld)

Local community-based Family and Child Connect services are available in 20 locations across Queensland. These services aim to provide advice and information to families, which includes linking children and families with services to assist with their individual situation.³⁷⁵

Youth Housing and Reintegration Service (Qld)

Community-based organisations provide a Youth Housing and Reintegration Service in six locations across Queensland to support young people aged 12 to 21 years old who are experiencing homelessness, who are at-risk of homelessness, who are transitioning from/have recently exited care or youth detention, or who have unstable living arrangements. This includes case management and brokerage to assist young people with housing needs.³⁷⁶

Youth Support Services (Qld)

There are 87 community-based youth support services across Queensland who work with young people aged 8 to 21 years old to help them connect to positive family support, engage in employment, training and/or education, and live a healthy and violence-free life with a safe and stable place to live.³⁷⁷ Youth support services deliver both access services (information, advice, and referral to other services) and support services (case management/coordination and one-on-one assistance) that are tailored to the individual and their circumstances.

Youth Day Support Program (Rockhampton, Qld)

Lives Lived Well runs a free non-residential drug and alcohol Day Support Program for young people aged 12 to 17 years old and young people aged 18 to 21 years old in Rockhampton.³⁷⁸ Lives Lived Well has a research partnership with the University of Queensland in support of providing timely evidence-informed treatment.³⁷⁹

Jacaranda Place (Brisbane, Qld)

Jacaranda Place is a 12-bed sub-acute extended treatment centre that provides inpatient support (for up to six months) to young people primarily aged 13 to 18 years old who have severe and complex mental health concerns. Jacaranda Place also provides a day program that provides outpatient support to young people aged 13 to 18 years old who live in the community.³⁸⁰

E_Suarve (Gold Coast, Qld)

Everything Suarve Inc (E_Suarve) is a not-for-profit organisation offering alternative learning programs for young people who are at-risk of justice system involvement or have experienced the justice system on the Gold Coast. The E_Suarve Big Brother program supports young people aged 14 to 25 years old to re-engage with education, training and/or employment, which includes building tiny homes for homeless people and gaining certificates in construction. E_Suarve has reported that 90% of participants have gained employment on completion of the program.³⁸¹

Recycle Your Dreams (Townsville, Qld)

Recycle Your Dreams, formerly run by Queensland Youth Services, was a two-year pilot program (from 2017 to 2019) aimed at connecting young people aged 15 to 25 years old at-risk with education, training, and employment. In total, 37 participants gained full time employment and 13 participants went on to further study and training. Queensland Youth Services estimated this is a potential economic savings of \$714,000 Newstart savings from youth who gained employment or returned to school, and \$2.3 million in potential Newstart savings based on recipients accessing financial assistance for five years.³⁸²

Onwards & Upwards Wellbeing Mentoring Program (Qld)

The Inspiring Brighter Futures Foundation's Onwards & Upwards Wellbeing Mentoring Program supports children and adults who may be experiencing disadvantage through one-on-one personal development and mentoring.³⁸³ The program has been delivered for diverse groups of people including people with a criminal justice system experience and young people who are disengaged from education.

Early Action Groups (Qld, 3 Locations)

Following an internal review, the remit of the Townsville Stronger Communities initiative was refreshed in 2021 to focus on early intervention through an Early Action Group.³⁸⁴ This multi-agency Early Action Group includes representatives from Queensland Police Service, Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs, Department of Education, Department of Communities, Housing and Digital Economy, Department of Seniors, Disability and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, and Queensland Health.³⁸⁵ The group works in partnership with relevant community-services and supports children aged 8 to 16 years old to address the underlying factors that lead to offending. In February 2023, \$1.8 million in funding was committed to roll out this initiative in Mount Isa and Cairns.³⁸⁶

Project Booyah (Queensland Police)

Project Booyah is a Queensland Police-led mentoring program for disconnected young people aged 14 to 17 years old, which aims to empower participants to make better life choices.³⁸⁷ It incorporates adventure-based learning, leadership skills development, decision-making and problem-solving activities, resilience training, policing strategies, and family inclusive principles. In 2014, Griffith University undertook an evaluation of Project Booyah to establish its efficacy in targeting criminogenic behaviours and attitudes.³⁸⁸ This evaluation was not made publicly available. However, Queensland Government reported publicly that the majority of young people who participated in the program did not go on to offend again, and that for every dollar invested in Project Booyah, the savings to the community are \$2.55.³⁸⁹

Framing the Future (Queensland Police)

Framing the Future aims to continue engagement with Project Booyah graduates for 18 months (and longer if required) after completion of the program to prevent involvement in antisocial and offending behaviour.³⁹⁰ This includes supporting young people to engage with education and/or employment and providing tailored interventions.

