You state in your submission that 'overly onerous reporting requirements' make core service delivery 'more difficult than it needs to be'. (p19) What issues have you identified in current reporting requirements, and what changes would you make?

Different Government Departments have inconsistent and duplicative reporting requirements which create unnecessary administrative burdens that divert resources from frontline service delivery. There are many community-led organisations that receive funding from multiple different government departments to run very similar projects but have to report differently on each of these. This includes straight-forward differences in the way in which clients and/or instances of service are counted. The way in which outcome data is counted also differs significantly across different funding streams.

For instance, when I worked at the Community Restorative Centre (the largest post-release service in NSW) we had 18 different Government funding streams and 18 different reporting requirements (across both state and federal departments), most of which involved very similar transitional programs. Across these streams, we were required to report on different time-frames based on when funding was distributed, and at different frequencies (some quarterly, some six monthly and some annually). The information we were asked to report on was also different across funding streams. Some funders wanted information on referral outcomes; some wanted information about changes in behaviour over time (for instance AOD use); some wanted information about the number of times we engaged with the client; some wanted information about the total number of clients; some wanted information about return to prison rates; some wanted information about risk levels. There were additional differences in terms of the demographic data we were required to collect across the 18 streams as well.

Part of the reason for onerous reporting requirements is the way in which organisations working with justice impacted people have to source funding from so many different Government departments to do their core work (and report across those organisations). Because people impacted by the justice system also have multiple other needs, and because there is no 'core' funding or fund that is designed to support people with intersecting and complex needs, many community led orgs apply and receive funding from Corrections, Mental Health/AOD/Health, SHS/Homelessness at a state level, as well as Federal NIAA, PHN and NDIS funding. This is usually supplemented by small grants, including from local councils, as well as contributions from philanthropic contributions. The administrative burden is particularly challenging for smaller community organisations that do not tend to be funded for reporting and evaluation and are required to absorb this work in addition to frontline service delivery. The most effective remedy to the issue of onerous reporting would be for Government Departments to better work together in order to figure out what data is required, and also to review the multiple streams of funding at the level of Government and for Government departments to genuinely work together.

Can you comment on the impact of media reporting on public perception of youth crime trends? The Committee has heard that government should focus on public education and awareness to address concerns about community safety. What are your thoughts on this?

The role of the media in influencing public perception of youth crime is well established. Media reporting that sensationalises and dehumanises has the capacity to significantly heighten public fear, fuel moral panic, and increase political pressure to develop knee-jerk policy responses (for instance tougher bail laws, harsher sentencing) which (as noted in our submission) do nothing to reduce crime. Often, such reporting reinforces racist tropes about First Nations and other racialised children and young people which causes significant harm to individuals, families, and communities.

Public education is important, and we would absolutely support strong media guidelines around the reporting of crime (similar to what the mental health and AOD sectors have very successfully advocated for in the 'Mindframe' guidelines). However, alongside this, we also require sensible, clear-headed political leadership. We need our political leaders to steer an evidence-based course when media reporting escalates into the by now entirely predictable narratives of youth crime being 'out of control' – especially when those narratives contradict publicly available data. Public education and media guidelines alongside political leadership that sticks to evidence-based policy even when under pressure would transform the way the public understands crime and community safety.