

Securing Community Safety

**Labour's policy for
Corrections
2008**

Introduction

Since 1999, New Zealand's prison population has increased rapidly as a result of Labour's increase in police numbers of around 2,500, a much higher crime resolution rate by the Police, and tougher laws on bail, sentencing and parole.

Four new prisons and around 3,300 additional prison beds have been created to cope with a 71 percent increase in prison numbers since the latter part of the 1990s.

Increased security in prisons has resulted in a sharp decline in prison escapes, down 84 percent since the late 1990s. Tougher measures, including drug dogs, have helped reduce contraband entering prisons and drug tests show a decline in drug taking by two thirds from 34 percent down to 14 percent.

Labour has not only increased capacity and security in prisons. It has also embarked on a major programme to address the causes of offending and to reduce reoffending. This includes vastly increasing work available for inmates, to give offenders work habits, work experience and work skills.

There has been a major increase in drug and rehabilitation programmes for inmates, which has had positive effects in reducing reoffending by around 14 percent. Emphasis has been placed on improving literacy and numeracy skills among inmates and creating opportunities to earn New Zealand Qualification Authority credits.

In Community Corrections, the introduction of electronic monitoring devices has proven effective in monitoring and controlling offenders in the community, while increased resources in the area of probation will allow improved standards in supervision in this area and in community sentences.

Prison Numbers

As a result of stronger policing and tougher laws, Labour has imprisoned criminal offenders at an unprecedented rate. Labour has introduced longer prison sentences with a greater proportion of those sentences served, and a tougher response to parole applications with declines increasing from 51 percent before the 2002 Parole Act to 71 percent currently.

This has required the construction of four new prisons (Otago; Auckland Regional Women's; Northland; and Springhill in the Waikato) and around 3,300 additional beds.

New Zealand currently has an imprisonment rate of 188 per 100,000 population, well above comparable countries like Australia, England and Canada and one of the highest in the developed world.

While serious offenders will continue to get heavy sentences, efforts need to be made to prevent offending in order to get prison rates down in the future.

Labour will increase its focus on dealing with the causes of crime, including by addressing neglect and abuse of children in dysfunctional families.

A continued and increasing focus will be placed on reducing demand for and supply of illegal drugs, and reducing abuse of alcohol through more restrictive laws and trying to address the culture of binge drinking and tolerance of drunkenness.

Labour will work to further reduce the supply of and demand for illegal drugs and reduce abuse of alcohol.

We will build on the Early Intervention initiatives already underway to keep less serious and lower risk offenders out of the prison environment which exposes offenders to hard core, and recidivist criminals and to require lower risk offenders to meet their responsibilities to their families through working, paying taxes and providing reparation to victims.

We will continue and build upon efforts to stop prison being a revolving door by addressing the causes of offending and reoffending through proven effective rehabilitation programmes.

Labour will put increased resources into early interventions to nip offending in the bud, and will continue to work to bring down reoffending rates through the provision of meaningful rehabilitation programmes.

Upgrading Prison Security and Facilities

Labour has succeeded in dramatically reducing escape rates from prisons by better physical security such as effective perimeter fences, the use of surveillance equipment, single points of entry into prisons and better management.

Labour will continue the process of improving prison security and work through a programme to replace obsolete and uneconomic prison facilities beginning with Mt Eden.

Labour will expand facilities in the Auckland region to reduce the number of inmates from Auckland currently being transferred to facilities in other regions because of lack of capacity in Auckland.

Safety of Prison Officers

Labour will speed up the process under which prison management and unions are working together to improve the safety of prisons officers. Labour is committed to seeing this issue advance so that prisons have appropriate tools and procedures at their disposal for officers to be able to protect themselves without putting at risk a stable prison environment.

Gang Members in Prisons

The percentage of gang members and associates in the prison system has increased significantly with Police targeting of and crackdown on gangs involved with serious crime and drug trafficking.

Telephone conversations and correspondence from gang members will be targeted for the purposes of police intelligence and to prevent gang leaders in prisons continuing to direct criminal associations in the community.

Continued affiliation to and contact with organised criminal groups will be a factor taken into account by Parole Boards, likely to result in the decline of parole applications by gang members.

Under Labour, continued association with criminal gangs while in prison will count against getting parole.

Contraband in Prisons / Telephone Jamming and Monitoring

Tighter controls in the prison system including the use of metal detectors, drug dogs, single point of entry and cell-phone jamming have been effective in restricting entry of illicit items into prisons.

Labour will build on and intensify such controls:

- By February next year, all prisons will have cell-phone jamming rendering unlawful communication by inmates by this means inoperable.
- By law all lawful communication, either by payphone or letters will be subject to recording, and monitoring, either at random or by targeting based on intelligence.

Labour will bring into force the Corrections Amendment Bill, which will make it harder to bring contraband into prisons and make it easier to detect such items and punish those who use and peddle them.

