

## Ineffective approaches to child justice creating more problems than they solve

**Wednesday 10 July 2024:** The policies being promoted in the Queensland election campaign to address offending by children have been criticised by National Children's Commissioner, Anne Hollonds and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Katie Kiss as a "race to the bottom".

"We all want to live in safe communities that support children to be healthy, safe and developing well. To achieve this, we need leaders of all political parties to show courage by acting on the evidence that locking up children does not keep the community safer," said Commissioner Hollonds.

"Queensland already has the toughest youth crime laws in the country which has only led to overflowing children's prisons and police watchhouses, and egregious breaches of human rights.

"Knee-jerk, punitive solutions by political parties which boast about being tough on crime are not only failing to deal with the root causes but are contributing to more crime – not less," she said.

It costs over \$1million per year to lock up a child. Commissioner Hollonds argues that money is being wasted when it could instead be spent on keeping kids healthy, in housing, out of poverty and at school learning, as this is what works to keep the community safe.

"We need to work together across the Australian federation on a roadmap for reform, building on Australian and international evidence of what works to address problems much earlier and build the safer communities we all want.

"If we were serious about addressing this national problem, then National Cabinet would make child safety and wellbeing a key priority, as it has done with other critical issues such as women's safety," said Commissioner Hollonds.

First Nations children are disproportionately affected by the failing 'tough on crime' approach and these sloganised approaches only serve to perpetuate racial profiling and negative stereotyping, said Commissioner Kiss.

"Governments need to make better decisions based on evidence that ensure First Nations children get the start they need in life so they can enjoy better life expectancy, educational achievement and economic opportunity; and respects their right to self-determination.

"State and national governments' approaches to child justice are instead condemning First Nations children to a lifetime of abuse, deprivation and disadvantage – a cycle that can repeat from generation to generation.

"Governments around the country have made commitments to close the gap on Indigenous disadvantage – it's time they were held accountable for delivering on their promises.

"Improving the lives of First Nations children closes the gap, restores their dignity, gives them strong connection to kin and country, and hope for a better future. First Nations children benefit and the communities in which they live benefit too," Commissioner Kiss said.

Commissioner Hollonds' *Help Way Earlier! How Australia can transform child justice to improve safety and wellbeing* report will be released in late August.