Proud Warrior (Townsville, Qld)

Proud Warrior is an Australian Army program that aims to positively influence young people aged 14 years and above in Townsville who are at-risk of further justice system involvement.³⁹¹ The program provides a safe and enjoyable environment for young people to be mentored, coached, and supported. It is delivered in collaboration with Police, Youth Justice, Department of Seniors, Disability and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Australian Army Cadets, local Aboriginal Elders, Sunbus, Education Queensland and Unity Care.

Youth Support Coordinator Initiative (Qld)

The Queensland Government Department of Education Youth Support Coordinator Initiative provides funding to schools to employ one full-time equivalent staff member to focus on supporting educational retention and attainment of young people in Year 10 to Year 12. This early intervention initiative aims to provide educational and sustainable future employment opportunities for young people who are disengaged, or at-risk of disengaging, from school.³⁹²

General Practitioners in Schools Pilot Project (Qld)

The Queensland Government has funded 50 schools across Queensland through the General Practitioners (GPs) in School Pilot Project to run an onsite GP clinic one-day per week for secondary students. This project is intended to provide timely and appropriate health care for students and thereby removing barriers to access.³⁹³ Access to good-quality health care, including mental health care, especially for children and young people experiencing disadvantage is an important protective factor.

Regional Youth Engagement Service (Qld)

The Queensland Government Department of Education has established Regional Youth Engagement Services in eight regions within Queensland, which provide place-based support for young people to reengage with education or work. The services work in partnership with other government agencies, schools, registered training organisations, community-based organisations, and other stakeholders.³⁹⁴

Positive Learning Centres, Flexispaces, and Spotlight Schools (Qld)

There are Queensland Government Department of Education funded Positive Learning Centres in 15 locations across Queensland. Positive Learning Centres provide an alternative education option for students who require early intervention beyond what is available within a mainstream classroom. This can include long-term placements, part-time programs, and suspension periods, with the aim of keeping students engaged in education and ultimately reengaging students back into mainstream school or alternate learning/vocational pathways.³⁹⁵ There are also 52 schools across Queensland with a FlexiSpace, which is an alternative learning environment for students who may be experiencing disengagement. Complementary to these alternative education options, the Spotlight Schools Initiative provides evidence-informed professional development and capacity-building support to schools who are working to improve practices and responses for disengaged students and/or students at-risk of disengagement.³⁹⁶

Link and Launch (Qld)

The Queensland Government Department of Education's Link and Launch program aims to provide case management support to Year 12 young people to assist them to engage with education, training and/or employment at a key transition point in their life course.³⁹⁷ Link and Launch services are now available in 36 schools across Queensland following an independent evaluation that showed 73.2% of participants transitioned into employment, further education, or training and 90.9% remained engaged after 30 months.³⁹⁸

Beyond Domestic Violence (Brisbane, Qld)

In April 2023, Beyond DV (Domestic Violence) received \$295,665 funding through the Community Partnership Innovation Grant scheme to establish a holistic early intervention that will support young people impacted by domestic and family violence.³⁹⁹

Selectability Limited (Cairns, Qld)

In April 2023, Selectability Limited received \$259,331 funding through the Community Partnership Innovation Grant scheme to establish an after-hours outreach and mentoring program in Earlville and Edmonton.⁴⁰⁰

Australian Training Works Group (Brisbane, Qld)

In April 2023, Australian Training Works Group Pty Ltd (an Indigenous group training organisation) received \$299,423 funding to provide work-readiness courses and skills building for young people in Cairns.⁴⁰¹

The Block (Goondiwindi, Qld)

In April 2023, Winangali Infusion received \$300,000 in funding through the Community Innovation Grant Scheme to support young people in Goondiwindi (as well as young people in border towns in New South Wales) through a community hub that provides pro-social activities, cultural education, and other opportunities.⁴⁰²

Rites of Passage Framework (Goondiwindi, Qld)

In April 2023, Marigurim Yalaam Indigenous Corporation for Community Justice received \$298,980 in funding through the Community Innovation Grant scheme to develop a Rites of Passage framework that provides intensive support to young people pre-and-post attending a Rites of Passage Camp.

