

POLICY FUTURES

A Reform Agenda



Breaking the Cycle: Straight talking ex-offenders reduce recidivism

A successful prison system should not just contain people who have committed offences; it should also improve their lives by preparing them for release. Reintegration is about more than stopping reoffending. It is about adjusting, adapting and transitioning successfully to a straight life on the outside.

Community safety improves when released offenders do not commit further crimes. If they go on to productively contribute to their communities, we benefit through decreased crime rates and increased social/economic capacity.

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Key Policy Recommendations

1

Australia needs to incorporate the expertise of those with lived experience of prison into the criminal justice system. Their expertise is invaluable across its design, delivery, evaluation and reform. They are proven effective agents for positive change. And not only prison management. In other countries ex-prisoners lead their own agencies, employ former prisoners and help to deliver person-centred services. As peer mentors and advisors, they help inform policy to public servants, government ministers, and researchers, helping to reduce the ever-increasing criminal justice price-tag of more than \$17 billion.

2

Establish rehabilitative through-the-gate peer mentoring programs. My evidence to Victoria's 2017 Legislative Council's Legal and Social Issues Committee inquiry into Youth Justice Centres led to the recommendation of a government established rehabilitative mentoring program for young offenders. Based on my Fellowship, Straight Talking - the only 'through-the-gate' peer mentoring trial in Australia using ex-prisoners as peer mentors - has been trialled in Geelong, Victoria. Straight Talking has been found by Deakin University's Professor Joe Graffam to have succeeded in reducing re-incarceration.

3

Enable Straight Talking's expansion across Victoria to test its scalability and transportability for a national rollout. Funding should come from existing government budgets, as occurs overseas, where such programs are integrated into the suite of resettlement services.

Federal Ministers should take these recommendations to National Cabinet. By urging all states and territories to make this conscious policy shift, they could bring Australia into line with other countries, reduce recidivism and, at the same time, save billions of taxpayer dollars. We have the momentum. The time is now!

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