

Continuity of care is crucial for ex-prisoners rebuilding lives

David Biles ("Jail means offenders are out of sight and out of harm's way", August 5, p17) has drawn attention to important new research which shows that the death rate for recently released prisoners is much higher than for prisoners.

However, his solution - that correctional workers need to work harder to ensure that ex-prisoners receive appropriate social support - is only part of the story.

The key issue is continuity of care. Transition to release must be properly coordinated, and treatment and services offered in prison or youth detention are continued after release.

What works for ex-prisoners is support to gain and maintain what most of us take for granted: stable housing, education or employment, a supportive family and social network, and proper attention to physical and mental health issues.

This is a whole-of-government, whole-of-community responsibility,

not just about parole and corrections staff.

We have two shiny new facilities: the Alexander Maconochie Centre and Bimberi Youth Detention Centre.

It is critical that the good work being done to move to a human rights, rehabilitation focus on both sites is complemented by well-coordinated reintegration services post-release.

The evidence suggests that such an approach will not only save lives, but will also reduce crime rates, and the human and social costs of reoffending.

Simon Rosenberg, president, Mental Health Community Coalition of the ACT

Drug 'dangerous'

A man who died after having his teeth removed before heart surgery was given an inappropriate and dangerous dose of a drug for his bleeding gums, a NSW coroner has heard. George Godden, 74, was to have a heart valve operation in February 2007 when he suffered a seizure and heart failure shortly after being given Cophenylcaine, a medication not indicated for use in gums. NSW Deputy State Coroner Garnett Forbes was told during an inquest yesterday that a doctor at Prince of Wales Hospital had recommended the extraction of all 19 teeth to reduce the chance of infection. Counsel assisting the coroner Kristina Stern said Mr Godden suffered extensive bleeding and a junior doctor, Tami Brown, instructed nurses to apply gauze soaked in Cophenylcaine. Ms Stern said the prescription was unsafe.

Needle exchange

It seems as if many of those who write in opposed to a needle and syringe program at the Alexander Maconochie Centre (and a range of other initiatives designed to reduce harms to individuals) focus their arguments on moral and ethical grounds such as: why should society have to support individuals who have thrown away their chance to be worthwhile members of society? And: drugs are illegal - they deserve what they get.

ACT Labor and both other parties are committed to "evidence-based policy". If those opposed to such programs as the needle exchange program hope to sway our MLAs (or the rest of the community), they would do well to confine their arguments to those supported by evidence.

Despite David O'Sullivan's opinion (Letters, August 2), there is actually rather a lot of it about.

Colin Hales, Kippax

17 months in jail for drunken car chase

By Natasha Rudra

A man has been jailed for 17 months after drunkenly crashing his car during a high-speed police pursuit and abandoning his "horribly injured" passenger.

Kalonga Chifuntwe, 20, fled from police who tried to pull him over in Wannassa in the early hours of April 3, reaching speeds of 120km/h in suburban streets.

The ACT Magistrates Court heard Chifuntwe, who was drunk and had a suspended licence, led officers on a brief chase before crashing into a tree on Wheeler Crescent.

He and another man ran away from the crashed car, leaving passenger Matthew West severely injured in the back seat.

When police caught him he returned a blood-alcohol reading of 0.109.

Chifuntwe pleaded guilty to culpable driving causing grievous bodily harm, driving while suspended, drink-driving, failing to stop and performing a burn-out.

At the time of the offences he was on Supreme Court bail on charges of mugging a man at knifepoint in Phillip and had specific bail conditions banning him from driving.

Acting Chief Magistrate Peter Dingwall said Mr West had suffered extensive damage to his liver, which he described as shattered, and was left with permanent scarring and respiratory problems. He said Mr West provided a victim-impact statement describing the permanent impact of the crash on his life, saying he was on painkillers and could no longer carry out any physical activity or sport.

Chifuntwe is already serving a two-year prison term for the mugging in Phillip.

Mr Dingwall said Chifuntwe was still relatively young and had strong prospects for rehabilitation. He sentenced Chifuntwe to a total of 17 months in jail with a non-parole period of 10 months.

He disqualified him from driving for two years and ordered him to pay \$400 in fines for the burnout and the failure to stop.

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