Case studies:

Tertiary programs for children and young people

Community Youth Response and Diversion (Qld)

The Queensland Government has allocated a total amount of \$56.9 million towards Community Youth Response and Diversion programs that aim to divert young people aged 10 to 15 years old from the justice system into placed-based diversion services, integrated case management and other supports. Community-based organisations provide culturally appropriate diversionary options in Brisbane, Gold Coast, Logan, Ipswich, Cairns and Townsville, with the current program funded until June 2023.⁴⁰³ The Queensland Government has contracted Nous Group to undertake an evaluation of this program.⁴⁰⁴

The Lighthouse: Youth After Hours Diversion Service (Townsville, Qld)

The Lighthouse is open from 6pm to 8am seven nights per week to provide support for young people aged 10 to 17 years old in Townsville who need a safe place to go. Young people who access the service are assigned a case worker and can access overnight accommodation as well as other activities/supports.⁴⁰⁵

Disrupting the School to Prison Pipeline Project (Moreton Bay Region, Qld)

The Disrupting the School to Prison Pipeline Project aims to reconnect disengaged First Nations young people in the Moreton Bay Region with education, training, or employment. The project is delivered by Mindle Bygul Aboriginal Corporation and Queensland University of Technology who are undertaking the evaluation component.⁴⁰⁶

Transition to Community (Ipswich, Qld)

Transition to Community is an intensive six-month post-release program in Ipswich that aims to support young people leaving youth detention to reintegrate back into the community including through connection with training and employment opportunities.⁴⁰⁷ This program is delivered by Fearless Towards Success, who have developed a collaborative relationship with the evidence-based BackTrack Youth Works Project in New South Wales and have developed their services using an evidence-informed approach.⁴⁰⁸

On Country Program (Cairns, Mount Isa and Townsville, Qld)

The Queensland Government has funded \$9.8 million towards an On Country program for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander young people aged 10 to 17 years old who have offended and are assessed as having high and complex needs. The program is delivered by First Nations community-controlled organisations in three locations including Jabalbina Yalanji Aboriginal Corporation in Cairns, Mona Aboriginal Corporation in Mount Isa, and Gr8Motive Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation Queensland in Townsville.⁴⁰⁹ Queensland Council of Social Service is undertaking an evaluation that looks at the effectiveness and impact of the program on youth offending.⁴¹⁰ In addition, Jabalbina Yalanji Aboriginal Corporation received additional funding through the Community Partnership Innovation Grant scheme to deliver overnight On Country Healing Camps at short notice and in the 72 hours after young people leave youth detention.⁴¹¹

Elders Cautioning Pilot Program (Qld)

The Queensland Government has funded an Elders Cautioning Pilot Program in Inala. This project is run by Inala Elders Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation in partnership with Queensland Police and Griffith University who are undertaking the evaluation component.⁴¹² The program aims to divert young people from the justice system into culturally appropriate cautioning and other supports. Elders in other communities (including Rockhampton, North Stradbroke Island, and Townsville) are also providing Elders Cautioning in partnership with Queensland Police (however, Elders Cautioning in these communities is unfunded and voluntary).

Community Helping Adolescents with New Growth and Endeavours (Change) (Toowoomba, Qld)

CHANGE aims to provide wrap-around interventions and supports for young people aged 10 to 17 years old in Toowoomba who are at-risk of becoming entrenched in the youth justice system. Five community-based service providers (Catholic Care Social Service, Emerge, Good Samaritan College, Bunya Peoples Aboriginal Corporation, and Raw Impact) collectively deliver the program to ensure young people receive holistic support (including housing, mentoring, education, training, employment, recreational activities, and cultural connection).⁴¹³ In April 2023, Raw Impact also received \$300,000 in funding through the Community Partnership Innovation Grant scheme to deliver intensive cultural connection support and opportunities for young people at-risk in Toowoomba.⁴¹⁴

Keeping Our Kids Out (Koko) Pasifika Youth Holistic Hub (Logan, Qld)

Village Connect Ltd has developed the first culturally safe integrated service response for Pacific Islander young people in Queensland, which aims to provide wrap-around supports for young people who are offending as well as their families.⁴¹⁵

Yangah Program (Brisbane, Qld)

Sisters Inside delivers this program, which aims to reduce the number of young girls aged 10 to 17 years old held on remand in prison or within police watch houses by providing pre- and post-release support to improve the likelihood of bail and bail compliance. This includes supporting girls to access accommodation, community-based services and supports, legal representation and individual/family support.⁴¹⁶

Intensive Bail Initiative (Qld)

The Intensive Bail Initiative (IBI) is delivered by community-based service providers in five locations across Queensland who provide support to young people aged 10 to 17 years old who have committed serious, repeat offences, and have intensive bail conditions (such as electronic monitoring or a conditional bail program) as well as support their families. The IBI includes bail support; intensive family partnership case work; and community co-responders who are available to provide support and connection services out of hours (including in response to calls from young people, families, Youth Co-Responder Teams, and Youth Justice Service Centres). The program is being expanded to Toowoomba, Mount Isa, and Cairns. The Queensland Department of Children, Youth Justice, and Multicultural Affairs reports that it has allocated total funding of \$33.9 million for delivery in a total of eight locations over a number of years until 2026–27, and that there has been a 34% reduction in custody nights in the existing five locations.⁴¹⁷

Current service providers are Youth Advocacy Centre (Brisbane), Anglicare Queensland (Logan), TAIHS (Townsville bail support component only), Kurbingui (Caboolture/Redcliffe) and Anglicare Southern Queensland (Gold Coast).

