

Challenges in Establishing Adolescent Forensic Mental Health Services within Australian Youth Detention Centres

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Abstract

Young people in custody rank amongst the most marginalized in Australia, and have high rates of mental health disorders. However, the knowledge base to support the emerging field of adolescent forensic psychiatry is limited. Following an appraisal of Australia's state-based youth justice systems, it is proposed that three key challenges need to be addressed: the challenge of advocating for change, the challenge of building an evidence base, and the challenge of developing integrated transitional models of service delivery. Adolescent forensic mental health services that view their role as existing solely within the walls of youth detention centres or community juvenile justice services have too narrow a vision. While not seeking to trivialize their patients' criminal behaviour, psychiatrists need to drive the delivery of innovative mental health services within youth detention centres and collaborate with those in the political, legal, youth justice, education and child safety sectors to inform debate of the challenges faced by young people in custody.