

# MEDIA RELEASE

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## AMA joins united call for action on Australia's youth justice shame

The Australian Medical Association has united with leading youth justice experts to call on all governments to urgently tackle the underlying causes of the country's child incarceration crisis.

AMA President Dr Danielle McMullen will join the Justice Reform Initiative and National Children's Commissioner Anne Hollonds on Thursday for the public launch of their report, "[Help way earlier! How Australia can transform child justice to improve safety and wellbeing](#)", highlighting the grim reality of Australia's youth justice system.

The launch will also be attended by young people with lived experience, those advocating in the child rights and justice sectors, and legal advocates.

"This report is an incredibly sobering read, as it contains many uncomfortable truths about youth justice in Australia — egregious human rights violations, the over-incarceration of First Nations children and young people dying in custody," Dr McMullen said.

"The AMA is calling for the report's many recommendations to be implemented, especially raising the age of criminal responsibility in all jurisdictions to 14 years.

"To have so many youth justice experts, leading advocates, and people with lived experience, come together to call for action should be a serious wake-up call for all governments in Australia."

The AMA supports many of the report's recommendations, including a ban on solitary confinement practices in child detention facilities and the expansion of evidence-based diversionary programs for children, including those provided by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations. The AMA also supports the report's call for the establishment of a national taskforce for reform of child justice systems.

Dr Danielle McMullen said evidence clearly showed contact with the justice system in early adolescence, let alone being locked up in prison, condemns a child to a lifetime of developmental harm and disadvantage.

"There is overwhelming evidence to show incarceration greatly harms children mentally and impairs their physical development, and yet Australia has one of the lowest ages of criminal responsibility anywhere in the world," Dr McMullen said.

"Most children in prison already come from disadvantaged backgrounds, where they often experience violence, abuse, disability, homelessness, cultural unsafety, economic insecurity, and drug or alcohol misuse.

"Criminalising the behaviour of young and vulnerable children creates a vicious cycle of disadvantage and increases the likelihood of ongoing experiences with the legal system — there is absolutely no credible evidence that locking up children at the age of 10 reduces crime in the long term."

Dr McMullen called on all governments to stop ignoring the evidence and instead listen to health and youth justice experts, and to those with lived experience of this tragic issue.

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