

Expanding Adult Time, Adult Crime and Taking a Strong Stance on Drugs and Anti-Social Behaviour Amendment Bill 2026

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About The Salvation Army

The Salvation Army is an international Christian movement with a presence in more than 130 countries. Operating in Australia since 1880, The Salvation Army is one of the largest providers of social services and programs for people experiencing hardship, injustice and social exclusion.

The Salvation Army Australia provides more than 1,000 social programs and activities through networks of social support services, community centres and churches across the country.

Programs include:

- Financial counselling, financial literacy and microfinance
- Emergency relief and related services
- Homelessness services
- Youth services
- Family and domestic violence services
- Alcohol, drugs and other addictions
- Chaplaincy
- Emergency and disaster response
- Aged care
- Employment services

As a mission-driven organisation, The Salvation Army seeks to reduce social disadvantage and create a fair and harmonious society through holistic and person-centred approaches that reflect our mission to share the love of Jesus by:

- Caring for people
- Creating faith pathways
- Building healthy communities
- Working for justice

We commit ourselves in prayer and practice to this land of Australia and its people, seeking reconciliation, unity and equity.

Further information about The Salvation Army can be accessed at: <
<https://www.salvationarmy.org.au/>>



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Our commitment to inclusion

The Salvation Army Australia acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet and work and pay our respect to Elders, past, present and future.

We value and include people of all cultures, languages, abilities, sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions and intersex status. We are committed to providing programs that are fully inclusive. We are committed to the safety and wellbeing of people of all ages, particularly children. Our values are:

- Integrity
- Compassion
- Respect
- Diversity
- Collaboration

The Salvation Army is a worldwide movement known for its acceptance and unconditional love for all people. We love unconditionally, because God first loved us. The Bible says, “God so loves the world” (John 3:16, RGT). As both a church and charity, we believe all people are loved by God and are worthy of having their needs met. Everyone is welcome to find love, hope, and acceptance at The Salvation Army.

The Salvation Army Australia Territory wishes to acknowledge that members of the LGBTIQ+ community have experienced hurt and exclusion because of mixed comments and responses made in the past. The Salvation Army is committed to inclusive practice that recognises and values diversity. We are ensuring our services affirm the right to equality, fairness, and decency for all LGBTIQ+ people, rectifying all forms of discriminatory practice throughout the organisation.

We seek to partner with LGBTIQ+ people and allies to work with us to build an inclusive, accessible, and culturally safe environment in every aspect of Salvation Army organisation and services. Everyone has a right to feel safe and respected.

Learn more about our commitment to inclusion: <salvationarmy.org.au/about-us>



Executive summary

The Salvation Army welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission to the Queensland Justice, Integrity and Community Safety Committee in relation to the Expanding Adult Crime, Adult Time and Taking a Strong Stance on Anti-social Behaviour Amendment Bill 2026 (the Bill).

The Salvation Army recommends the Bill not be passed.

Our experience as a provider of a broad range of social services, including alcohol and other drug, and youth services, is that diversionary programs should be more, rather than less, available.

The Salvation Army also opposes the Bill's intention to further broaden the list of offences to which adult penalties apply for young people. Instead, supportive responses that are tailored to address the factors behind a young person offending, and that minimise the negative impacts of a young person's exposure to the criminal justice system, must be maintained and expanded wherever possible.

Finally, we recommend that the Queensland Government acts to raise the age of criminal responsibility to 14 years of age, without exception. This is in line with research into child development, reducing recidivism and our obligations to protect the rights of young people.

The Salvation Army has made 3 recommendations for the Committee to consider. A summary of these recommendations follows on the next page.

Summary of recommendations

Recommendation 1

1.5 The Salvation Army recommends the Queensland Government maintains the Police Drug Diversion Program to ensure responses to drug-related offences maximise equitable access to diversion and reduce contact with the justice system.

Recommendation 2

2.5 The Salvation Army recommends the Expanding Adult Crime, Adult Time and Taking a Strong Stance on Drugs and Anti-social Behaviour Amendment Bill 2026 not be passed.

Recommendation 3

3.3 The Salvation Army recommends the Queensland Government raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility to 14 years old, without exception.

