

Over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in prison:

- 10.7 times more likely than other Queenslanders to be in prison (1)
- A quarter (26.4%) in Queensland prisons are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (2)
- This is higher than national average (2)
- Despite being only 4.5% of our total Queensland population (3)

Disproportionate representation continues despite the Cape York Justice Agreement, or Queensland Corrective Services' Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Strategy, or recommendations from the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody in 1991.

Prison population increasing:

- Queensland has 20% of Australia's prison population (1)
- Over ten years to June 2007, the number of prisoners in Australia increased - in total by 42%; females by 82%; males by 40% (4)
- Despite a small decline in Queensland numbers from 5649 to 5491 in 2007-08, our prison population is "expected" to keep growing! (2)

Expenditure on prisons does not reduce inequality

- Qld Government has committed major expenditure to increase prison beds (2, 5)
- Over a billion dollars for the next few years including:
 - ⇒ \$485.1 million precinct in Gatton
 - ⇒ \$445 million expansion and redevelopment of Lotus Glen Correctional Centre, which has at least 70% Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander inmates.

Costly per day and lifetime

- Average total cost of prison per day per person in 07-08 was \$269 in 07-08 (2)
- \$2.6 billion spent nationally a year (2)
- Queensland spends the third lowest, despite having third highest prison population (2)
- Is spending less better?
- What about spending on rehabilitation, healthcare and throughcare to reduce return-to-prison rates?

Re-incarceration - recidivism

- 42% return to custody in Qld - just slightly behind the national average of 44%
- Why do ALMOST HALF go BACK?
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Minister Judy Spence claimed these figures "highlight the success of our practice offender-based programs" in her January 2009 media release. Surely more improvement is really required before success can be claimed? (6)



Poor health and wellbeing needs addressing

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people currently experience higher rates of ill-health, death, unemployment, family breakdown and poverty than any other groups in Australia (9)
- People in prison have higher rates of chronic illness and mental health issues, alcohol and drug misuse issues and blood-borne infections (7)
- Health often declines from pre to post release to the community (8).

Need more programs

- A fifth in prison are currently unsentenced and have reduced access to programs for rehabilitation or community re-entry (4)
- Few, if any, programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders address social inequality (10)
- Needs of those with mental health issues are inadequately met (11)
- Culturally sensitive assessment tools are not widely available (11)
- Few programs address issues with forced removal of children under past government policy, including grief, anger, loss of culture and homes (10)

“It is a double-punish for them. One fellow has been in and out of institutions since he was a kid. He says ‘If I go back there is no more time left in me’. He gets angry in prison... it is the powerlessness of it, and it impacts on his health when he is in prison... his spirit is broken and there are so many things that have happened out of his control...” (12)

- Queensland has 14 custodial facilities - but remote communities face much disadvantage in travelling our vast state, further contributing to family breakdown.

The Cape York Justice Agreement and QCS Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Strategy indicate commitment to addressing Indigenous over-representation in prison. We need to generate accountability for their targets and commitments.

References:

1 As at June 30, 2008; Office of Economic and Statistical Research (2008) Information Brief: Prisoners in Australia: 2008, Queensland Government, Brisbane. 2 Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision (2009) Australian Government Productivity Commission, Canberra. 3 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2009) Quick Stats using 2006 Census Data, www.abs.gov.au. 4 ABS (2007) Prisoners in Australia, Cat. No. 4517.0, Canberra. 5 Queensland Corrective Services (2008) State Budget 2008-09: Agency Budget Highlights: Police and Corrective Services, Budget highlights, Queensland Government, Brisbane. 6 Queensland Government, Queensland Corrective Services (2009) Queensland’s Correctional System is One of the Best, Media Release, Minister for Police, Corrective Services and Sport The Honourable Judy Spence, <http://mysunshinecoast.com.au/articles/> accessed 25/02/09. 7 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), (2006); 8 Kinner, S. (2006). *The Post-release Experience of Prisoners in Queensland*, University of Queensland, Brisbane. 9 Borzycki, M. (2005) *Interventions for Prisoners Returning to the Community*. Attorney General’s Department, Canberra. 10 Davey, L. et al (2006) ‘Effective anger interventions for Indigenous prisoners: Research and development in a South Australian study’, *Aboriginal and Islander Health Worker Journal*, Vol. 30, No. 1, pp 4-5, 14. 11 Ogloff, J., Davis, M., Rivers, G. and Ross, S. (2007) *The Identification of Mental Disorders in the Criminal Justice System*, Trends and Issues and Criminal Justice, Australian Institute of Criminology, Australian Government, Canberra. 12 Poroch, N. (2007) *You Do the Crime, You Do the Time*, Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Service, Narrabundah, ACT. Interviewee quote, p. 161.

ANTaR Qld and the Bridge Network are seeking to establish a COALITION of interested organisations and individuals who want to reduce the shocking over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Queensland prisons. Contact us to join: