



MEDIA STATEMENT

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“DEDICATED DRUG AND ALCOHOL REHABILITATION PRISONS MAY BE THE ANSWER TO OVERCROWDING ACCORDING TO THE EVIDENCE”

CEO of Rural Health Tasmania, Robert Waterman said that according to the evidence, more mainstream prisons are not the answer to overcrowding and dedicated drug and alcohol rehabilitation prisons hold the key to reducing reoffending, recidivism and overcrowding and addressing drug use.

Mr. Waterman said, reports from The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and The Australian Institute of Criminology are damning. Within an average of 34 days’ post release, 64 percent of males and 37 percent of females report using illicit drugs and 32 percent of prisoners released returned to custody within 24 months.

In the DUMA report across all sites, between July 2013 and December 2014, 46% of detainees tested positive to cannabis and 33% tested positive to amphetamines and in another QLD study, thirty-five 17 year old detainees were interviewed at the Brisbane site. Eighty-six percent of those who provided a urine sample tested positive for at least one drug type; test positive rates were highest for cannabis (77%), followed by amphetamines (45%). 97% of these reported ever having tried cannabis, while 66% reported having tried methamphetamine.

Mr. Waterman said a survey of prisoners in Australia also revealed that 23 per cent had injected drugs at some time in prison with a frightening 12 per cent injecting for the first time while incarcerated. This demonstrates that drugs are easily available in prisons in Australia and a need for an inquiry into how to better stop drug use in prisons (a supposedly secure system). Mr. Waterman said it is also clear that mixing drug related offenders or drug users with non-drug users poses a serious health risk to some inmates and is also another argument for the need of a dedicated, secure drug and alcohol rehabilitation prison.

Mr. Waterman quoted that “the Australian criminological literature is replete with evidence of associations between illicit drugs and crime. For more than 13 years the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC), through the Drug Use Monitoring in Australia program (DUMA), has collected both self-report and urinalysis data from more than 40,000 police detainees. The AIC presented findings that two in every three offenders (66%) detained by the police tested positive to at least one drug, not including alcohol (Gaffney et al. 2010); female detainees were more likely to test positive (73% vs. 65%) and almost half (47%) of those who had been charged with an offence in the preceding 12

months reported having taken drugs at the time of that prior offending. The findings from the DUMA program leave little doubt that substance misuse is more prevalent among offenders than in the general community (see comparative data at AIHW 2008)".

Among incarcerated offenders, the results are much the same. In a survey of adult male prisoners in 2001, the AIC's Drug Use Careers of Offenders (DUCO) study found that 62 percent of adult male prisoners reported being under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs at the time of the offence that later resulted in their incarceration (Makkai & Payne 2003).

Drug use also appears linked to a heightened risk of recidivism among prison populations. In a research project funded by the Criminology Research Council, the Queensland Alcohol and Drug Research and Education Centre found significant legal and illegal substance abuse histories among prisoners soon to be released (Kinner 2006) and that prisoners with a history of injecting drug use were found to be three times more likely to be re-incarcerated than their non-injecting peers.

Drug Use Monitoring in Australia (DUMA) interviewed 1,884 detainees in the third and fourth quarters of 2009. Of these 1,113 reported using at least one illegal drug in the preceding 30 days, while 1,376 reported consuming alcohol. In total, 1,631 of the 1,884 detainees reported using alcohol or illegal drugs on at least one day in the previous 30, and of these half (52%) indicated that substance use was a factor in their most recent offending.

Nationally 73% of police detainees who provided a urinalysis sample tested positive to at least one drug stating they either needed the money to buy drugs, were high/intoxicated at the time of the offence and/or were "hanging out" for drugs.

The DUMA report also revealed that 37% of adult detainees tested positive to amphetamines; this constitutes an increase of 13 percent since 2011–12. This is the highest recorded rate of amphetamine use in DUMA's history, with the previous peak being 35 percent in both 2003 and 2004.

In 2013–14, 47% of adult detainees interviewed reported having been charged on at least one separate occasion in the previous 12 months. This represents a rise in the recidivism rate compared with the 2011–12 data collection period (44%). The age of initiation (first use) for cannabis ranged from 7 to 17 and for methamphetamine ranged from 10 to 17. That's right, we now have 7 year olds smoking cannabis and 10 year olds using methamphetamine ice Mr. Waterman said.

Mental Health

Mr. Waterman said that population-based linkage study in Australia of adults in their 20s and 30s found that around one-third (32%) of those with a psychiatric illness had been arrested during a 10-year period, and the first arrest often occurred before first contact with mental health services (Morgan et al. 2013) and almost one-half (49%) of prison entrants and 44% of dischargees reported ever having been told they have a mental health disorder, including alcohol and drug misuse. (9%) of dischargees thought their mental health had deteriorated while in prison, and 44% reported no change.

