

## MEDIA RELEASE

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### Prison expansion increases costs for all



The Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association (VAADA) today expresses continuing concern regarding the disproportionate amount of scarce public resources allocated to the prison system in Victoria.

The alarming figures from the Productivity Commission regarding the extraordinarily high cost of running prisons in Victoria compared to other states is accentuated by recent findings late last year from the Victorian Auditor-General regarding a pending capacity crisis in Victoria's prisons.

Sam Biondo, EO of VAADA says, 'it is highly concerning that the government is running a massive prison expansion program being driven by punitive sentencing whilst there are enormous issues regarding health and education funding'.

Mr Biondo continues, 'The evidence is clear that prisons do not work, especially for the 70% of prisoners who have a history of drug use. The Victorian Auditor-General found that treatment programs in prison are not resourced commensurately to need. This is of particular concern given that the alcohol and other drug treatment reduces crime, but plays second fiddle to imprisonment'

The capacity crisis in Victoria's prisons is linked to a range of issues, including the endemic levels of hepatitis C infection in prisons (approximately 40% of the prison population compared to 1% in the general community). Although this is treatable, the Victorian Ombudsman notes that only 3 of the 14 prisons in Victoria offer treatment. There has also been an increased number of prison incidents including assaults and attempted suicide, which is exacerbated by overcrowding.

The Productivity Commission found that Victorian prisoners cost the state \$98,000 per annum, significantly higher than that national average.

Mr Biondo says, 'It is concerning that so much money is spent on Victoria's prisons, but still essential services such as prison based treatment programs and hepatitis C treatment programs are not widely accessible.'

Victoria has enjoyed a relatively low imprisonment rate in past years compared to other states but recent reports suggest that this trend may change.

'The failure of prisons to address complex problems such as alcohol and other drug dependency will not be countered by increased prison size. What needs to be considered are policies such as those focussing on 'justice re-investment' which is essentially a re-orientation of funding to things that work including, but not limited to, alcohol and other drug treatment, better education opportunities, health focussed programs, housing and employment services.

*VAADA is the peak body that represents over 100 Alcohol and other Drug services across Victoria. On a daily basis these services are dealing with the effects of harmful alcohol and other drug consumption.*

**For more information or to arrange an interview please contact Sam Biondo on 0414 974 121 for comment or if unavailable, David Taylor on 0413 914 206.**