

Submission  
No 99

**INQUIRY INTO THE PRIVATISATION OF PRISONS AND  
PRISON-RELATED SERVICES**

**Organisation:** Homelessness NSW  
**Name:** Ms Sue Cripps  
**Position:** Chief Executive Officer  
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The Director  
General Purpose Standing Committee No. 3  
Parliament House  
Macquarie St  
Sydney NSW 2000

## **The privatisation of prisons and prison-related services**

Dear Ms Simpson

Homelessness NSW is the peak body for the adult homelessness sector in New South Wales. We represent specialist homeless services for single men, single women and families. We work collaboratively with Governments, other peak bodies, community organisations and the private sector to advocate for homeless people and services that support them.

Being homeless is a complex issue, created by the failure of a variety of service systems. Homeless people and those at risk of becoming homeless are affected by common themes that include social exclusion, an ineffective service system, lack of access to housing that is affordable to people on low incomes and a lack of support and supported accommodation services.

Most people don't choose to become homeless – it is not a life style choice. Being homeless is being without: without shelter, without resources, without support, without recognition, without power to influence society.

Homelessness NSW is pleased to make a submission to the Committee. Many people exiting prison end up in homelessness, often within a short period of time. Anecdotal evidence from our members suggests that on many occasions people leaving prison will give as their address a family member or a friend, but this accommodation breaks down rapidly, often within days. These people will then end up at a specialist homelessness service. This is not an optimal outcome.

Homelessness NSW would urge the committee to recommend that research be commissioned so that both the government and the community sector understand the extent of people approaching a specialist homelessness service within a short period of exiting prison.

We have also been told by our members of occasion when a person leaving prison will turn up at their door after having been given a Cabcharge voucher to get them there. This is an appalling situation and should not be tolerated.

Homelessness NSW would urge the committee to recommend that this practice be stopped. Appropriate through-care from the time a person enters prison should see no need for any person to be exited directly to a specialist homelessness service.

The cost of crime to the Australian community is significant. A report released by the Australian Institute of Criminology in 2003 identified that crime costs Australia almost \$32 billion each year.<sup>1</sup> The cost of the crimes themselves account for \$19 billion of that total. Other costs such as policing, prisons and the security industry account for a further \$13 billion.

There are also many hidden costs to the community. Approximately 60% of women in prison are parents, with around 40% sole carers. Imprisonment of a sole parent will usually mean that the child will require care, either formal or informal. There is both anecdotal and empirical evidence that time spent in out-of-home care is a major precursor to adult homelessness.<sup>2</sup>

In NSW the proportion of the adult population in prison is 10% above the national average.<sup>3</sup> It is the second highest of any jurisdiction in Australia.<sup>4</sup>

We know from extensive research that lack of planning prior to release from prison regarding where prisoners are going to live post release and the supports that they are going to need to enable them to reintegrate into the community results in many reoffending and returning to prison to create an environment where their basic needs

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Institute of Criminology Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice. *Report no. 247 Counting the Costs of Crime in Australia*, Pat Mayhew & Glenda Adkins, April 2003.

<sup>2</sup> Johnson, G & Chamberlain, C. 'From Youth to Adult Homelessness', in *Australian Journal of Social Issues*.

<sup>3</sup> *Auditor-General's Report to Parliament 2006 Volume four*, p.81

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*

of food and shelter are secure.<sup>5</sup> In NSW 47% of prisoners return to some form of corrective services within two years of being released.<sup>6</sup> This is worse than any other jurisdiction in Australia.<sup>7</sup>

Homelessness NSW believes that prisons policy may be misdirected due to problems in collecting and releasing data, especially in relation to flow-through numbers. This information is vital for the development of any through-care and post-release policies. We believe that the Australian Bureau of Statistics does collect such data, but it is not publically available.

Homelessness NSW has also been informed by our members of some issues with the Community Compliance Group (CCG). The CCG monitors offenders in the community using methods such as compliance checks, electronic monitoring and through writing assessment reports. It is not uncommon for the CCG to arrive unannounced at a member service after hours to check up on an ex-prisoner. This causes issues in the management of the specialist homelessness service, and one service has gone so far as to stop taking ex-prisoners under the control of the CCG.

Homelessness NSW would urge the Committee to investigate the actions of the CCG and to determine whether they should liaise better with specialist homelessness services and other community based organisations when an ex-prisoner is either staying or otherwise involved with that service.

Once again thank you for allowing us to make a submission and if you require further information on please contact Digby Hughes, Policy & Research Officer on phone: (02) 9319 7111 or email: [digby@homelessnessnsw.org.au](mailto:digby@homelessnessnsw.org.au).

Yours sincerely



Sue Cripps  
CEO  
3 March 2009

<sup>5</sup> Baldry, E., D. McDonnell, P. Maplestone, M. Peeters (August 2003). *Ex-prisoners and accommodation: what bearing do different forms of housing have on social reintegration?* Final Report 46.

<sup>6</sup> NSW Audit Office, *Performance Audit: Prisoner Rehabilitation – Department of Corrective Services*, 2006, p.14.

<sup>7</sup> *Auditor-General's Report to Parliament 2006 Volume four*, p.83.