



Closing the gap on incarceration rates

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs will hold its first public hearing for its inquiry into the high level of involvement of Indigenous juveniles and young adults in the criminal justice system.

Australia has one of the highest incarceration rates of Indigenous people in the OECD. Currently Indigenous prisoners comprise 25 per cent of the total prisoner population and in the Northern Territory they are 82 per cent of the prisoner population. The early involvement of young Indigenous people in the criminal justice system puts them at much higher risk of further involvement as adults.

The Committee will hear from Dr Jill Guthrie, Research Fellow, at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), and Prof Michael Levy, of the ANU School of Clinical Medicine. Dr Guthrie and Professor Levy are members of the Indigenous Offender Health Research Capacity Building Group which is examining a range of interventions and programs to determine what works for Indigenous juveniles involved in the criminal justice system.

Dr Guthrie and Professor Levy will highlight some of the best practice examples of programs that support the diversion of Indigenous people from juvenile detention centres and discuss with the Committee the importance of investing in community and individual development.

The Chair of the Committee Bob Debus MP stated: 'Indigenous juvenile are 28 times more likely to be detained than non-indigenous juveniles – and the detention rate is increasing. This inquiry is focussing on prevention and early intervention in order to identify strategies to close the gap and assist in reducing the number of Indigenous Australians who become involved in the criminal justice system.'

The inquiry will also identify cross-jurisdictional challenges to the coordination of services for Indigenous youth in the justice system, such as whether preventative programs can be better aligned to advance the health and emotional wellbeing of Indigenous young people.

Public hearing on Thursday 4 February 2010

Venue: Committee Room 1R2 Parliament House
12.15pm Dr Jill Guthrie and Professor Michael Levy

To listen to the public hearing from your computer log on to:

<http://webcast.aph.gov.au/livebroadcasting/>

For the full terms of reference and advice on making submissions see the Committee's website at www.aph.gov.au/atsia or contact the committee secretariat on **(02) 6277 4559**.

For media comment, please contact the Committee Chair Hon Bob Debus on (02) 62774490.
For background information, contact the Committee Secretariat on (02) 62774559 or atsia.reps@aph.gov.au