Navigate Your Health (Qld)

Navigate Your Health is available to young people aged 10 to 17.5 years old who are subject to community-based youth justice orders in Brisbane, Western Districts, Ipswich, Logan, and Cairns. Queensland Health Nurse Navigators work in collaboration with other government departments, general practitioners, Aboriginal Medical Services, and other community health services to ensure young people receive support related to their health and wellness.⁴¹⁸

Specialist Support and Counselling Services (Qld)

Queensland Government funds specialist support and counselling services for people impacted by sexual offending. Youth Sexual Violence and Abuse (YSVA) Services have been established within various locations across Queensland to provide trauma-informed counselling for young people aged 10 to 17 years old who have experienced sexual violence or child sexual abuse as well as early intervention responses for young people exhibiting problematic sexual behaviours.⁴¹⁹ Additionally, Bravehearts Foundation Limited provides evidence-based specialist counselling services involving therapeutic intervention support within restorative justice conferencing for adolescents who have committed sexual offences and their families, and persons harmed and their families/significant others.⁴²⁰ External providers have been engaged to evaluate the effectiveness of these services.⁴²¹

Family-led Decision-Making (Qld, 4 Locations)

Family-led decision-making aims to empower Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children who have offended and their families to have a voice about youth justice responses through a culturally safe decision-making process. Queensland Government has allocated \$8.7 million for this service, which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations deliver in four regions (Cairns, Toowoomba, Brisbane south/Logan and North Brisbane) across Queensland in partnership with youth justice staff. The Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak provides program support including with planned evaluation.⁴²²

Legal Advocacy and Bail Support Services (Qld, 13 Locations)

Legal advocacy and bail support services are delivered by community-based organisations in 13 locations across Queensland to support young people aged 10 to 17 years old in the youth justice system through court advocacy, case management, after hours support and visits, connection to local community services and assistance to comply with bail conditions.⁴²³ The Queensland Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs reports it has allocated \$43.1 million towards these services over several years until 2026–27 and that these services have resulted in a 32% reduction in reoffending frequency and severity.⁴²⁴

The Yili Program (Qld)

Yiliyapinya Indigenous Corporation delivers the Yili Program, which is a transition and engagement support program for youth aged 10 to 15 years old on bail reporting conditions who cannot have their needs met by alternative education facilities. This program and all other services that Yiliyapinya Indigenous Corporation delivers are evidence and neuroscience informed. In April 2023, Yiliyapinya Indigenous Corporation received \$300,000 through the Community Innovation Grant Scheme to deliver a neuroplasticity program for Aboriginal children aged 10 to 18 years old on bail in Woorabinda. Yiliyapinya Indigenous Corporation also offers their expertise in neuroplasticity programs to support other organisations through the development of tailored brain fitness programs for children, youth, and adults.⁴²⁵

Specialist High-Risk Youth Court (Townsville, Qld)

The Queensland Government introduced the Townsville High-Risk Youth Court in 2017 for the purpose of ensuring 'high risk and repeat young defendants appear in court and are heard by the same magistrate'.⁴²⁶

Multi Agency Collaborative Panels (Qld, 17 Locations)

The Queensland Government has legislated the operation of multi-agency collaborative panels for government departments to coordinate the provision of services, including assessments and referrals, for young people who have offended or who are at-risk of offending. The legislation provides the option for government to invite prescribed entities or service providers to assist with the provision of services through the panels.⁴²⁷ The Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs reports that it has allocated \$17.5 million to the operation of multi-agency collaborative panels, which are available in 17 locations across Queensland (Brisbane, Caboolture, Cairns, Darling Downs, Gold Coast, Ipswich, Logan, Mackay, Mareeba, Mount Isa, Rockhampton, south-west Queensland, Sunshine Coast, Townsville, Wandama, Western Districts and Wide Bay Burnett).

