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PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION DATA CONFIRMS URGENT NEED FOR CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM

“The Productivity Commission’s latest prisons data demonstrates governments are not solving the crime crisis, but merely spending record levels of taxpayers’ money on a system which is not fit for purpose and in dire need of reform,” said Mia Schlicht, Research Analyst at the Institute of Public Affairs.

Released today, the Productivity Commission’s *Report on Government Services 2024* reveals that spending on prisons has increased for the 12th year in a row. The data shows;

- **State and federal governments are now spending \$6.4 billion per year on the construction and operation of prisons. This has nearly doubled nationwide in just 10 years.**
- **It costs taxpayers on average \$154,000 to house just one prisoner for one year.**
- **Prisons across Australia are fast approaching their maximum capacity, with Queensland, South Australian, and Northern Territory prisons above 90 per cent of their designed utilisation. This means new prisons will need to be built to house the growing number of offenders, incurring significant costs.**

“Across Australia there are too many communities suffering the effects of intolerable crime levels, particularly youth crime. Yet the data shows the criminal justice system, despite long-term, record levels of spending, is not solving the problem,” said Ms Schlicht.

“There has never been a more compelling case for wholesale criminal justice reform, with record levels of funding being dedicated to prisons at the same time as violent crime is out of control in far too many communities.”

Research by the Institute of Public Affairs highlights the need for punishment reform to prioritise the safety of the community and the restitution of victims.

“Criminal justice reform must acknowledge the difference between violent offenders whose incarceration is necessary to ensure community safety, and non-violent offenders whose imprisonment is expensive and poses no discernable safety benefit,” said Ms Schlicht.

“By far the biggest deterrent from committing a crime is the fear of being caught. Reinvesting the funds saved from the reduced incarceration of non-violent offenders and putting more police on the streets would do far more to make the community safer.”

The Productivity Commission’s latest data follows that of the Australia Bureau of Statistics, which shows of the approximately 42,000 prisoners in Australia, nearly 38 per cent have been incarcerated for a non-violent offence.

“It costs \$422 to house one prisoner for one day, which means each year taxpayers are spending \$2.4 billion on the unnecessary incarceration of non-violent offenders who should instead be learning skills, and making a contribution to the community through work,” said Ms Schlicht.

“We should be following international examples of reform success. Conservative jurisdictions in the United States, such as Texas and Georgia, have saved billions of dollars by reducing the number of non-violent offenders in their jails, while at the same time seeing improved community safety outcomes with a reduction in violent, sexual, and serious property crimes.”

To download the IPA’s previous research [click here](#).

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