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Paper Title: **The Overrepresentation of Aboriginal Youth in Australian Prisons**

Abstract:

While Aboriginal populations comprise 2.5% percent of the total Australian population, fifty-nine percent of the youth prison population consists of Aboriginal juveniles. Moreover, the national rate of Aboriginal juvenile incarceration has risen to a rate of twenty-eight times the non-indigenous rate. As this subject is currently prevalent in the national dialogue, this paper examines various social and legal causes as well as alternative sentencing and prevention methods. Part II provides a background of the underlying social and cultural challenges associated with Aboriginal youth offending. Part III discusses over-policing and bail procedures for juveniles, two primary issues critically impacting an Aboriginal youth's future criminal activity. Part IV discusses circle sentencing as a method for reducing the overrepresentation of Aboriginal juveniles in Australian prisons. Part V explores the potential effectiveness of justice reinvestment as a strategy for deterring criminal activity among Aboriginal juveniles in Australia.

The process of gradually closing the incarceration gap will require attention to each of the factors identified in Parts II and III. Although both circle sentencing and justice reinvestment have the potential to be effective at building Aboriginal communities and reducing offending rates, a comprehensive strategy will need to address additional factors such as over-policing and bail policies, which have played an important role in creating and perpetuating incarceration disparities. Our interviews revealed that nationwide change will likely occur slowly and may even take multiple generations, but Australians remain optimistic about the possibility of positive change.