1 Diversion responses for drug-related offences

- 1.1 The Salvation Army cautions against narrowing Queensland's eligibility pathways to access drug diversion responses, in effect decreasing accessibility to vital non-criminal justice pathways for drug related offences. The cost of law enforcement responses to drug-related offending is significant¹ and a range of harms arise from punitive drug policies.²
- 1.2 By establishing a new Illicit Drug Enforcement and Diversion Framework, the Bill will replace the Police Drug Diversion Program (PDDP), reducing access to existing diversionary pathways. This is despite the PDDP yielding positive outcomes over the past 18 months,³ and economic benefits.⁴ By narrowing diversionary opportunities, the Bill forces people into unsupportive and unconstructive pathways, reducing opportunities for evidence-based and health-focused responses to substance use.
- 1.3 Laws should be grounded in robust evidence and designed to address the issues they aim to solve, including for people who use drugs. A heavy reliance on punitive criminal justice responses to drug use is ineffective and increases, rather than decreases, harms.⁵ Reducing accessibility of diversionary programs, and treating substance use as a criminal justice issue, increases the likelihood of confrontational interactions with the police, unserviceable fines, criminal proceedings and incarceration. All of these responses fail to address the drivers of substance use, disproportionately impact marginalised communities, and create barriers to treatment and harm reduction initiatives.
- 1.4 Harm reduction models are the most effective and viable response to substance use. Our model of care recognises harm reduction as foundational in rebuilding the lives impacted by harmful substance use and we adopt these approaches in our treatment practices.⁶

Recommendation 1

- 1.5 The Salvation Army recommends the Queensland Government maintains the Police Drug Diversion Program to ensure responses to drug-related offences maximise equitable access to diversion and reduce contact with the justice system.**

¹ Queensland Government. (2025). *Illicit Drugs: Effective harm minimization relies on balanced investment effort across the harm reduction, demand reduction and supply reduction pillars*. Report of the Chief Health Officer Queensland. <https://www.choreport.health.qld.gov.au/our-lifestyle/illicit-drugs>.

² The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). (2023). *OHCHR Report Human rights challenges in addressing and countering all aspects of the world drug problem*. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/calls-for-input/2023/call-inputs-ohchrs-report-human-rights-challenges-addressing-and-countering>.

³ Australian Medical Association Queensland. (2026, March 4). *Drug diversion changes a short sighted, disappointing move* [Media release]. https://amaq.com.au/common/Uploaded%20files/News/2026%20Media%20Releases/030226_MR_DrugDiversion.pdf

⁴ Queensland Network of Alcohol and Other Drug Agencies. (2026). *Queensland Police Drug Diversion Program Briefing Note*.

⁵ Justice Reform Initiative. (2024). *Drug use & the criminal justice system- Taking steps towards a health focused response*.

⁶ https://www.justicereforminitiative.org.au/discussion_papers; The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. (2023). *Human rights challenges in addressing and countering all aspects of the world drug problem*. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/calls-for-input/2023/call-inputs-ohchrs-report-human-rights-challenges-addressing-and-countering>.

⁶ The Salvation Army Australia. (2021). *Alcohol and other drug services National Model of Care*.

https://www.salvationarmy.org.au/scribe/sites/auaesalvos/files/documents/1_AOD_Model_Of_Care_2021.pdf.

2 Supportive responses for young people

- 2.1 The Salvation Army does not support extending adult sentencing requirements to young people who offend, as stated in the short title of the Bill. Expanding the offences listed under section 175A of the Youth Justice Act mistakenly assumes that harsher sentencing is the most appropriate way to create safety in the state. The Salvation Army disagrees.
- 2.2 Children and young people who encounter justice system responses often present with a range of complexities, and we know that many have been victims themselves. This suggests, and evidence tells us, that children experiencing the greatest disadvantage are disproportionately impacted by hardline justice responses that exacerbate disadvantage.⁷
- 2.3 Adult interventions and penalties that are analogous to those administered to adults, disregard the needs and vulnerabilities of children and young people. We recognise the damaging impact of offending behaviour on victims, survivors, families and communities. Hardline responses will not achieve the intended goals of community safety. Such measures increase young people's susceptibility to engaging in further offending, erode rehabilitation efforts and contradict the principles of safeguarding.⁸
- 2.4 Individualised and developmentally appropriate interventions are necessary to address the root causes and risk factors for offending.⁹ Responses must support children and young people understand the impact of their behaviour and promote positive behaviour change. Expanding the application of adult penalties under the current Bill, increasing the available sentences for an additional twelve offences, will be counterproductive and increase the risk of:
- Creating a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to addressing youth offending;
 - Disproportionately criminalising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities¹⁰;
 - Causing further harm to children and young people across Queensland; and
 - Increasing costs to the state.¹¹

Recommendation 2

- 2.5 The Salvation Army recommends the Expanding Adult Crime, Adult Time and Taking a Strong Stance on Drugs and Anti-social Behaviour Amendment Bill 2026 not be passed.**

⁷ Malvaso, C et al. (2022). Adverse Childhood Experiences and Trauma Among Young People in the Youth Justice System. *Trends & issues in crime and criminal justice*. No. 651. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology. https://www.aic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-06/ti651_adverse_childhood_experiences_and_trauma_among_young_people.pdf#:~:text=In%20fact%2C%20a%20recent%20systematic%20review%20by%20Malvaso.short%20of%20the%20diagnostic%20ut%E2%80%91off%20for%20mild%20PTSD.

