The Henderson Government’s failure to provide adequate rehabilitation services has contributed to rising recidivism rates across the Northern Territory, says acting Shadow Justice Minister John Elferink.

Figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics show that in 2007, 58% of Territory inmates had been in prison before, up from 67% in 2006 and 65% in 2005.

This is the highest rate in the country and well above the national recidivism average of 56%.

As well, 10 years after release, 48% of prisoners in the Territory are reimprisoned compared with the national average of 39%.

“During this year’s Estimates hearings my colleague, Jodeen Carney, identified the extent of the Government’s neglect of rehabilitation services,” Mr Elferink said.

“When asked how much of Correctional Services approximately $100m budget was spent on rehabilitation, Minister Gerry McCarthy said he didn’t know.

“Ms Carney uncovered only 51 had prisoners participated in alcohol treatment programs in 2009/10 compared to 111 the previous year and an alcohol treatment program scheduled for Darwin jail this year has only 12 available places.

“Sex offender treatment programs are also inadequate, with only 42 prisoners completing programs in Territory prisons as at May 2010 out of 171 sexual offenders in Territory prisons.

“Only three such programs were planned this year for Darwin and an Alice Springs program stopped last year.

“Anti-domestic violence programs are also inadequate with one program scheduled for Berrimah prison with only 12 places available.”

Mr Elferink said while the ABS study identifies the Territory’s relatively high Indigenous population and demographic factors behind the high recidivism rate, the Government must do more to steer people away from returning to crime.

“In addition to ramping up rehabilitation services, a Country Liberals’ Government would make education in prisons a priority.

“Our policies would provide inmates with an opportunity to reform while in prison, rather than honing their criminal skills.”

Further comment: John Elferink 0418 406 400