SUMMARY

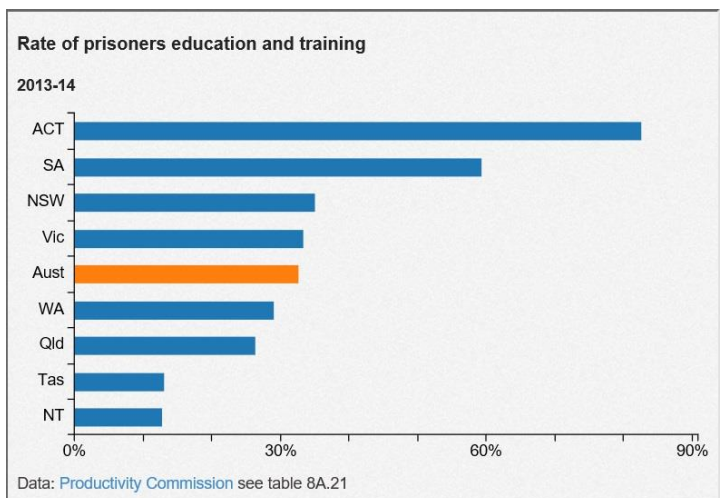
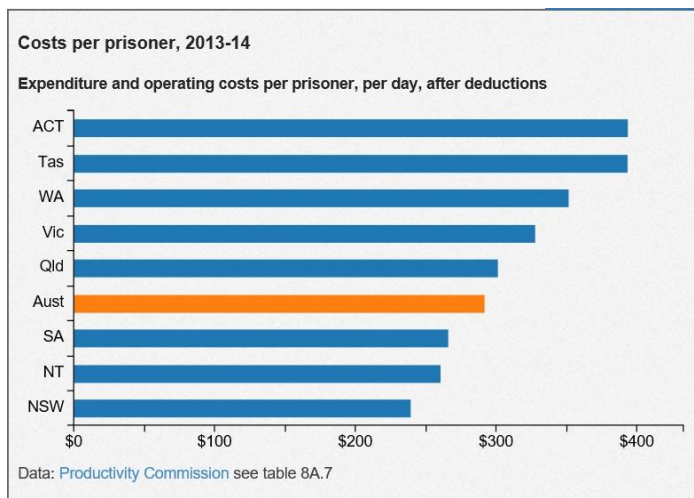
The UNODC shows that per population, Australians are now the largest users of Ecstasy and the third largest users of Methamphetamine Ice in the world and its wreaking havoc on our criminal justice systems and causing overcrowding. Mr. Waterman said, substance abuse is costing Australian tax payers around \$73 million dollars a day (Collins and Lapsley 2004/05) and approximately \$9.8 million dollars a day to keep drug related offenders in prison and with treatment programs being optional or noncompulsory, there is no affective strategy to rehabilitate them.

Mr. Waterman said, in 2004 there were 24,171 people in prison in Australia. Within 10 years this had jumped to 33,791 in 2014. That's a staggering 40% increase in just ten years and is disproportionate to population growth in the extreme. "We cannot keep building more prisons every time they start getting full. It is not financially sustainable and in my opinion is morally questionable when more than half of the inmates are obviously more suited to a therapeutic environment such as a dedicated drug and alcohol rehabilitation prison Mr. Waterman said.

Mr. Waterman said, Tasmania didn't fair very well in the Productivity Commission Report 2015 either. Inmates of Australian jails cost \$292 per day on average, with Tasmania showing the second highest prisoner cost of any state or territory at approximately \$400 a day as well as the lowest rates of inmate employment, education and training.

The government recently commitment to a new 270 bed prison in Northern Tasmania at an estimated cost of \$270 million dollars for the construction and a further \$40 million dollars a year based on previous costs to detain prisoners. Mr. Waterman said, when we consider that more than half of prisoners are detained for drug and alcohol related offences, 44% have a mental illness and 32 percent of prisoners released return to custody within 24 months, wouldn't it make sense to build a dedicated drug and alcohol rehabilitation prison which focuses entirely on compulsory therapeutic interventions and rehabilitation. Mr. Waterman said this would reduce rates of drug use, reoffending and re-incarceration. Mr. Waterman said, aside from the obvious health outcomes of rehabilitating drug users, this could potentially create savings of up to \$12 million dollars per year by reducing rates of reoffending, re-incarceration and reduce pressure on Risdon prison.

Mr. Waterman said that he understands that many drug offenders are not suited to community based or not for profit treatment settings due to the severity of the crimes and the risks they may pose to the community and the need for custodial sentences however; Mr. Waterman said he is concerned with such an obvious failure to rehabilitate drug users whilst in custody and prevent the lives of children and families from being torn apart by ongoing drug use. There is clearly a need to look at this more broadly and from an evidence based approach. We can't keep filling up our prisons with drug users and continue to build more and not prioritise their treatment and rehabilitation from a custodial perspective. Based on the accumulation of evidence, rehabilitating inmates with a history of substance abuse would seem a much better way of improving health outcomes for inmates and improve safety for our communities. Mr. Waterman said that this has already been considered in WA by the Premier Mark McGowan. Mr. McGowan said 60 per cent of prisoners in WA had used meth or amphetamines in the 12 months before incarceration and he would convert a minimum security male prison into the state's first drug and alcohol rehabilitation prison. Another and far cheaper option could be to convert Ashley Youth Detention Centre into the state's first Drug and alcohol rehabilitation prison Mr. Waterman said.



References

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Kindest Regards,

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