

Drug court push grows

DOMINIC GEIGER

AN Illawarra solicitor says a jump in the number of NSW prisoners testing positive for drugs shows the need for specialised drug courts.

An Auditor-General's report released yesterday revealed 15.3 per cent of randomly selected prison inmates tested positive for drugs in 2012-13.

Illawarra Law Society member Renata Matyear has been part of a push for a court in the Illawarra designed to deal exclusively with drug-related crimes, following the successful introduction of similar

courts at Parramatta and Toronto, near Newcastle.

Ms Matyear said the 15.3 per cent figure wasn't surprising for those who worked with prisoners. "I think it's understood by those who are already working in prisons and courts that drugs are a problem and being in prison doesn't necessarily take away the drug problem," she said.

"I think it's a misconception that members of the public have that once someone goes to prison that solves the problem.

"That's why something like a drug court is good; it deals with the fundamental problem of drug

addiction and gives people the opportunity to live a drug-free and crime-free life."

In its recommendation to Corrective Services NSW, the Auditor-General's report said the department should "more closely examine how prisoners continue to access drugs in prison and increase its efforts to minimise drug use".

Wollongong lawyer Aaron Kermaghan said it was difficult to understand how greater scrutiny could be put in place to prevent drugs entering a prison.

"The amount of scrutiny and examination screening that goes

on to access a jail is extremely high - it does raise questions about how it is actually happening," Mr Kermaghan said.

The report also found in NSW, 42.5 per cent of released prisoners returned to jail within two years.

Ms Matyear said this recidivism rate could also be reduced through the wider implementation of drug courts.

"Drug courts deal with addiction ... [the program] goes for about two years and helps them reintegrate into society ... instead of falling into that old habit of needing to commit crime to support a drug habit," she said.

A Corrective Services spokesman said efforts had been "significantly boosted" to stop drug use by inmates.

Specialist search squad officers and sniffer dogs were used to conduct searches and the department had a "range of programs inside its centres that specifically treat inmates with histories of substance abuse and addictions".

A drug court public forum will be held at the University of Wollongong's McKinnon Building from 9am to 4pm on Saturday.

Admission is free. Register at lha.uow.edu.au/law/drugcourtforum.

Champ helps with training

Shining light: Under-23 World Champion triathlete Aaron Royle leads a training session for residents of Lighthouse Youth Housing who are preparing for the 2014 Australia Day Aquathlon at Wollongong Harbour. Lighthouse Youth Housing offers transitional accommodation for people aged 16-24 who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. The training, organised in partnership with Anglicare, aims to give them an opportunity to get fit, be disciplined and set personal goals. Picture: KIRK GILMOUR



Population will double by 2075

AUSTRALIA'S population is set to double to more than 46 million people by 2075, experts forecast.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), yesterday released its predictions for coming decades - based on fertility, life expectancy and migration - including that population growth is likely to be greatest in capital cities.

"Melbourne and Sydney should be neck and neck by 2053, with 7.9 million people each," head of demography at the ABS, Bjorn Jarvis, said.

The head count in Perth will total three million by 2028, when it will overtake Brisbane.

A decade later the ACT's

population will surpass Tasmania.

Mr Jarvis said the projections were based on "medium growth" and that the nation could reach a 46 million population by 2058.

Growth is expected to continue in all states and territories except Tasmania where it is thought the population will plateau by 2040 and fall from 2047.

Increasing life expectancy will lift the median age to 40 years by 2040, up by three years by 2012 figures.

Over the same period, the number of people aged over 85 is expected to almost triple to 1.2 million, while the number of people aged over 65 will double to 6.8 million.

AAP