

Prisoners' civil and political rights

- goes without saying?
- taken for granted?
- hard to defend?
- no such thing?

Where does Australia stand on prisoners' civil and political rights? And where are we heading?

The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission and the Australian Human Rights Centre are planning to promote research, analysis and debate on these questions during 2000. Details will be announced here in February.

Your preliminary comments would be most welcome before then, please send them to:

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Update - Children's Commissioners

The Australian organisation 'Kids First Foundation' has added its voice to the many Australian non-government organisations calling for the establishment of a Commissioner for Children within a Federal Office for Children. The focus would be on child protection and co-ordination of a national approach to child abuse prevention and treatment. The Foundation's Chairwoman, Beryce Wilson, highlighted the major problem of the lack of uniform child-protection legislation and the need for uniform notification laws, approaches to prosecution and treatment services.

Which reminds us! What is the Government doing or what does it intend to do, regarding implementation of related recommendations in the Australian Law Reform Commission / Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission report 'Seen and Heard - Priority for Children in the Legal Process' and the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties Report on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The former advocated an office for Children with the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, the latter an Office for Children as an independent statutory authority attached to the Prime Minister's Portfolio.

Sally Castell-McGregor

Victorian Health Initiative

The Victorian Government recently announced the establishment of a Ministerial Advisory Committee on Gay and Lesbian Health in order to properly identify health needs that require special focus and find effective ways to address them. Minister for Health, The Honourable John Thwaites MP has said the Committee would be asked to develop an action plan within a 12 month time frame. Two major issues will be investigated:

- The range of health risks relating to lifestyle behaviours and social pressures.
- The barriers, and often discrimination, faced by gay men and lesbians in accessing and using health services.

The Committee will comprise 12 to 15 people encompassing health professionals, academics/researchers and community nominations. One of the first tasks of the Committee will be to establish a detailed community consultation process.

Expressions of interest in Committee membership and submissions concerning the scope and priority issues for the Committee are sought by 10 March 2000. Inquiries and requests for further information can be directed to the Department of Human Services' Health Development Section on:

03 9637 4023 or belinda.simons@dhs.vic.gov.au.

DCI-Australia welcomes the concern for targeted attention. We encourage individual members and affiliate organisations to express support for the Committee adopting a scope and set of priorities that are

- inclusive of children and young people's rights and interests; and
- both sensitive and realistic to how their diverse circumstances impact on the major issues investigated by the Committee.

New Office in Canberra

DCI's National Office has moved into a new office in Central Canberra, where we have greater public visibility and are easier for visitors to find. The move was done quickly in mid December, by an enthusiastic team of volunteers before closing down for the Summer holiday. Special thanks to Helen and Brian Mattick, David Vennik, Michel Brabic, Jan and John Blank, Bob Merridew, Richard Morton, Suzi and Pratap Bayes-Morton, Elly Yeung and Simona Bobei, for help with the move.

The new office is in Room F10 on the first floor of the Griffin Centre, Bunda Street, Canberra City. An adjacent room houses the DCI Resource Centre. This building houses a wide range of community groups and meeting rooms. Do drop in and see what we are doing! Offers of help are always welcome too.