

Criminal Justice Policy for a more just and safer community

Community safety is always a priority, according to Denis Fitzgerald, Executive Director of Catholic Social Services Victoria: “Catholic Social Services Victoria believes that the key to a safer society is to build communities where the root causes of crime are addressed”. Going further he says, “when offences are committed, a focus on restoration for all parties, and on rehabilitation, must be central to our response”.

In the last decade *Victoria’s prison population has risen by 58% with harsher sentencing rather than increased crime rates appearing to be the key driver for increase*. Research shows that *exposing someone to prison doesn’t reduce reoffending, and may in fact increase it*. Instead, as a community, we should *focus on fostering reconciliation and restoring harmony in social relationships disrupted by crime*. It’s important to break the cycle of crime for safer communities, as well as to free up funds for key societal needs; *it costs approximately \$98,000 per year to imprison someone*.

Catholic Social Services Victoria has released a four-point criminal justice policy action plan:

1. **Implement preventative strategies** – placing more emphasis on measures that address the root causes that underlie crime and reoffending (such as low education levels, mental health issues, income inequality, lack of stable housing and employment).
2. **More emphasis on rehabilitation** (including through prison chaplaincy) and transition to aid re-integration into the community – housing, employment and social inclusion are all necessary, particularly for groups that are already marginalised.
3. **Alternatives to prison should be further developed** – as well as promoting restoration and rehabilitation - this can divert funds from costly incarceration to services into programs that address the underlying causes of crime in local communities – a **justice reinvestment approach**.
4. **Support victims of crime** – including, where appropriate, use of restorative justice processes that offer restoration, reconciliation, and restitution involving the offender, victim and community. This is to repair harm and also, where possible, break the cycle of crime through fostering greater offender accountability and behaviour change.

You can download the Catholic Social Services Victoria

Criminal Justice – Policy Perspective here:

<http://www.css.org.au/Article-View/Article/21189/Catholic-thinking-on-Crime-and-Punishment-in-Victoria>

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