

**UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL 6AM ON MONDAY 6 APRIL 2009**

## **JUSTICE HEALTH: PUTTING FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES FIRST**

A wide range of people with an interest in prisoner health and crime prevention are coming together in Melbourne for the Public Health Association of Australia's (PHAA) Justice Health Conference. The two day conference starts today, with a particular focus on addressing drug and alcohol problems, the spread of blood borne viruses and helping prisoners to transition back into communities post-release.

"Prisoners are somebody's child, somebody's sibling, somebody's parent - they belong to the community - and it's these families to whom they will return. If they go home sick, it's the people around them who will suffer. There's a larger number of people who aren't in prison and living in the community but are nevertheless caught up in the criminal justice system - such as those before the courts, periodic detainees, those on parole, and those just released from prisons - they cannot be ignored," explained Michael Moore, PHAA's Chief Executive Officer.

"There is also a body of evidence to demonstrate that investing in health services for prisoners, like drug treatment and post-release case management, has the potential to reduce recidivism – the long term goal being a reduction in offending, recidivism and ultimately rates of imprisonment. After all, it's not just prisoners and families who want to reduce offending – it also helps the general community," said Mr Moore.

"The conference will be opened by Bob Cameron MP, the Victorian Government Minister for Corrections, at 8:30am. Among the experts speaking on the opening day of the conference will be Will Small from the British Columbia Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS in Canada and Alison Churchill, the Chief Executive Officer of the Community Restorative Centre in NSW," said Associate Professor Tony Butler from the National Drug Research Institute, Convenor of the Conference Committee.

"Another key feature of the program on the first day of the conference will be the afternoon debate session. Gino Vumbaca from the Australian National Council on Drugs and Brett Collins from Justice Action will take on Karen Batt from the CPSU and Michele Gardner from Victorian Justice Health. The teams will be debating whether anything has changed in justice health since convict times," said Associate Professor Butler.

**What:** PHAA *Justice Health in Australia: Beyond the Convict Era* Conference  
**Where:** Hilton on the Park, 192 Wellington Parade, Melbourne  
**When:** Monday 6 April 2009  
**Time:** 8:30am – 6pm

**For further information/comment:**

Melanie Walker, Conference Media Contact:

0438 430 963

A summarised version of the conference program and biographies for the speakers in plenary sessions can be found on the PHAA website at: <http://www.phaa.net.au/documents/PrisonBrochure.pdf>

*The Victorian Government Department of Justice is a partner to the event, which is also being supported by the Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health and an education grant from GlaxoSmithKline.*