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LABOR PROPOSES NEW APPROACH TO TACKLE ABORIGINAL INCARCERATION

NSW Labor has announced it will commit landmark resources to a new approach designed to tackle Aboriginal disadvantage and incarceration rates.

In an Australian first, Labor will invest \$4 million into three pilot projects run by non-government organisations based on the strategy of Justice Reinvestment. Resources will be targeted at spatially-concentrated Aboriginal populations as a way to reduce prison spending down the track. An expert unit in the Justice Department will research and monitor program effectiveness.

Shadow Attorney General Paul Lynch noted today that Justice Reinvestment programs have been pioneered in US states where racial minorities are massively over-represented in prisons. Notably, the programs are supported by many Republicans and fiscal conservatives.

Adoption of this approach has been discussed in Britain by a Parliamentary Committee of the House of Commons and in Australia by a Report of a Committee of the NSW Senate.

"This is a significant commitment. Aboriginal incarceration rates are tragically high in NSW and Labor is looking for new approaches to bring those rates down," Mr Lynch said.

"Aboriginal people make up about 2 per cent of our State's population – yet about one quarter of our prison population. There are now more Aboriginal people in NSW jails than when the current Government came to power in 2011.

"The essence of Justice Reinvestment is simple. Targeted investment in spatially-concentrated populations today saves money on social spending tomorrow.

"There are some obvious similarities between Justice Reinvestment and early intervention and diversionary strategies. The difference is that Justice Reinvestment involves the very detailed mapping and profiling of the people who live in a particular community – and a comparison of Government spending today versus the future savings from avoiding incarceration.

"Other developed countries are grappling today with the extraordinary cost of maintaining incarceration rates and building new prisons. We must learn from that experience in NSW."

Shadow Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Linda Burney added: "The challenge of dealing with Aboriginal over-representation in prisons is central to reconciliation.

"Labor is excited by the possibilities of Justice Reinvestment – and looks forward to partnering with non-government organisations on worthwhile projects."

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