

8 June 2023

NEW ABS DATA SHOWS CONCERNING RISE IN AUSTRALIA'S INCARCERATION RATE

"Data released today by the Australian Bureau of Statistics has confirmed that policymakers must urgently act to halt the increase to Australia's incarceration rate before it gets out of control" said Morgan Begg, Director of Research at the Institute of Public Affairs.

New data released today by the Australian Bureau of Statistics reveals a worrying two per cent increase to the incarceration rate over the past year, increasing to 205 prisoners per 100,000 adults, up from 201 at the same time last year.

The increase to the incarceration rate was driven by a dramatic increase in Queensland, and modest increases in New South Wales and Tasmania. Specifically, incarceration rates have increased over the past 12 months in:

- Queensland from 226 to 242 per 100,000 adults.
- New South Wales from 193 to 196 per 100,00 adults.
- Tasmania from 150 to 153 per 100,000 adults.

"Australia's incarceration rate had broadly been declining since 2018, when it stood at 221 per 100,000, but it appears to once again be rising," said Mr Begg.

Although ABS data does not categorise prisoners by type of offence, previous IPA research has found that approximately 40 per cent of prisoners are behind bars for committing non-violent crimes. That amounts to approximately 16,700 people in prison for non-violent offences.

"People who commit violent and sexual crimes should be imprisoned, often for longer periods than they are currently sentenced to. But low-risk and non-violent offenders should be punished in other ways," said Mr Begg.

IPA research has argued that Australia's nation-wide worker shortage could partly be alleviated through allowing low-risk, non-violent offenders to have their prison term substituted for a community-based sanction, which includes full-time employment.

"As Australia faces simultaneous incarceration and worker shortage crises, many low-risk non-violent offenders could be gainfully employed in the community right now without risk," said Mr Begg.

"Rather than being a drain on taxpayers' funds, low-risk non-violent offenders should be working, paying tax, and helping to reduce the severe and inflation-inducing labour shortage that Australia is experiencing."

"It costs taxpayers over \$147,000 every year to detain each prisoner. Most non-violent low-risk offenders should be given the opportunity to have their prison term substituted for a community-based sanction, the core element of which is full-time employment," said Mr Begg.

Read the IPA's previous research [here](#).

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