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MEDIA RELEASE – FEBRUARY 5, 2025

Federal Budget must protect nations’ children, says Jesuit Social Services

Jesuit Social Services has called on the Federal Government to appoint a Minister for Children and invest in evidence-backed intervention to reduce family violence, child sexual abuse, and address failing youth justice systems.

“At the heart of some of the most pressing issues facing Australia right now – including crime, family violence and mental ill-health – is childhood trauma,” says Jesuit Social Services CEO Julie Edwards.

“After nearly 50 years supporting some of the most disadvantaged and marginalised individuals and communities around Australia, we have learnt that intervening early in a person’s life can break cycles of disadvantage and prevent future harm.”

Jesuit Social Services has provided the Federal Government with 15 recommendations ahead of its next budget, to ensure our children are protected from harm and offered the opportunities they need to live safe and supported lives.

“We call on the Federal Government to invest in children, as an investment in the future of all Australians. The more children we can support to live free from trauma caused by abuse, family violence, justice system involvement, place-based disadvantage and climate impacts, the better our nation will be as they grow up,” says Ms Edwards.

“Our recommendations focus on children and young people, highlighting opportunities for targeted spending based in early intervention, and drawing on the Government’s own ‘Measuring What Matters’ framework. One of our key recommendations supports a call from the National Children’s Commissioner in her 2024 report ‘Help way earlier! – transforming child justice’: the introduction of a Cabinet Minister for Children.

“While our justice systems fall under the remit of State and Territory Governments, it is time for the Federal Government to provide leadership in setting the standards.

“Change is urgently needed in how we approach youth justice. We all want to see less crime and fewer victims, but locking kids up is not the answer. Research evidence, and our experience through decades of working with kids in contact with the justice system, demonstrates that restorative practices and early intervention work to reduce reoffending and increase community safety. It is very clear that incarceration does not achieve the same.

“Youth justice facilities are failing to keep young people safe and are not appropriate for the young people held in them.”

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Key recommendations in the submission include:

- Appoint a Cabinet Minister for Children with responsibility for the human rights and wellbeing of children in Australia.
- Collect data to understand child sexual abuse perpetration, with the aim of informing targeted prevention strategies and early intervention efforts to prevent men's violence against women and abuse of children.
- Greater investment in targeted early intervention programs enabled by outcomes-based funding for adolescents who are at risk of using violence.
- Invest in trials of innovative programs that focus on the strengths and resilience of women and children and enable recovery and healing for children who are victim-survivors of family violence.
- Legislate requirements for technology companies to ensure children's safety online, including requirements to prevent and disrupt child sexual abuse on their platforms, and to enforce age limits on pornography websites.
- Provide additional funding for the development and implementation of online interventions that prevent child sexual abuse, and early intervention services.
- Establish a First Nations Self-determination and Strengthening Fund for Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs).
- Ensure an ongoing commitment to long-term funding for community-led Justice Reinvestment sites, as part of the National Justice Reinvestment Program.

Read the full submission and an executive summary [here](#)

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