Lutheran Church (Brisbane, Qld)

In April 2023, Brisbane Lutheran Church received \$300,000 funding through the Community Partnership Innovation Grant scheme to establish a targeted-holistic case-coordination and intensive case management service that will target drivers behind young people's offending behaviours.⁴²⁸

Back to Community Reintegration Program (Mount Isa, Qld)

In April 2023, 54 Reasons received \$300,000 funding through the Community Partnership Innovation Grant scheme to establish this program that will provide rights-based, trauma informed and culturally responsive throughcare support to young people from Mount Isa, Doomadgee or Mornington Island who are leaving youth detention.⁴²⁹

Adam Wenitong (Toowoomba, Qld)

In April 2023, Adam Wenitong received \$142,483 funding through the Community Partnership Innovation Grant scheme to establish a 30-week response for young people who have reoffended in Toowoomba (which includes a First Nations cultural project).⁴³⁰

Youth Off The Streets (Logan, Qld)

In April 2023, Youth Off the Streets received \$293,500 funding through the Community Partnership Innovation Grant scheme to support the delivery of targeted and evidence-based interventions for young people transitioning from detention to the community and for young people who require support to re-engage with education (including young people from First Nations, Pasifika and African communities).⁴³¹

Case studies:

Alternatives to policing in Queensland

Youth Co-Responder Teams (Qld)

The Queensland Government has established Youth Co-Responder Teams in eight locations across Queensland (Townsville, Cairns, Mackay, Rockhampton, Moreton Bay region, Brisbane North, Logan and Gold Coast), and has recently announced expansion of this initiative in five additional locations (Toowoomba, Hervey Bay, Mount Isa, Ipswich and south Brisbane). Youth Co-Responder Teams operate as a partnership between police and youth justice workers who patrol the streets and engage with young people including those on bail. The Queensland Department of Children, Youth Justice, and Multicultural Affairs reports that it has committed a total amount of \$97.5 million towards the Youth Co-Responder Teams and associated youth justice after hours support over several years until 2026–27,⁴³² and that there is a 96% average bail compliance across all locations.⁴³³

Case studies:

Bail support and alternatives to remand in Queensland

Edward Chubb Diversionary Service (Rockhampton, Qld)

Juwarki Kapu-Lug runs the Edward Chubb Diversionary Service in Rockhampton, which includes a 15-bed alternative accommodation centre that aims to divert people from police custody into more appropriate supports. The centre is purpose-built to provide culturally appropriate support and case management for adults who are at-risk to themselves or others as a result of public intoxication.⁴³⁴

Murri Watch Diversionary Centre (Brisbane, Qld)

Murri-Watch runs a 14-bed diversionary centre that provides a culturally appropriate alternative to police custody in Brisbane for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults who are at-risk as a result of public intoxication. In 2020, 687 clients accessed the diversion centre on 1360 different occasions.⁴³⁵

Reverend Charles Diversionary Centre (Townsville, Qld)

Yumba Meta runs a 50-bed diversionary centre (28 male beds and 22 female beds) as an alternative to police custody for adults who require supports as result of public intoxication.⁴³⁶

Breaking the Cycle Program (Townsville, Qld)

Yumba Meta runs a five to 30-day Breaking the Cycle Program in conjunction with the Reverend Charles Diversionary Centre (with all regular clients of the centre encouraged to complete the program). The program provides individualised intensive case management and supports in a safe and caring environment to address underlying factors contributing to their current circumstances.⁴³⁷

Supreme Court Bail Support Program (Townsville and South-East Qld)

Through this program, Sisters Inside supports women to apply for, and successfully complete, Supreme Court Bail in Townsville and south-east Queensland.⁴³⁸

Court Link (Qld)

Court Link is an integrated assessment, bail referral and support program that is available in eight locations across Queensland (Brisbane, Cairns, Ipswich, Southport, Caboolture, Redcliffe, Maroochydore and Mount Isa). The program aims to address the drivers of offending by connecting people with relevant services and supports.⁴³⁹ In 2021–22, 635 people were accepted into case management through the program and 346 people completed 12-plus weeks of case management. An evaluation of Court Link commenced in 2019 and is scheduled to be completed this year in 2023.⁴⁴⁰

Decarceration Program (South-East Qld)

Sisters Inside runs this program to reduce the number of women on remand in south-east Queensland by providing early support to improve the likelihood of a successful bail application and post-release outreach support to assist women to meet their bail or parole conditions.⁴⁴¹

Parole Support Program (South-East Qld)

This Sisters Inside program provides pre- and post-release parole support to women in all south-east Queensland prisons.⁴⁴²

Murri Watch Community Patrol Program (Townsville and Mackay, Qld)

Murri Watch delivers a Community Patrol program in Townsville and Mackay, which provides outreach, support (including referring to services), and transport for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are homeless/sleeping rough and intoxicated in public spaces.⁴⁴³

Safe Night Precinct Support Services (Qld, 15 Locations)