The Bill:

- Enhances existing powers and procedures for strip searching prisoners.
- Provides for random searches of areas, including staff lockers.
- Supports the integrity of drug testing in prisons by strengthening the measures against tampering with samples.
- Tightens offence provisions relating to contraband – it will be an imprisonable offence for a prisoner to possess or use an electronic communication device such as a cell phone, and for anyone to possess an unauthorised item without reasonable excuse while visiting or working in a prison.

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Drug and Alcohol Treatment

Labour has increased the places available for inmates with alcohol and drug addiction and abuse problems to attend six month intensive programmes to 500, up from the 40 it inherited from the last National Government.

These programmes are subject to on-going evaluation but have so far demonstrated effectiveness in reducing reoffending by around 14 percent.

The prison based programmes are made available to inmates who indicate motivation to change their behaviour and at an appropriate time before release to maximise the value to the community and inmates from the investment made in them.

Labour will continue to expand Prison-based drug and alcohol treatment programmes subject to the level of need and the availability of skilled drug and alcohol rehabilitation personnel.

Prison based programmes however need to be balanced by community based programmes focused both on preventing addiction and abuse problems leading to crime and to prevent relapse by inmates following release.

Under Labour, funding is being boosted by \$18 million to expand community based drug and alcohol treatment services over the next two years.

In Auckland for example a specialist Alcohol and Other Drug project should see around 2,000 AOD affected offenders or potential offenders receive treatment per annum. AOD specialists are being placed in Police Watch Houses in Christchurch and Counties Manukau, with other specialist staff to be based at Courts.

Investments in prison based programmes will not be at the expense of community based programmes.

Work in Prisons

Labour believes that it is vital that inmates, who at the time of conviction have high levels of unemployment, get the opportunity to acquire work habits, work experience and work skills.

Over the last three years, the number of inmates working has increased from 40 up to 51 percent, with around two thirds of sentenced prisoners now working. This represents an increase of around 900 more jobs. Almost all of the increase has been based on real work programmes rather than in-prison services.

By 2010, Labour will seek to increase work in prisons to meet the objective of 60 percent of all inmates and 80 percent of sentenced inmates in employment. This will mean the creation of nearly 1,000 new jobs over this period.

Labour will seek to create nearly 1,000 new jobs for prisoners – providing work habits, experience and skills – to reduce reoffending by 2010.

Work Skills

Over the last year work skills acquisition by inmates has increased dramatically, with the number of New Zealand Qualifications Authority credits gained increasing from 20,350 in 2006/07 to 37,563 in the 2007/08 year.

Labour will continue the emphasis on inmates gaining skills needed for successful reintegration into the community and lowered rates of reoffending.

Literacy and Numeracy

The use of a new screening tool in prisons has recently found 60 percent of prisoners do not possess the basic literacy needed to engage in society and 35 percent lacked in basic numeracy skills.

Labour has commenced and will this year consolidate new literacy and numeracy programmes which will provide for training for around 1,850 prisoners per year. The new programmes involve training of around 100 hours per prisoner to complete.

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Mental Health Needs

The cause of much offending in the community can be related to mental health conditions of inmates. Corrections provide primary mental health care with District Health Boards having responsibility for secondary care.

Corrections and Health have recently worked together to develop for the first time a mental health screening tool for the prison environment. The next Labour led Government will provide funding to develop this tool to better identify and make provision for mental disorders suffered by inmates.

Labour will put in place a mental health screening tool to better identify and make provision for mental disorders suffered by inmates.

Labour will also develop appropriate staff training to ensure that the primary mental health needs of inmates are better catered for.

Other Rehabilitation Programmes

Labour will continue to develop programmes such as Kia Marama and Te Piriti which deal with child sex offenders, where New Zealand has achieved world-leading success in preventing reoffending.

Labour will further expand other programmes such as Maori Focus Units and Faith Based Units which have achieved promising results, subject to full evaluation of their success.

Community Corrections

With an increasing number of offenders being subject to supervision and control in the community, it is vital that adequate resourcing be made available so that Community Corrections have adequate staffing levels and levels of training.

Labour will continue through the budget process to ensure that adequate resources are necessary to meet these needs.

Labour will continue to ensure that Community Corrections is adequately resourced.

Privatisation

Labour believes that core public sector functions such as corrections, policing, customs and defence should continue to be carried out by the public sector.

Labour opposes privatisation in corrections and sees National's proposals as the thin edge to the wedge to privatise key areas of public and social sector services.

Labour opposes private prisons.

Prevention

In criminal offending, prevention is more effective than cure, both in terms of results achieved and costs in getting those results.

While stronger policing and tougher laws have been necessary (and expensive), in the longer term prevention through programmes such as early intervention (Early Start, Project Early, Social Workers and Police in Schools etc) must be given greater resourcing.

Such prevention programmes, rather than programmes like boot camps, which while attractive on a superficial political level have proven ineffective, must and will be given priority by the next Labour led Government.

Labour will give priority to funding proven and effective programmes to tackle youth offending.