

10 great resources

Australian Prison Reform Journal

Volume 4, Issue 1, Article 2, 2024

© APRJ 2024 All Rights Reserved

Cameron I Russell

 [View ORCID profile](#)

URL: [www.aprj.com.au/articles/APRJ-4\(1\)-2-10-great-resources.pdf](http://www.aprj.com.au/articles/APRJ-4(1)-2-10-great-resources.pdf)

Abstract

There are many excellent resources for Australian prison reform and decarceration. We have gathered ten of the best that are available online in the hope that some of them will be of interest and/or aid in your research.

Countdown for favourite prison reform and decarceration resources

10. Deaths involving Tasers, restraint and other forms of force by police

Reuters developed the 'Reuters Tracker' for deaths by Taser. Fatal Encounters is a second US database of people killed during interactions with police. Reuters journalists also wrote a series of articles entitled 'Shock tactics' in 2017 on police use of Tasers in the United States and the resultant deaths and litigation. They found that Taser International (now Axon Enterprise) paid millions to a small band of medical experts to write studies, appear in court on behalf of Taser International and test the brain tissue of the deceased, all to favour the stun gun manufacturer. Australian Prison Reform Journal has written an article about the controversial diagnosis of Excited Delirium Syndrome [ExDS] which has been promulgated by the same American experts as a defence following a death in custody involving a police shooting, restraint, pepper spraying or Taser of someone displaying supposed ExDS symptoms.

[The Reuters Tracker: Deaths involving Tasers \(interactive map\)](#)

[Reuters: Shock tactics: Inside the Taser, the weapon that transformed policing \(series\)](#)

[Fatal Encounters: US national database of officer-involved homicide](#)

[APRJ: Excited Delirium Syndrome](#)

9. ABS: Statistics on Australian prisoners

The Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] provides key statistics for those serving time in correctional facilities or serving community-based corrections [CBC] orders on the one 'Corrective Services' webpage, automatically updated every quarter. The data is broken down for both people in prisons and people serving CBC orders in various ways, including state/territory/federal, legal status (sentenced/unsentenced), secure/open custody, receptions/releases, Indigenous status and sex. The numbers of sentenced probation orders and parole orders are also provided, and rates such as the imprisonment rate are calculated.

Whereas the 'Corrective Services' webpage provides a quarterly 'snapshot', the related 'Prisoners in Australia' webpage is based on the annual data for prisoners ending 30 June. It contains much of the information above (except over the whole year), together with further demographic information, including age, country of birth and most serious offence/ charge.

The 'Crime and justice' webpage is a useful resource summarising most of the ABS data collections in this area. It includes statistics for physical/ sexual/ family/ domestic/ partner violence; child abuse; disability and violence; sexual harassment; recorded crime victims and offenders; personal fraud; and criminal courts.

[ABS: Corrective Services, Australia](#)

[ABS: Prisoners in Australia](#)

[ABS: Crime and justice](#)

8. AIHW: Statistics on prisoner health

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [AIHW] is the leading publicly-available source for information and statistics on prisoner health in the nation. was established under the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Act 1987 (AIHW Act) as a corporate Commonwealth entity operating within the Commonwealth legislative, regulatory and financial framework. The AIHW Charter of Corporate Governance details its role in providing reliable, regular and relevant information and statistics on Australia's health and welfare.

The 'People in prison' webpage is a valuable index to the AIHW reports, articles and prisoner health statistics. The National Prisoner Health Data Collection [NPHDC] is the main source of the AIHW's information, based to date on surveys conducted in 2009, 2010, 2012, 2015, 2018 and 2022. It includes valuable sections on AIHW data by [a range of geographies](#), [sex/gender](#), [health](#), [welfare](#) and [Indigenous status](#).

[AIHW: People in prison](#)

[AIHW: National Prisoner Health Data Collection \(NPHDC\)](#)

[The health of people in Australia's prisons 2022 \(published 15/11/2023\)](#)

[Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Act 1987 \(Cth\)](#)

[AIHW Charter of Corporate Governance: 2023](#)

7. Prison Fellowship: Justice reform resources for volunteers and churches

Faith-based Prison Fellowship supports prisoners and their families in many ways, including visiting prisoners, providing Christmas gifts on behalf of incarcerated parents, and sending the children of incarcerated parents to summer and sports camps. During the prison shutdowns due to COVID, Prison Fellowship also created a huge virtual platform for Bible-based content called Floodlight® which strengthens relationships and enables healing life choices. Among the many free resources for prisoners, their families and churches that provide ministry in prisons, there is a webpage devoted to justice reform resources:

[Prison Fellowship: Justice reform resources](#)

[Alpha in Prisons \(Australia\): Interactive sessions for incarcerated people](#)

[Kairos Inside \(Australia\): Program for incarcerated men and women](#)

[Kairos Outside \(Australia\): Program for women impacted by the imprisonment of family or friends](#)

[Kairos Torch \(Australia\): Program for youth in prison](#)

6. IPA: The cost of prisons in Australia: 2023

Mia Schlicht, research analyst with the Institute of Public Affairs [IPA], provides an assessment of the costs of the Australian corrections system, finding that the average annual cost per prisoner is \$147,900. Australian governments spend \$21 billion per year on criminal justice, \$6 billion of that on prisons.