Community-based service providers offer safe night precinct support services in 15 locations across Queensland to assist people who are intoxicated between 10pm to 4am on Friday and Saturday nights.⁴⁴⁴

Management of Public Intoxication Program (Qld)

The Management of Public Intoxication Program (MPIP) was developed based on evidence-based practice to provide case management, health supports, and assertive outreach with people who are homeless and experiencing intoxication in public spaces. The MPIP is delivered by Anglicare Southern Queensland in Townsville⁴⁴⁵ and Aboriginal and Islander Community Resource Agency in Rockhampton.⁴⁴⁶

Men's Domestic Violence Education and Intervention Program (Gold Coast, Qld)

The Domestic Violence Prevention Centre Gold Coast delivers a Men's Domestic Violence Education and Intervention Program in partnership with Queensland Corrective Services, which provides an alternative option for the court to include as a condition of a community-based probation or parole order for adult men.⁴⁴⁷

Case studies:

Post-release support and throughcare in Queensland

Beyond the Police Check (Australia-Wide)

Australian Red Cross undertook research that found employers can feel overwhelmed when employing people with lived experience of the justice system.⁴⁴⁸ In response to this finding, Australian Red Cross developed the Beyond the Police Check resource, which provides tools to support employers to recruit, manage and support people with lived experience of the justice system.⁴⁴⁹ Research has shown 78% of employers who had previously recruited someone with lived experience reported positive outcomes.⁴⁵⁰

Community Re-Entry Support Teams (Qld)

The Community Re-Entry Support Teams (CREST) are available in most male correctional centres and in Townsville Women's Correctional centre in Queensland. CREST services provide in-prison information and referral support, post-release managed support, and parole support.⁴⁵¹ CREST services are delivered by Lives Lived Well in Far North and Central Queensland⁴⁵², Open Minds Australia in Townsville⁴⁵³ and Australia Community Support Organisation (ACSO) in south-east Queensland.⁴⁵⁴ Queensland Correctional Services engaged ABT Associates to evaluate the CREST service and its impact on recidivism, which (to our knowledge) has not yet been made publicly available.⁴⁵⁵

MARA (South-East Qld)

Sero4 Ltd delivers a re-entry program for women in south-east Queensland correctional centres called MARA. The MARA program provides trauma-informed pre- and post-release support for up to three months before leaving prison and six months after leaving prison.⁴⁵⁶

Women's Healing Service (Townsville, Qld)

Palm Island Community Company runs a trauma-informed and culturally-driven women's healing service that supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women pre- and post-release from prison in Townsville.⁴⁵⁷

Transition from Corrections (South-East and Wide Bay, Qld)

Richmond Fellowship Queensland runs a recovery-focused Transition from Corrections program that aims to support adults with a mental health condition who are released from prison in the south-east and Wide Bay regions of Queensland. Emotional and practical support is provided pre- and post-release (up to 12 months post-release).⁴⁵⁸

Health Support Program (Qld)

Sisters Inside runs a Health Support Program that supports women who have been criminalised (particularly in the first month post-release from prison) and their children to improve their social and emotional wellbeing and health. This includes referrals to supports and services (including non-health related services) and practical support to attend appointments.⁴⁵⁹

Time to Work Employment Service (Townsville and South-East Qld)

The Time to Work Employment Service is a federal government-funded initiative delivered in Queensland Correctional Centres that aims to support sentenced Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples in prison to connect with employment opportunities post-release from prison.⁴⁶⁰ National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) engaged SVA Consulting to evaluate this service in 2021. This evaluation outlined several limitations of the service including that just over half of all participants who participated in the service did not connect with an employment provider within 13 weeks post-release. Other limitations included:

- » Lack of evidence showing it was developed in consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders
- » The need for providers to strengthen cultural appropriateness in their delivery of the service
- » Operational barriers limiting successful implementation of the program in all prisons
- » The need for providers to work with participants over a longer period
- » Issues with program logic, implementation and fidelity
- » Continued service coordination challenges
- » Limited connection between participants and their post-release employment provider
- » The need for improved data collection and linkage in support of evaluating outcomes of the service.⁴⁶¹

Post-Release Supported Accommodation Program (Qld)

St Vincent de Paul delivers the Post-Release Supported Accommodation Program in partnership with Queensland Corrective Services. This program provides post-release housing and support to men on parole in Toowoomba, Moreton Bay, Townsville and Cairns. From the program inception in 2019 to 30 June 2022, 197 men had obtained housing through the program (with more than half identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander).⁴⁶²

Next Step Home – Women on Parole Program (Qld)

