

Today the South Australian government releases the *Reducing Reoffending: 10% by 2020 Strategic Policy Panel Report*. I was honoured to chair the Strategic Policy Panel which has worked for the past 4 months to understand the challenges for South Australian Corrections in reducing reoffending.

Together we have examined the evidence and data on how reoffending can be addressed and developed strategies and recommendations for achieving the SA Government's objective of reducing reoffending by 10% by 2020.

In any discussion on crime and incarceration, the safety of the community is paramount. Protecting people and their property is the main reason we have a criminal justice system. Community safety was a primary focus for the Panel and the key theme of the Report.

The Panel took an evidence based approach - testing pre-conceptions, breaking through myths and being prepared to challenge conventional wisdom.

We looked at the problem in an international context; SA's challenge is not unique, and governments around the world are responding in different ways. Overarching, leaders in the justice system are increasingly focussing on rehabilitation. Evidence shows that investing in successful rehabilitation of offenders pays dividends to society through fewer crimes, less victims, and less costs to the taxpayer.

From both international and local learnings, the importance of employment quickly became apparent. Not only is employment critical to a person's independence and survival, but also their sense of self worth and purpose in life – all critical elements to being a positive member of our society. We worked with Flinders University and Business SA to identify employment and industry solutions, which have informed a key strategy pillar within the report and four correlating recommendations. I also believe that there are opportunities for discussions about Prisoner employment to occur on a National Level on the COAG agenda and through Commonwealth's Prison to Work programs.

The evidence also tells us effective rehabilitation requires an individualised approach. One-size fits all doesn't work. Rehabilitation should address offending behaviour and provide cognitive-behavioural assistance. Rehabilitation interventions need to address the factors most linked to reoffending including alcohol and substance abuse, mental health issues, lack of accommodation, poor education, lack of employment and an absence of positive relationships and networks.

When considering disconnects within the current system, the return of offenders to the community post-sentence stood out as one of the biggest risk factors. In response to this, we propose end-to-end case management of offenders, prioritising those most likely to respond. Through providing support from the moment a person walks through the prison doors to 6 months post release, with case-management targeted towards each prisoner's particular needs - for example drug and alcohol treatment, housing and violence prevention, more prisoners will have a chance of succeeding.

This end-to-end support needs to extend to those on remand. This is important. Prisoners on remand awaiting trial for long periods will often be released on conviction because of time served. If rehabilitation is limited to convicted offenders these people miss out altogether. Reoffending is most likely to occur within the first 3-6 months post-release and therefore maintaining support post-release is important to reducing reoffending.

One in four people in SA's prison system are Aboriginal, and this fact can't be ignored. Again, this is not unique to South Australia, but through this strategy we have the opportunity to lead the way in addressing this over-representation.

Early on, we decided to appoint a separate Aboriginal Reference Group to advise on factors specific to Aboriginal reoffending. This advice informed the development of all recommendations within the strategy, with seven recommendations specific to Aboriginal people such as ensuring prisoners that are returning to country received specialised transitional support.

Rehabilitation means an offender turning their life around completely, moving from a criminal lifestyle to a lifestyle that's socially accepted with a sense of purpose, resilience and ultimately self-sufficiency. There are no losers in successful rehabilitation. It benefits the offender, their family, their community, the taxpayer and society as a whole. I urge the South Australian government, its departments and agencies to implement the Report's recommendations and set clear, measurable targets and timeframes for that implementation.

The 10% by 2020 target is ambitious. I believe it is achievable.

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