The Productivity Commission has also been a major contributor of data on Australian prison costs. The 2024 data has just been released (on 29 Jan 2024) and the 2023 data is also provided below for comparison.

[IPA: The cost of prisons in Australia 2023](#)

[Productivity Commission: Report on Government Services 2024](#)

[Productivity Commission: Report on Government Services 2023](#)

5. Justice Reform Initiative: Key statistics related to Australian incarceration

Justice Reform Initiative [JRI] has recently published two overviews containing statistical infographics on incarceration. The statistics allow comparison across the Australian jurisdictions and across time. JRI has also published reports on the state of incarceration and alternatives to incarceration for each of the Australian states and territories as well as for the nation.

[JRI: Adult imprisonment in Australia: An overview \(September 2023\)](#)

[JRI: Children's imprisonment in Australia: An overview \(September 2023\)](#)

[JRI: Reports on incarceration for each Australian jurisdiction and for the nation](#)

4. Jesuit Social Services: Dropping Off the edge (series of reports)

In 1999, Professor Tony Vinson wrote, and Jesuit Social Services [JSS] published, the ground-breaking report, *Unequal in Life*, which mapped the distribution of social disadvantage in Victoria and New South Wales by postcode. It was found that different forms of disadvantage overlapped to limit life opportunities. Vinson concluded that 'intensive help in the form of educational, health, family support, housing, justice and other needed

community services is required, in combination with supported community-building endeavours to sustain the benefits of assistance rendered.’ Two years later, Vinson and JSS produced *Unequal in Health* which confirmed that socially and economically disadvantaged Australians are generally burdened with greater health problems, and more intensive healthcare for disadvantaged people is required to achieve equity.

Dropping off the Edge 2007 had such a significant impact on policymaking that it became a series led by Vinson until his death in 2017. The conclusion was that without concerted action by communities, government and other stakeholders, there was the danger that the most severely disadvantaged communities would ‘drop off the edge.’ *Dropping off the Edge 2015* found that a percentage of postcodes or statistical local areas in each state/territory accounted for a far greater burden of disadvantage. The series continues to provide valuable geography-based data on disadvantage, with indicators continually added when statistically significant. The latest report, *Dropping off the Edge 2021* was led by Professor Robert Tanton. The report includes the new indicators of intergenerational disadvantage and environmental factors, as well as qualitative data from eight communities across Australia.

[JSS: *Unequal in Life: The distribution of social disadvantage in Victoria and New South Wales* \(1999\)](#)

[JSS: *Unequal in Health: Standing in solidarity with those in need* \(2001\)](#)

[JSS: *Dropping off the edge 2007: The distribution of disadvantage in Australia*](#)

[JSS: *Dropping off the edge 2015: Persistent communal disadvantage in Australia*](#)

[JSS: *Dropping off the edge 2021: Persistent and multilayered disadvantage in Australia*](#)

3. Justice Reinvestment Network Australia: resources

The Justice Reinvestment Network [JRN] provides a large number of excellent articles and other resources from Australia, New Zealand, the United States and the United Kingdom.

[JRN: Introduction to justice reinvestment](#)

[JRN: Research papers and reports](#)

[JRN: International examples of justice reinvestment](#)

[JRN: Communities and supporters](#)

[JRN: Project planning and management](#)

2. UNSW: Research Report: Police responses to people with disability

Led by Professor Eileen Baldry and Emeritus Professor Leanne Dowse of the University of New South Wales, Sydney, this valuable Research Report was written to assist the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability [the Disability Royal Commission]. The Disability Royal Commission was established in April 2019 in response to ‘community concern about widespread reports of violence against, and the neglect, abuse and exploitation of, people with disability.’

A related publication is the submission of the Australian Human Rights Commission [AHRC] to the Disability Royal Commission.

[UNSW: Research Report: Police responses to people with disability](#)

[Disability Royal Commission: Terms of reference](#)

[Disability Royal Commission: Final Report \(1st published 29 Sep 2023; updated 2 Nov 2023\)](#)

[AHRC: People with disability and the criminal justice system](#)

1. The Guardian: Deaths inside: Indigenous Australian deaths in custody

The Guardian’s ‘Deaths inside’ database provides valuable information on every known Indigenous custodial death that took place between 2008 and 2021. It followed the landmark Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody [RIADIC], which was established in October 1987 ‘in response to a growing public concern that deaths in custody of Aboriginal people were too common and poorly explained.’ The Commission examined all Australian deaths in custody between 1 January 1980 and 31 May 1989, and the actions taken following each death. The final report made 339 recommendations mostly related to the justice system, prison safety procedures, reconciliation, land needs and international

obligations, liaison with Aboriginal groups, police education and improved accessibility to information.

Another inquiry that shed light on detention conditions for Indigenous people was the Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory. It was established in August 2016 to ‘uncover where the systems had failed and make recommendations on how to improve laws, policies and practices in the Northern Territory to provide a safer future for our children.’

[The Guardian’s ‘Deaths inside’ database](#)

[Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody: Final Report \(15 April 1991\)](#)

[The Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory: Final Report \(17 November 2017\)](#)