

# Australia cannot tackle disadvantage without comprehensive reform to its criminal justice systems

10 DECEMBER 2020

A new report released today by the Centre for Policy Development (CPD) finds that Australia's criminal justice systems create and compound disadvantage at escalating costs to children, communities, and governments.

***Partners in Crime: the relationship between disadvantage and Australia's criminal justice systems*** shines light on how Australia's criminal justice systems exacerbate disadvantage in our communities. It draws on deep research and extensive consultations, making a number of recommendations to governments, communities, businesses and philanthropy.

"The key takeaway of ***Partners in Crime*** is that Australia cannot genuinely address disadvantage without comprehensive reform to our criminal justice systems" said CPD CEO, Travers McLeod. "We need to own up to this fact, especially when most Australian states and territories have an incarceration rate above the global average."

"Rising incarceration rates have been locking more and more of Australia's most vulnerable people into cyclical and intergenerational disadvantage, at enormous and escalating costs to taxpayers with hugely negative outcomes for individuals, families and communities."

"The statistics in this report reveal the scale of the challenge and where our systems fall short. Evidence shows the majority of people entering prison in 2018 had already experienced incarceration, were unemployed in the month before entering prison, and expected to be homeless on release."

"The status quo is costly and unsustainable, both financially and in terms of human potential. Without fundamental systems reform, we risk trapping some of the most vulnerable Australians and their children in criminal justice systems."

Krystal Lockwood, CPD Fellow and lecturer at Griffith University's School of Criminology and Criminal Justice, said the report highlights the concerning intergenerational impacts of Australia's criminal justice systems.

"In 2018 there were around 77,000 children with a parent in prison in Australia. The children are the silent victims of a situation not of their making, more likely to experience life-long adversity. We need to better support children and families to avoid perpetuating a cycle that has negatively affected generations of young Australians."

"As the report makes clear, the impact of our criminal justice systems is particularly devastating on Indigenous Australians and First Nations communities. Disproportionate rates of imprisonment for Indigenous Australians has led to even more severe intergenerational impacts, especially for children."

***Partners in Crime*** proposes three drivers of change that can jointly address the relationship between disadvantage and Australia's criminal justice systems:

- **Communities** — long-term investment in local communities to support vulnerable families and people most at risk of entering criminal justice systems, including 'Community Deals' for justice reinvestment;
- **Evidence** — gather better data to improve understanding of effective responses and inform new strategies, including an Australian 'what works' centre; and
- **Coordination** — of policy and law reform efforts, underpinned by an intergovernmental process with a broad coalition to build the authorising environment for change.

"What this report makes clear is we need better integration and coordination between our criminal justice systems and essential human services. Without this, incarceration will remain a default and detrimental response to disadvantage."

"No single reform theme will catalyse the changes needed alone. The report shows how governments, business, service providers, NGOs and philanthropy can work together to give Australians impacted by criminal justice systems a fair go at social and economic participation."

"COVID-19 is providing an opportunity to reshape critical service systems. Rethinking the policy and legal settings which shape Australia's criminal justice systems, including more diversionary programs and lifting the criminal age of responsibility, needs to be at the top of the queue."

***Partners in Crime*** is available on CPD's website.

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