The Next Step Home Women on Parole Program provides post-release housing and wrap-around support for women leaving prison in south-east and north Queensland. The University of Queensland (UQ) completed an evaluation of this program in 2020 that (to our knowledge) has not been released publicly.⁴⁶³ Queensland Corrective Services (QCS) reports that 187 women in south-east Queensland and 35 women in north Queensland have obtained housing through this program as of 30 June 2022.⁴⁶⁴

Gatton Re-Entry Program (Gatton, Qld)

Sisters Inside delivers this program to provide pre-release support (for up to three months) and post-release individual and family support (for up to six months or longer if required) for women who are incarcerated at Gatton.⁴⁶⁵

Case studies:

First Nations-led place-based approaches in Queensland

Mornington Island Restorative Justice Project (Mornington Island, Qld)

This evaluation utilised a mixed-methodology approach to explore outcomes from the Mornington Island Restorative Justice Project. This community-led mediation/peacemaking project aimed to build Mornington Island community capacity to self-determine conflict management without violence or engagement with external agencies (such as police and courts). The evaluation outlined several positive outcomes of this place-based mediation project including community ownership, confidence and trust in the process, restoration and healing in the community (rather than through the justice system), and restoration of Elder authority and respect.⁴⁶⁶

Aurukun Restorative Justice and Reintegration Justice Project (Aurukun, Qld)

Through the Aurukun Restorative Justice Project (which commenced in 2013), a local and culturally inclusive mediation and peacekeeping service has been established to build community dispute resolution capacity in Aurukun.⁴⁶⁷ A 2017 evaluation of this project found the community was very supportive of localised mediation and over two-thirds (64%) of mediation participants recorded successful outcomes. Following this evaluation in April 2017, the Aurukun Reintegration Justice Project commenced to improve services and supports for people from the Aurukun community before, during, and after incarceration.⁴⁶⁸

North Stradbroke Island Youth and Social Justice Working Group (Terrangeri, Qld)

The North Stradbroke Island Youth and Social Justice Working Group was established after discussions between Aboriginal Elders across Terrangeri (Stradbroke Island) and south-east Queensland, who were concerned about the ongoing issues impacting Aboriginal youth. These discussions identified the ongoing failures of existing systems and highlighted the need for an urgent and self-determining response. Led by the Minjerribah Moorgumpin (Elders-in-Council), the working group includes a grass-roots network of stakeholders who create justice reinvestment and restoration initiatives for the local community. This work is community controlled. It was founded by, and ensures the ongoing engagement of, Aboriginal Elders across all levels of decision-making. The working group has a particular focus on promoting self-pride and self-worth in Quandamooka youth through culturally-based models, with the fundamental intention of life promotion and belonging.

Case studies:

In-prison programs in Queensland

Anti-Violence Program (Townsville And Gatton, Sisters Inside, Qld)

Sisters Inside runs an anti-violence program that facilitates individualised counselling and education/support groups with women in prison who have experienced domestic, family, and/or sexual violence. This program is supported by two full-time anti-violence workers in Townsville and one in Gatton.⁴⁶⁹

Sexual Assault Program (Qld)

The Sisters Inside's Sexual Assault program provides counselling and support to women in Queensland prisons who have been impacted by sexual assault.⁴⁷⁰

Elders Visiting Program (Qld)

Elders from Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities visit people in prison to provide cultural and other supports.⁴⁷¹

Cell Visitors Service (Qld)

In response to the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, the Queensland Government funded the establishment of Cell Visitor Services in watch houses across Queensland. Community organisations deliver these services to minimise harm and prevent deaths in custody. Service providers include Juwarki Kapu-Lug (in Rockhampton), Murri Watch (in Brisbane City, Beenleigh, Richlands, Ipswich, Cleveland, Pine Rivers, Caboolture, Mackay, Townsville and Palm Island) and Anglicare (in Cairns and Innisfail).⁴⁷²

Pups In Prison (Southern Qld)

Pups in Prison is a voluntary program that is delivered in partnership with Assistance Dogs Australia and offered to women who are incarcerated in southern Queensland correctional centres. As part of the program, women obtain a Certificate III in Companion Animal Services and lead the training for dogs to become qualified assistance dogs.⁴⁷³

Cultural Connections Program (Aurukun, Qld)

Apunipima Cape York Health Council runs a social and emotional wellbeing cultural connections program for adult males from Aurukun who are in prison. This program includes in-custody programs and post-release intervention and support.⁴⁷⁴

Building on Women's Strengths (Brisbane and Townsville, Qld)

The Sisters Inside's Building on Women's Success program supports mothers to maintain relationships with their children while in prison and to rebuild their lives together post-release.⁴⁷⁵

Disrupting Family Violence Program (Qld)

