

Media Release

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New report challenges 'punitive public' myth

A research report to be released today by the Sentencing Advisory Council indicates that Victorians favour increasing alternatives to prison over building more prisons.

The *Alternatives to Imprisonment: Community Views in Victoria* paper reports on one aspect of a national survey that canvassed community views on issues to do with crime, the courts and sentencing.

The study found that almost three quarters of people surveyed supported increasing the use of alternatives to prison such as supervision, treatment and community work. Conversely, only one in four people surveyed supported a policy of building more prisons as a way to address the increasing number of people in Victorian gaols. Those surveyed were especially supportive of community sentences for mentally ill offenders (92% support) and young offenders (88% support).

Professor Arie Freiberg, Chair of the Sentencing Advisory Council said, "The general public is often portrayed in the media as being highly punitive. However, this study reinforces previous research findings that show the community is far more thoughtful in their consideration of issues to do with sentencing offenders, and understands the benefits of sanctions that aim to rehabilitate."

"Clearly the public understands there are significant benefits associated with non-prison sentences such as community orders and treatment programs. In terms of economics alone, one day of prison costs taxpayers around \$240, compared to one day on a community corrections order costing only \$18. We also know that offenders who go to prison end up back before the courts more often than those sentenced to community corrections orders, which suggests a better outcome for the community in the longer term."

The *Alternatives to Imprisonment: Community Views in Victoria* paper is available for download from the Sentencing Advisory Council website.

To interview Sentencing Advisory Council Chair Professor Arie Freiberg contact 0407 344 606.

To find out more about the Sentencing Advisory Council,
call 1300 363 196, email contact@sentencingcouncil.vic.gov.au or visit
www.sentencingcouncil.vic.gov.au.