



## **Closing the Gap Justice Targets for Safer, Stronger Communities**

### **Why are we doing this?**

A Shorten Labor Government will deliver a nationally coordinated approach to close the gap in Indigenous incarceration and victimisation rates. These rates have reached a crisis point.

- A young Indigenous man is more likely to go to jail than university.
- An Indigenous adult is 15 times more likely to be imprisoned than a non-Indigenous adult and an Indigenous child is 24 times more likely to be in detention.
- And an Indigenous woman is 34 times more likely to be hospitalised as a result of family violence than other women.

This is unacceptable.

Labor will apply leadership and innovation to address the justice gap - through community-driven and national strategies that empower communities to address the complex causes of incarceration and crime.

Labor believes we cannot close the gap in education, health and employment disadvantage between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians without national leadership to change the record and build safer, stronger communities.

Labor acknowledges the work of successive Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioners, the Change the Record campaign and the work of the House of Representatives Standing committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs for its 2011 report that have all recommended a focus on this issue.

### **Labor's plan**

Labor's national plan to meet the justice gap will include:

1. The first meeting of Council of Australian Governments (COAG) convened under a Shorten Labor Government will consider priorities for justice targets to be included under the Closing the Gap framework that build safer communities and address levels of Indigenous incarceration.

Following this meeting COAG will establish a Working Group of State, Territory and Local Government agencies, as well as key community organisations, to develop measurable targets that address rising incarceration rates and build safer communities.

This will focus national attention on closing the gap in these areas, alongside and complementing existing targets in education, employment, the early years, life

expectancy and mortality.

2. Labor will establish three new launch sites in a major city, regional town and remote community that build on existing community-led initiatives to explore the role of justice reinvestment in preventing crime and reducing incarceration.

These sites will be identified by working with State and Territory Governments, as there are currently justice reinvestment initiatives at various stages of development across Australia.

3. Labor will resource a long-term study of the effectiveness of the justice reinvestment project currently underway in Bourke, New South Wales, to see what Australia can learn from this specific initiative.

4. Labor understands the need for a strong evidence base, to understand what is working and inform future policy. Through COAG, Labor will establish a national coordinating body to build the evidence base, collect data and measure progress as the new targets are implemented, and to monitor the effectiveness of justice reinvestment in the Australian context.

### **What is justice reinvestment?**

Justice reinvestment works on the principle of redirecting funds spent on justice system to prevention and diversionary programs to address underlying causes of offending with disproportionately high levels of incarceration.

This is not about being 'soft' on crime, or giving offenders a free pass. It's about breaking the vicious cycle of disadvantage, the demoralising treadmill of offending and incarceration.

Justice reinvestment programs are being implemented in the United States where 27 states are investigating or applying the principles of justice reinvestment. Notably in Texas, between 2008 and 2010, funds were redirected to drug and alcohol treatment, behavioural, prevention, recidivism and diversionary programs, leading to decreases in the prison population and savings by cancelling plans to build new prisons.

Labor acknowledges the success of justice reinvestment will depend on community-engagement and location-specific responses which give communities ownership of the issues and the solution.

We also acknowledge the need for all levels of government to work together, which is why we will work through COAG as the justice reinvestment sites are established and implemented.

### **Who benefits?**

Justice reinvestment offers opportunities for communities and saves money - every dollar spent on imprisonment is one less dollar for our communities. The Report on Government Services 2015 shows it costs the Australian taxpayer \$292 a day to keep a person in prison.

By preventing crime and reducing incarceration we also give our young people more opportunity to finish their education and have greater opportunities to participate in

employment.

Incarceration and family violence is cyclical, leading to more crime and incarceration. National action and focus is needed to break this cycle.

### **Successful programs**

Two years ago the town of Bourke in the west of New South Wales, topped the state for six of the eight crime categories - including family violence, sexual assault and robbery. In February 2013, a headline in the Sydney Morning Herald reported that if Bourke was a nation, on a per capita basis, it would be 'more dangerous than any country in the world'.

The people of Bourke took it upon themselves to change this. Using the 'justice reinvestment' model, the community brought together 18 different organisations: police, magistrates, legal services, mental health experts and community groups to examine the causes of crime - and to work on preventing crime. The approach was owned and championed by local people and informed by local knowledge and local expertise - and supported by the NSW state government.

In doing so, the people of Bourke built the capacity of communities to tackle the underlying causes of crime: substance abuse, disengagement from school and family dislocation. Similar programs are underway in Katherine, in the Northern Territory - where the NT Law society is helping fund a project. The South Australian Government has offered its support to two sites.

### **Labor's record**

Labor first committed to a justice target at the 2013 election, recognising that a nationally coordinated approach was needed to reduce incarceration and victimisation rates among Indigenous people.

In contrast, in November 2014, the Abbott-Turnbull Government announced it would not implement a justice target, despite offering bipartisan support for a justice target in 2013. Meanwhile, incarceration and victimisation rates have increased.



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