The Disrupting Family Violence Program is a cognitive behavioural therapy program for men in prison who have perpetrated violence and abusive behaviours against intimate partners and family. In 2021, Queensland Corrective Service reported that the program was examined to assess its suitability in prison contexts and found it to be an effective intervention for people in prison.⁴⁷⁶

Case studies:

Services in the community in Queensland

Bowman Johnson Hostel (Brisbane, Qld)

Bowman Johnson Hostel is a 22-bed short-term supported accommodation option (inclusive of case management services) for people who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness in Brisbane. The hostel is run by Murri Watch and is primarily targeted towards supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander male and female adults. Murri Watch reports that 136 clients were accommodated over the past 12 months.⁴⁷⁷

Dale Parker Place (Townsville, Qld)

Dale Parker Place is a supported accommodation option available to single males, single females, and couples without children who are experiencing homelessness or sleeping rough in Townsville. Through the service, Yumba Meta provides individualised case management to support clients to transition into independent, sustainable housing in the community. The facility has 40 one-bedroom units available and has exceeded 95% capacity at all times.⁴⁷⁸

Binbi Yadubay – Healthy Beginnings (Rockhampton, Qld)

In 2022, a new purpose-built 42-bed drug and alcohol residential facility called Binbi Yadubay (Healthy Beginnings) opened in Rockhampton. This is the first service in Queensland to offer withdrawal, rehabilitation, and family recovery residential services.⁴⁷⁹ Lives Lived Well has formally partnered with the University of Queensland to support continuous monitoring and improvement and delivery of evidence-based services/programs.⁴⁸⁰

Gindaja Treatment and Healing Indigenous Corporation (Yarrabah, Qld)

Gindaja Treatment and Health Centre Aboriginal Corporation runs a 17-bed Residential Recovery Centre and a non-residential Learning and Wellbeing Centre to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to recover from problematic alcohol and/or substance use.⁴⁸¹

Mimosa Creek Healing Centre (Woorabinda, Qld)

Central Queensland Indigenous Development (CQID) runs the Mimosa Creek Healing Centre, which supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men suffering from problematic drug and/or alcohol use through a 12-week residential program that is strong in culture.⁴⁸² CQID also provides non-residential culturally appropriate services and supports for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait adults who are impacted by problematic substance use.⁴⁸³

Shanty Creek (Mareeba, Qld)

Lives Lived Well runs a 30-bed residential drug and alcohol program for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander men and women to access supports for problematic drug and/or alcohol use (for up to four months).⁴⁸⁴

Logan House and Family Recovery Units (Logan, Qld)

The Lives Lived Well Logan House is a 6–12-week residential treatment program for adults with problematic drug and/or alcohol use.⁴⁸⁵ In addition to Logan House, Lives Lived Well offers family recovery units for parents to stay with their young children while they participate in a residential drug and alcohol treatment program over a three-month period.⁴⁸⁶

Stagpole Street Drug and Alcohol Rehabilitation Unit (Townsville, Qld)

In partnership with Blue Care, Pinangba (an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led arm of UnitingCare) provide residential drug and alcohol rehabilitation services primarily for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people who are impacted by problematic substance use. The Stagpole Street Drug and Alcohol Rehabilitation Unit is located in Townsville and specialises in culturally appropriate healing services.⁴⁸⁷

Men Towards Equal Relationships (Menter Program) (Townsville, Qld)

The North Queensland Domestic Violence Resource Service runs a group-based men's behavioural change program of 16 weeks to address the use of violence within relationships.⁴⁸⁸

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The Justice Reform Initiative is an alliance of people who share long-standing professional experience, lived experience and/or expert knowledge of the justice system, who are further supported by a movement of Australians of good-will from across the country who all believe jailing is failing, and that there is an urgent need to reduce the number of people in Australian prisons.

The Justice Reform Initiative is backed by eminent patrons, including former Governors-General Dame Quentin Bryce AD CVO and Sir William Deane AC KBE as patrons-in-chief.

The list includes: former justices of the High Court, a former state Chief Justice and judges from other courts; respected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders; a former Federal Police Commissioner, Director of Public Prosecutions, former Australians of the Year and numerous former Federal and state Ministers from both sides of politics. A list is available [here](#).

The Justice Reform Initiative deeply appreciates the support of the Paul Ramsay Foundation.

The Initiative respectfully acknowledges and supports the current and longstanding efforts of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to reduce the numbers of Indigenous people incarcerated in Australia and, importantly, the leadership role which Indigenous-led organisations continue to play on this issue. We also acknowledge the work of many other individuals and organisations seeking change, such as those focused on the rate of imprisonment for women, people with mental health issues, people with disability and others.

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