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IPA RESEARCH INDICATES NEED FOR CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM

“Australia's overuse of prison is failing to keep the community safe from crime by wasting resources that could be better spent elsewhere in the criminal justice system,” said Andrew Bushnell, Research Fellow at the free market think tank, the Institute of Public Affairs.

The IPA today released a research report into incarceration in Australia. *The use of prisons in Australia: reform directions* details Australia's recent surge in incarceration, its causes, and what might be done about it.

“Australia's incarceration rate is now higher than it has been at any time since just after Federation,” said Mr Bushnell. “But crime is not falling, and prisons are costing more and more each year.”

Australia's incarceration rate is 196 per 100,000 adults, with more than 36,000 people now detained in custody – an increase of 40 percent in the last decade. The adult offender rate has increased by 15 percent in recent years. Prisons now cost Australian taxpayers \$3.8 billion each year.

“The main purpose of prison is to keep the community safe. But we are seeing more offending, and prisons are terrible at rehabilitation. 59 percent of prisoners have been incarcerated before. Reducing crime overall will require a different approach,” said Mr Bushnell.

The report argues that the best way to protect the community from crime is to reform punishment for nonviolent offenders.

“While prisons are necessary for isolating violent and antisocial criminals, there are other ways to punish nonviolent, low-risk offenders,” said Mr Bushnell. “Reducing incarceration of nonviolent offenders can save money, which can then be spent on more effective ways to keep the community safe, like policing.”

The most serious offence of approximately 46 percent of Australian prisoners was a nonviolent offence. The report argues that many of these people can be punished by measures like home detention, community corrections orders, and fines and forced restitution.

“Crime is a choice, and we must hold criminals accountable for their actions. The question though is what is the most cost-effective way to punish law-breakers. By being smart on crime, we can reduce reoffending and invest in community safety.”

A copy of the report: *The use of prisons in Australia: Reform directions* is available [here](#).

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