⁸ Walsh, T et al. (2021). Raise the Age – And Then What? Exploring the Alternatives of Criminalising Children Under 14 Years of Age. *James Cook University Law Review* 27, 37-56. <https://classic.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/JCULawRw/2021/3.html#Heading53>.

⁹ Hollonds, A. (2024). 'Help way earlier!' How Australia can transform child justice to improve safety and wellbeing. Australian Human Rights Commission. https://humanrights.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0025/25477/1807_help_way_earlier_-_accessible_0-1-2.pdf.

¹⁰ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). (2023). *Youth Justice in Australia*. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/3fe01ba6-3917-41fc-a908-39290f9f4b55/aihw-juv-140.pdf?v=20230605182448&inline=true>.

¹¹ Ibid (n 9).

3 Raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility to 14 years

- 3.1 Most children and young people who offend engage in relatively low-level conduct. Often behaviours are impulsive, opportunistic, and driven by peer pressure with most children and young people desisting over time.¹² Children who engage in more serious or persistent harmful conduct form a minority and have generally been exposed to more risk factors.¹³
- 3.2 Consistent with the advocacy of the Raise the Age campaign, we call for the minimum age of criminal responsibility to be raised to 14 years, without exception.¹⁴ Incarceration and separating children from support networks is damaging and children who face increasing periods of time connected to the justice system risk becoming entrenched. Holding children under the age of 14 criminally accountable is untenable for the following reasons:
- **Childhood development and criminal culpability.** Developmental evidence demonstrates that children under 14 have not yet developed sufficient cognitive capacity to assume criminal culpability.¹⁵ This affects several skills including impulsivity, cognitive reasoning, and consequential thinking, all of which are linked with offending behaviour.¹⁶
 - **Reducing recidivism.** Children’s engagement with the justice system is a risk factor for future offending.¹⁷ In particular, contact with the justice system before the age of 15 is a strong predictor of later offending.¹⁸ This experience is magnified where children are incarcerated alongside adults or justice system responses mirror those provided to adults.
 - **Protecting the rights of children and young people.** All levels of Australian government are responsible for ensuring legislative and administrative processes respect and uphold the rights of children and young people, based on international guidelines.¹⁹

Recommendation 3

- 3.3 The Salvation Army recommends the Queensland Government raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility to 14 years old, without exception.**

¹² Australian Bureau of Statistics (2022-23). *Recorded Crime – Offenders*. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/crime-and-justice/recorded-crime-offenders/latest-release>.

¹³ Walsh, T et al. (2021). *Raise the Age – And Then What? Exploring the Alternatives of Criminalising Children Under 14 Years of Age*. *James Cook University Law Review* 27, 37-56. <https://classic.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/JCULawRw/2021/3.html#Heading53>.

¹⁴ *Raise the Age*. (Undated). *About the Campaign*. <https://raisetheage.org.au/campaign>.

¹⁵ Cunneen, C. (2017). *Arguments for Raising the Minimum Age of Criminal Responsibility* (Research report, Comparative Youth Penalty Project). Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research, University of Technology, Sydney

¹⁶ Australian Human Rights Commission. (2020). *Review of the age of criminal responsibility* (Submission to the Council of Attorneys-General Age of Criminal Responsibility Working Group). https://humanrights.gov.au/data/assets/file/0028/54595/Ahrc_20200226_submission_cag_working_group_macr.pdf.

¹⁷ Shirley, K. (2017). *The Cautious Approach: Police Cautions and the Impact on Youth Reoffending*. Crime Statistics Agency. <https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2017-09/apo-nid108381.pdf>.

¹⁸ Weatherburn, D. & Ramsey, S. (2018). *Offending over the Life Course: Contact with the NSW Criminal Justice System Between Age 10 and Age 33*. *Crime and Justice Statistics*, 132. NSW: Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research. <https://bocsar.nsw.gov.au/documents/publications/bb/bb101-150/bb132-report-offending-over-the-life-course.pdf>.

¹⁹ *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, opened for signature 20 November 1989, 1577 UNTS 3 (entered into force 2 September 1990); UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC). (2007). *General Comment No. 24, replacing General Comment No. 10: Children’s Rights in Juvenile Justice*, CRC/C/GC/24.

4 Conclusion

- 4.1 The Salvation Army thanks the Queensland Justice, Integrity and Community Safety Committee for the opportunity to provide a written submission.
- 4.2 The Salvation Army would welcome the opportunity to discuss the content of this submission should any further information be of assistance. Further information can be sought from ecqld@salvationarmy.org.au.

The Salvation Army Australia Territory

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