

SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS
ATTORNEY-GENERAL'S DEPARTMENT

Program 1.5

Question No. 44

Senator Wright asked the following question at the hearing on 14 February 2012:

Senator WRIGHT: Thank you, yes. The government's response to the House of Representatives *Doing time—time for doing* report indicated that the [National Justice CEOs] working group's report would enable the identification of gaps in services and gaps in the necessary data to better target programs and strategies. Has the working group identified the gaps in services and data, and if so what service gaps and data gaps have been identified?

...

Ms Fitch: We might need to take that on notice just to check the context. There are several avenues of work going on in this area.

Senator WRIGHT: Certainly. I am happy to do that, and that can possibly save time too. What I would then be interested in—again on notice—is: following identification of gaps in service delivery and data, has the department engaged, or will it engage, in preliminary justice mapping to identify areas of high offending? Is the department

The answer to the honourable senator's question is as follows:

The National Justice Chief Executive Officers (NJCEOs) Working Group on Justice Reinvestment / Causes of Crime collated information from each jurisdiction about existing activity underway consistent with justice reinvestment approaches. This included programs and policy initiatives where the primary aim is to address the underlying causes of crime, and which are targeted at offenders or those identified as at risk of offending.

The Working Group found that while no jurisdictions are currently implementing an integrated justice reinvestment strategy there are a significant number of initiatives which seek to address the causes of crime. The primary gap identified was a lack of publically available, independent, outcomes focussed evaluations of these initiatives. It is a gap that should be addressed if justice reinvestment strategies are to be successfully implemented in Australia. Strong evidence about what initiatives are effective at addressing offending behaviour has underpinned justice reinvestment initiatives in the United States. Jurisdictions are currently working together to improve the evidence base through the evaluations of Indigenous justice programs occurring under the National Indigenous Law and Justice Framework. The findings of the first tranche of these evaluations are scheduled to be delivered in December 2012.

The Working Group also analysed the existing Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) annual prisoner census data to assess the primary drivers of Indigenous incarceration. This data revealed that violent offending accounts for the majority of prison sentences for Indigenous people (65 per cent). However a gap in 'flow data' to identify the total numbers of Indigenous people cycling through Australia's prisons (particularly for minor offences attracting shorter sentences) was identified by the Working Group. NJCEOs have agreed to work with the ABS to improve the national corrections datasets to address these issues. Improvements to national prisoner offence data will provide policy and program developers with a more accurate picture of the types of offences which are driving the over-representation of Indigenous people within the criminal justice system.

More detail on the findings of the Justice Reinvestment / Causes of Crime Working Group is set out in the report delivered to NJCEOs in November 2011. The Commonwealth intends to publicly release the report, but is currently awaiting final approval to do so from all jurisdictions.