

Calls for ex-prisoners' support

JANE HAMMOND

Prisoners are more likely to die in the first year after their release than in custody, with research suggesting newly released prisoners are dying at the rate of more than one a day.

A new study published in the Medical Journal of Australia estimates that up to 527 people released from jail in 2007-08 died within the first year.

The study also indicated that a disproportionate number, up to 138, died within the first four weeks.

This compared with 45 people who died in custody in 2007.

According to the study, which examined figures from the prison populations in WA and NSW, there were 50,000 people released from prison in 2007-08.

The study, led by Stuart Kinner from the Burnet Institute's Centre for Population Health, was the first to look at mortality rates of former prisoners in Australia.

He said the two biggest causes of deaths among the former prisoners who had been recently released were suicide and drug overdose,

and that the mortality rate was far in excess of what could be expected in the general population.

"There is an urgent need to establish a national system for routine monitoring of ex-prisoner mortality and to continue the duty of care beyond the prison walls," Dr Kinner said.

PhD researcher on deaths in custody Gerry Georgatos said the figures were alarming and showed an urgent need to provide pre-release and post-release health services and programs.

He claimed prisoners were leav-

ing the jail system in a state far worse than when they went in.

Australian Lawyers Alliance national president Greg Barns said the study highlighted government and community failure to support adequate health and reintegration programs for ex-prisoners.

"Prisoners deserve to receive proper healthcare in prison and on release should be given mental and physical health support by government and the community," Mr Barns said.

Marc Newhouse, from the Deaths in Custody Watch Committee,

described the findings as "very disturbing".

A spokesman for the Department of Corrective Services said the department would review the findings.

"The research clearly highlights the importance of the current work that is being done by the department in partnership with other agencies, both non-government and government, to ensure improved services to offenders whilst in custody and upon their return to the community," the spokesman said.



Potential killer: Myrmecia (the bull ant).

Native ants are deadly threat

JANE HAMMOND

Bulldog ants commonly found on the Darling Scarp are in a group of four potential killer native ant species identified in a new study.

The study of anaphylactic reactions to ant bites, published in the latest Medical Journal of Australia, found four main groups of ants can trigger life-threatening allergic reactions in humans.

All the deadly ants, which include green-head ants, bulldog ants, jumper ants and jack jumper ants, are found in WA.

Jack jumper ants have caused fatal reactions in Tasmania and were identified as the cause of at least one anaphylaxis near Esperance.

Up to 3 per cent of people would have a severe reaction to the bites and these could be fatal within 15 minutes of a sting, the study said.

Study author Simon Brown, from the University of WA, said treatments to strengthen immunity to potentially fatal ant bites were not funded through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme.

These involved exposing the person to gradually increased doses of venom. But in most cases, severe allergic reactions happened on the first bite, so pre-treatment was not feasible.

Professor Brown said venom extracts had yet to be developed for most Australian ant species.

In February, 48-year-old council worker John Banks died after being bitten by ants in Bunbury.

His widow has called for an inquest into the death, thought to be the first caused by ants in WA.

Man lashed in bed

A man was lashed 40 times with a cable after he woke to find four bearded men in his bedroom in Sydney's west about 1am yesterday.

The 31-year-old man was asleep in his apartment in Silverwater when he woke to find four unknown men in his bedroom. Three of the intruders allegedly restrained him on the bed while the other used a cable to lash him 40 times.

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