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Out of sight, out of mind: Australia's 18,000 prisoners with a brain injury BRAIN INJURY AWARENESS WEEK BEGINS TODAY

Very large numbers of Australians with a brain injury are in adult prison or juvenile detention. **As many as 80 per cent of offenders report brain injury.** Yet while the problems they experience with their thinking and behaviour place them at the highest risk of re-offending, brain injury gets very little recognition throughout the criminal justice system. **Prisoners with the disability do not qualify for programs that might help them stay out of prison. And they do not qualify for offender rehabilitation programs that might help stop them from returning there. And while prison costs more than \$200 per inmate per day, Australian governments are not investing in services and supports to prevent people with a brain injury from committing crime in the first place.**

Bob Barco's story is sadly typical. After sustaining two serious head injuries as a child, he served two stints in juvenile detention. **"I remember starting to steal money, shoplifting, breaking into factories," says Barco. "Just acting really impulsively, which I now know is common after brain injury."** A third head injury at age 15, where he was thrown through a car's front windscreen after a high-speed collision, only made things worse. "I became hair trigger, flying off the handle at the littlest things. I would get very stressed when things got on top of me, almost to boiling point." **Barco started committing more serious - and violent - crime. His more than 50 offences include convictions for armed robbery and malicious wounding. But during his 23 years in prison, he was never asked about his experiences of head injury or given access to rehabilitation specific to the needs of offenders with the disability.** Since his release in 2009, Barco has obtained a masters degree, taught at university, written a children's book, and married.

The overall costs of crime in Australia are around \$36 billion per year. "Assault, which is both the most common cause of brain injury in prisoners and their most common offence, accounts for roughly \$1.4 billion of that," says Nick Rushworth, the Executive Officer of Brain Injury Australia. "Australia's governments are currently considering a draft National Crime Prevention Framework. Given they are already spending around \$3 billion a year on prisons, the Framework must address the rehabilitation needs specific to offenders with a brain injury - as a commitment to crime prevention also ."

**For more information, to arrange interviews with Nick and Bob Barco,
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