WHAT IS THE ISSUE?
The over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the criminal justice system is one of the most significant social justice issues in Australia, with the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in all stages of the criminal justice system far exceeding their representation in the community.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people comprise 3% of the Australian population and they make up 28% of the total prison population, that is an imprisonment rate 14 times higher than the non-indigenous rate. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are also 7.9 times more likely to be taken into police custody than non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and are 12 times more likely to be in community based correction programs.

IS THE SITUATION IMPROVING?
The rates of incarceration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are worsening. Between 2001 and 2010, the imprisonment rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women increased by 99% and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men by 35%. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women now represent the fastest growing prison population in Australia with an increases of 20% in the last 12 months alone.

WHAT ARE THE DRIVERS OF CRIME?
The underlying driving factors of crime are varied and complex. Evidence has demonstrated that individuals who come into contact with the criminal justice system are highly likely to experience multiple characteristics of severe social and economic disadvantage.

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE CURRENT APPROACH? "Tough on crime" campaigns that promote increased or mandatory sentences as the way to protect the community rely on the myth that harsher sentences deter reoffending. Yet the evidence shows that prison fails to deter, rehabilitate, meet public concerns and make communities safer. We need to move beyond "tough on crime" approaches to a "smart on crime" solution-focused approach to justice.

Key drivers that contribute to offence rates include:
- inadequate or inappropriate education
- inadequate housing
- health issues including mental health
- disability
- access to employment
- family violence
- alcohol and other drug use

IS IT AFFECTING YOUNG PEOPLE?
Yes. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander offenders tend to have contact with the criminal justice system at younger ages than their non-Indigenous counterparts and at a higher proportion. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander juveniles are between 25-28 times more likely to be detained in the juvenile justice system than other young people. A greater percentage of Aboriginal young people are experiencing lives with families separated by incarceration.

WHAT'S NEEDED?
We need a dedicated focus on reducing incarceration from all levels of government, and done so in real partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives. Government should set targets through the Council of Australian Government's (COAG) framework for Closing the Gap in Indigenous disadvantage.

HOW CAN JUSTICE REINVESTMENT HELP?
Justice Reinvestment is a circuit-breaker. It aims to address the underlying causes of crime and improve outcomes for both individuals and communities. The approach aims to divert funds from the prison system into diversionary and prevention programs in communities where there is a high concentration of offenders.
The concept is that this in turn will create savings in the criminal justice system which can be tracked and reinvested.
Justice reinvestment involves a strong focus on localised community governance and has been shown to be successful overseas.

Justice Reinvestment is:
- Data Driven
- Supported by a centralized strategic body
- Place Based
- Fiscally Sound
- Targeted to reducing offending rates
- Targeted to increasing community safety

When implemented, Justice Reinvestment has been shown to benefit entire communities, not just individuals.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?
- Go to https://antar.org.au/campaigns/justice-campaign
- Get informed
- Write to your local MP

www.antar.org.au